TODAY'S MOVIE

'Of Men and Music' Brings Noted Concert Artists to the Screen

By SEYMOUR PECK

POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
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OF MEN AND MUSIC, a 20th Century-Fox film; screenplay by Liam O'Brien, Harry Kurnitz, John Paxton and David Epstein; produced by Rudolph Polk, Bernard Luber and Edmund Reek; directed by Irving Reis and Alex Hammid. At the Park Avenue.

THE CAST: Jascha Heifetz, Artur Rubinstein, Jan Peerce, Nadine Conner, Dimitri Mitropoulos and the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra.

"Of Men and Music" is a very respectable achievement, for it brings together in one movie such fine artists as Heifetz, Rubinstein, Mitropoulos, Jan Peerce and Nadine Connor, presenting them all with dignity and seriousness.

It does not condescend either to them or to us by making them do "Begin the Beguine" or "Mairzy Doats," or by making them swing the classics, or by making them comic actors—as Lauritz Melchior became a comic actor in his movies—or by involving them in an operetta plot so treacly it would make the very saints cry out in anguish.

"Of Men and Music" is a straightforward movie about — well, about men and music. Divided in four separate parts and quite devoid of plot, it gives each of its artists a chance to perform, and sometimes a chance to tell a little about himself, his personal life, his rehearsal techniques, his approach to art and to his career.

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Thus Artur Rubinstein simply plays the piano—List, Mendelssohn, Chopin—introduces us to his wife and children, shows us a little of his home, and talks engagingly about himself.

Peerce and Miss Conner sing pleasingly a duet from "Lucia" and a few solos, though they are snarled up in a rather maudlin little bit of a story: they return to a theater late at night to pick up a score Miss Conner has left there, meet the poor, old, bent little night watchman, discover he is mad about music and happily and generously put on a concert in the empty, dark theater for him alone. This one, I'm afraid, is for the stop - you're - breaking - my - heart dept.

Dimitri Mitropoulos is observed leading the Philharmonic - Symphony through a rehearsal of portions of Liszt's "Faust" Symphony, during which he becomes so rapt in his music that he forgets cameras entirely and shakes his head violently, with real emotion and excitement, making it almost impossible for the cameras to follow his agitated movements.

Such moments make for authenticity in "Of Men and Music," although some of the Mitropoulos rehearsal looks stagey, since all the musicians of the orchestra are dressed in their best Sunday suits and look spic and span, as though they are going to a wedding or a Bar Mitzvah. Musicians, I strongly suspect, do not dress to the hilt for a rehearsal.

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The best section of "Of Men and Music" is taken up with violinist Jascha Heifetz, to whom Bernard Shaw once wrote, "Young man, such perfection angers the gods. I advise you to appease them by playing one or two wrong notes every night before you go to bed."

Here there is a minimum of phoniness, of window dressing, of artifice. A narrator recounts some of Heifetz's life; we see his preparations for a concert, and we watch spellbound as his magnificent hands move surely over his Guarnerius. We visit his house and his wife and his studio where he practices, and we glean a few hints of his personality, of his pure searching for perfection.

Will "Of Men and Music," which is primarily a concert on film—rather than a movie—be popular? Its aims are worthy: to bring music to millions who do not hear it, perhaps because they cannot afford concerts, or are merely indifferent to music.

But ardent music lovers may dismiss the movie as lowbrow, arguing that it is wasteful and uninspiring for a man of Rubinstein's caliber to play "Liebestraum" and "Polonaise," works which are not equal to his pianistic genius. The great drama that is in music they will argue, comes with music that is higher and more intense and exalted than these overly familiar pieces.

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And the schoolboys and schoolgirls, and some of their elders who should learn from "Of Men and Music" may call it "highbrow" because they are not accustomed just to watching musicians perform. They will find it rather like cod liver oil—not much fun but so good for you. For the production has only now and then won out over the problem of how to make music interesting VISUALLY: a great deal of "Of Men and Music" is static.

But it is certainly a valuable experiment — probably the first Hollywood movie devoted entirely to music and musicians—and it wins our genuine appreciation. It may bring us more musical movies; perhaps the ones to come will be more imaginative, more rousing, more spirit-lifting, closer to a formula for making music fun for all.

DIMITRI MITROPOULOS
He Forgets the Cameras