

MOTION PICTURES FERTILE FIELD FOR COMPOSERS



Scenes in "Samson" Film and Composer of Its Music. No. 1, Jack Warren Kerrigan as "Samson"; No. 2, "Delilah" has sheared "Samson's" hair and the Timark soldiers are upon him; No. 3, Noble Kreider, Composer; No. 4, William Worthington as "Sihon," the Timark; No. 5, The dust drifted away, "Samson" groped to "Delilah's" body and fell across her—dead! No. 6, The host bent in obeisance before the God Dagon.

Significant Example In Noble Kreider's Incidental Music for Film Version of "Samson" Story—How Composer Absorbed "Atmosphere" by Watching Processes of Picture-Making in Studio—Disjointed Nature of Scenarios Necessitates Concentration of Musical Efforts on Big Climaxes

MUSIC and the drama have long been intimate friends, but music and the photoplay were but so lately introduced that they have not even yet decided to become staunch friends. Many difficulties stand in the way of the successful arrangement of music as a background and accompaniment for the film-drama. The usual scene lasts but a few seconds, when the action moves to another scene and consequently far different action, then back to the original scene.

Naturally music written for the first scene would be incongruous for the second one. If John was making ardent love to Mary in Scene 42 the composer might use a love motif effectively, but what chance would such music have in Scene 43, twenty seconds later, when Brother Bobby is swinging a dead cat around his head on a string? Until longer scenes become the vogue, or until scenarios are so written that all action in a single sequence bears out one theme, the composer's only chance is to develop his music for the strongest situation.

A recent blending of music and photodrama of particular interest to American musicians is the incidental music written by Noble Kreider, of Goshen, Ind., for the Universal Film Company's six-reel feature, "Samson." The Universal furnished copies of the "Samson" incidental music to each exhibitor, but Kreider holds the copyright for general publication.

When it was decided to have special music the Universal's Pacific Coast manager, I. Bernstein, looked about for a composer of sufficient experience and adaptability to handle the idea. Kreider was passing the Winter in Los Angeles and his name was chosen from fifteen considered. The Indiana composer was interested in the novelty of the work and accepted.

Before a note of music was written

the composer had to make the acquaintance of all the intricate machinery of picture-making. First, he went over the scenario with the writer, James Dayton. Scene by scene the author explained the play, the length of scene, the vital points in the action. When the day for the beginning of actual production came, Kreider was on the ground and during the two months before the picture was finished, director, stagehands and actors came to know the young composer well. From the preparation of "props" and costumes to the final development and cutting of the film, Mr. Kreider studied the motion picture game.

Kreider had many amusing experiences during this period. Once a "dollar-a-day" extra man, of decidedly Judaical physiognomy, accosted the composer in the grounds.

"Say, whatter youse goin' ter be? Yer ain't gotter Jew nose. Oh, yes, you're goin' ter be a Fillysteeno. Not fer mine. Yer gotter be in that temple smash. Not fer mine. I ain't er goin' to let no temple fall on me for a dollar a day. Nixie."

Little of the music was actually conceived at the studios. Kreider was simply getting chuck full of "atmosphere" and "Samson" enthusiasm. Then he would hurry back to his Pasadena apartment, his grand piano and silence and spend the next day or two, or as long as the inspiration remained, in concentrated work. Then back to the studios to watch more of the production.

Bit by bit the music grew. First the

introduction; then the Angel announcing the coming of Samson to his mother; the appearance of the strong man's first love, Zornh; the banquet music, where Samson's great riddle, "and out of the bitter came forth sweets"; "Samson Bound and Delivered to the Philistines" and his terrible slaughter of the enemy with the jawbones of an ass; his visit to Gaza and his encounter with the harlot; his meeting with Delilah, his temptation and overthrow in her house; the Chant of the Priests of Dagon and the Finale.

On the day of the final scene, when the blind Samson is given back his strength and pulls down the temple of the God Dagon, killing himself and the Philistine horde, Kreider and a dozen spectators were admitted to the grounds. The composer took up his stand at a convenient point, just back of the cameras.

"The scene didn't seem real," he says of the experience. "Five cameras were perched here and there, their Argus eyes staring at the crowd of Philistine men and women gathered in the court of the temple."

"Of course, I knew that the pillars were only painted cloth, tacked on lath frames, and the sheets suspended above contained only yellow ochre to simulate dust and excelsior-filled pasteboard boxes, painted to represent granite blocks. Yet there was as great a tension everywhere as though the stones and walls were of solid granite."

"The background entrance was five

hundred feet from the altar in the foreground. With banners flying and voices raised in the chant, the hundreds of Philistine priests and citizens swept down the broad aisle towards us. It was hard to realize that it was only a picture.

"Then came Delilah with her maids, and Sihon and Timark, the cameras whirring steadily all the time. The priests sprinkled incense on the fires and the host bent in obeisance. The ceremonies over, the people shouted to have Samson brought in that they might be entertained by the ravings of the blind man who had made sport of them while in his prime.

"Sihon gave in to the clamorings and sent for Samson. Jack Kerrigan, who played the part of the Biblical hero, was led in by a small boy. The mob jeered at him and the soldiers forced him to his knees before the god. This was all interesting, but in the mind of every spectator it was only a prelude to the real scene, the actual crash of the temple.

"It came at last. Samson prayed for strength, then pressed his knees against the great columns. They moved. We stared, unable to move an eyelid. Slowly the columns buckled. With a mighty crash they fell into the heart of the temple. Dust rose in clouds, hiding the scene. Still we held our breaths. The dust drifted. Samson struggled, crushed and bleeding over the mass of bodies, groping blindly till he found Delilah's body and then fell dead.

The cameras stopped and for a moment there was silence. Then a perspiring property man behind me said: "Gosh! Glad that bust is done finished."

"Then came the reaction. Most of us laughed, a few wept, and the director collapsed in a dead faint. I never realized before the tremendous strain, the planning and work and thought back of a motion picture.

"Dead" Philistines moved, pillars were lifted and not a man or woman was hurt. Three minutes of action, a result of months of work, but it was worth it."

RUTH ANN BALDWIN.