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## Film Reviews, by Jno.

# DANSE MACABRE

## THE RED SHOES

(Rank-Archers)

IT is said that the craftsmen of the Middle Ages, when building an abbey, a cathedral, or some other work of piety and devotion, were in the habit of leaving a pillar or pediment uncarved, or a window unpierced in acknowledgment of the perfection that belonged only to God. I doubt if the practice—a curious blend of conscious humility and unconscious egotism—persists to-day in ecclesiastical architecture, and I'm certain that its equivalent is not to be found in other fields of activity, but strangely enough I have been reminded of it more than once when watching films fathered by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Both are craftsmen who handle the raw material of their films with conscious artistry. Almost invariably there is one element or other of their joint work which comes as close to perfection as current film techniques will allow—and just as invariably, it seems, there is something so badly out of key, so obviously wrong that it is difficult to believe that the disfigurement is not deliberate.

No doubt the effect of such a jolt should be to make one thankful for the prevailing excellences of these films, to create appreciation by second intention, as it were. But it just annoys me to see fine work unnecessarily flawed either through carelessness or deliberate intent.

*The Red Shoes* is such a film. It is the most ambitious Powell-Pressburger production which I have seen, and in some ways the most beautiful and the most entertaining, but it is disfigured by a quite unnecessarily crude and bloody ending, in which a prima ballerina throws herself from the top of a railway embankment under the wheels of an express. Not satisfied simply to film the

## BAROMETER

Fair to Fine: "The Red Shoes."  
Mainly Fair: "Fome is the Spør."

leap, the producers give us a close-up of the girl's battered body as she expires on the boards of a porter's truck, her face laced in blood, her dress pathetically ripped and stained. Having long ago supped full of horrors in the cinema, it was not the macabre quality of the scene which disturbed me but its pointlessness—and the lapse from good taste which it represented.

Having made that criticism, however, let me repeat that in the main *The Red Shoes* is visually exciting and most entertaining, and for the sake of the ballet sequences and the music worth seeing more than once. Indeed, so far as the *Red Shoes* ballet is concerned (specially written for the film, choreography by Massine, and danced by Massine, Moira Shearer, Robert Helpmann, and an imposing *corps de ballet*) one would need to make many visits to the theatre to extract the last flicker of meaning from mime and gesture. I found the tempo a little too fast for my inexperienced eye and the richness and vastness of the settings tended to distract attention momentarily at least from the dancers, but in my own case I felt that if these were faults they were faults mainly in the eye of the beholder. Whatever arguments and speculations the new ballet may provoke among balletomanes, the manner in which it has been staged and the almost four-dimensional quality obtained by skilful photography and equally skilful editing should open new perspectives of beauty and delight for those to whom ballet has hitherto been only a name.

(continued on next page)



LEONIDE MASSINE as the magician-cobbler of the new ballet "The Red Shoes"

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