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A Schweitzer Score By 'Johann Sebastian Bop'

R. H. Hagan

"ALBERT SCHWEITZER," a documentary film in color about the life of the great contemporary philosopher, organist, physician, humanitarian and biographer, editor and performer of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, will have its San Francisco premiere tonight at the Clay Theater.

It has a musical score written by a contemporary composer who is known in some musical circles as Johann Sebastian Bop.

He is Alec Wilder, among whose compositions are piano works titled "Debutante's Diary," "Neurotic Goldfish," and "She'll Be Seven in May," as well as a ballet called "Juke Box" and such songs as "J. P. Dooley III" and "At the Swing Shift Ball."

Sacrilegious to the music of Bach and one of its greatest living interpreters, Dr. Schweitzer? I don't think so.

Nor does Jerome Hill, who spent five years directing and producing the movie on Schweitzer and

commissioned Wilder to do its musical score.

Hill, who is here for tonight's opening, explained it to me as a labor of love on the part of Wilder, who had previously done the score for a film Hill made on the life of the American artist, Grandma Moses. He also explained a new technique of synchronizing a musical score to a motion picture that was evolved in the production of the work.

"It took Wilder about a year to get started on the project," said Hill. "He, of course, had seen the completed film first. When he started to compose he began by composing a lullaby that seemed to express Schweitzer's youth in a little Alsatian town. Later the music grew almost as the life of Schweitzer grows in the film. The final score includes 18 pieces—among them a barcarolle, a chorale, a fugue and a jungle piece which suggests Schweitzer's environment in the primitive African settlement, Lambarene, where he has lived and worked as a medical missionary since 1913.

"When the score was finally done, we were confronted with the problem of fitting it to the split-second timing of the episodes in the film. Usually this is a tortuous job for any composer. But that's where the new technique came in. First we put a piano version of the score on tape and adjusted it to the film's sequences. When the adjustment was completed, Wilder made his orchestration of the music.

"And even after that he gave me complete reign to make any further adjustments I wanted to make. Just as an example, I must mention that jungle piece. Originally it was just a little bird song melody of 12 notes. I got the idea of recording it on two tapes at the same time, with another tape added as a bass. Imagine my surprise when the result was a perfect two-voice canon!"

Johann Sebastian Bach certainly would have liked that touch. And I'm sure Dr. Albert Schweitzer does too.