HUGO FRIEDHOFER'S SCORE TO

"THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES"

Louis Applebaum.

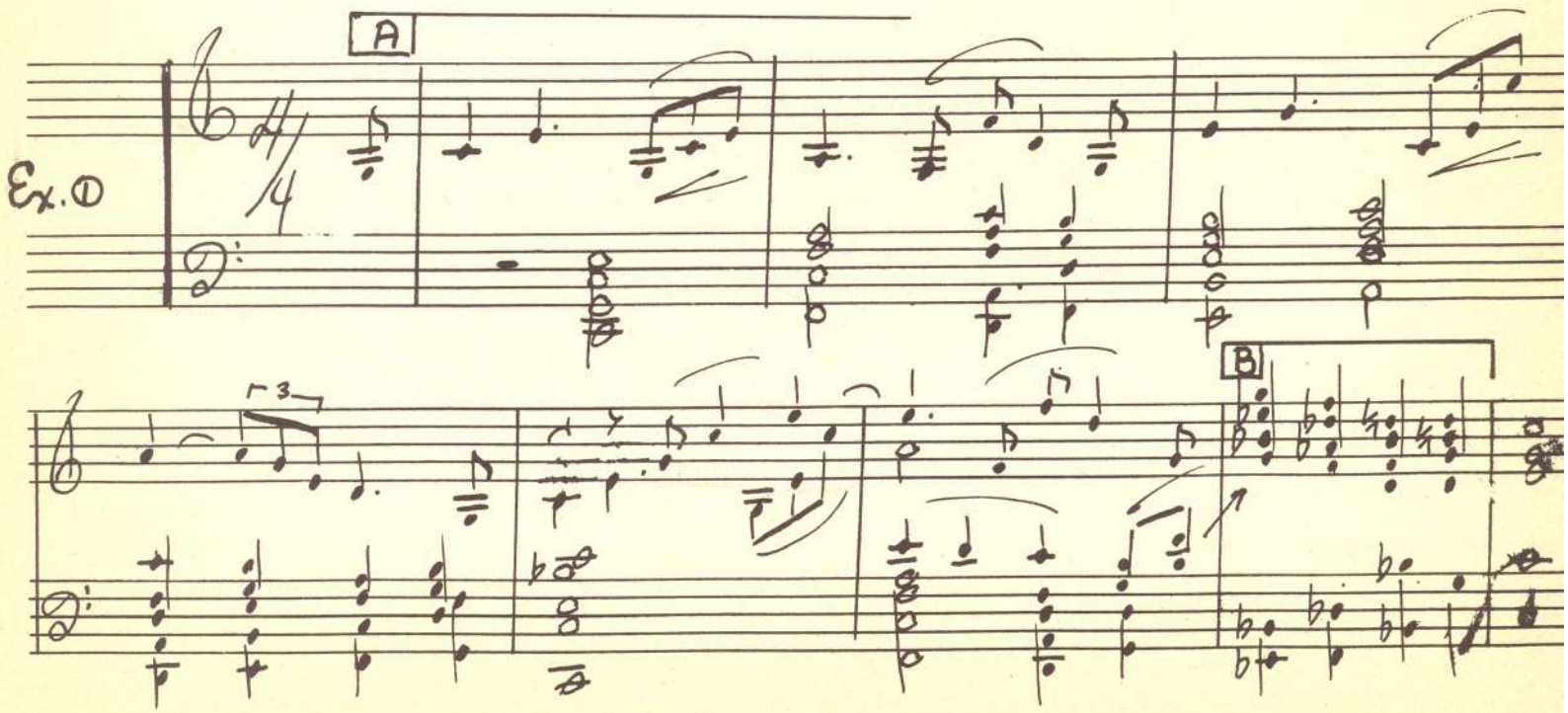
The Academy Award for a dramatic musical score was this year bestowed on a work about whose merit there can be no question. Not always does this recognition fall on the most deserving of the year's efforts - nor does it always reflect studied judgment and unbiased critical reflection. Film fans, students and critics can this year find no quarrel with the fact that Sam Goldwyn's and William Wyler's " THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES" swept off most of the important Academy prizes, and those interested in film music can be especially happy that Hugo Friedhofer's remarkable score for that film was included in the sweep. Mr. Friedhofer's considerable talents have been known to the handful concerned in the making of film music. Last year his score for "The Bandit of Sherwood Forest" won the FILM MUSIC NOTES plaque. At last Friedhofer's name and ability are given the widest recognition.

A general review and evaluation of "The Best Years" score has already been given to Film Music Notes readers in the February-March issue, by Lan Adomian. This article will, therefore devote itself to a presentation of the actual musical material on which the score has been so brilliantly built.

A reading of the score reveals that Mr. Friedhofer, as many composers do, has chosen to work on the development juxtaposition and superimposition of leit-motifs more or less in the Wagnerian tradition. The material itself is definitely not Wagnerian in character, but the manner of its handling derives from the Wagner of the Niebelinger Ring. As a result, it is possible, in a few short quotations, to list practically all the root material out of which the score as a whole generated.

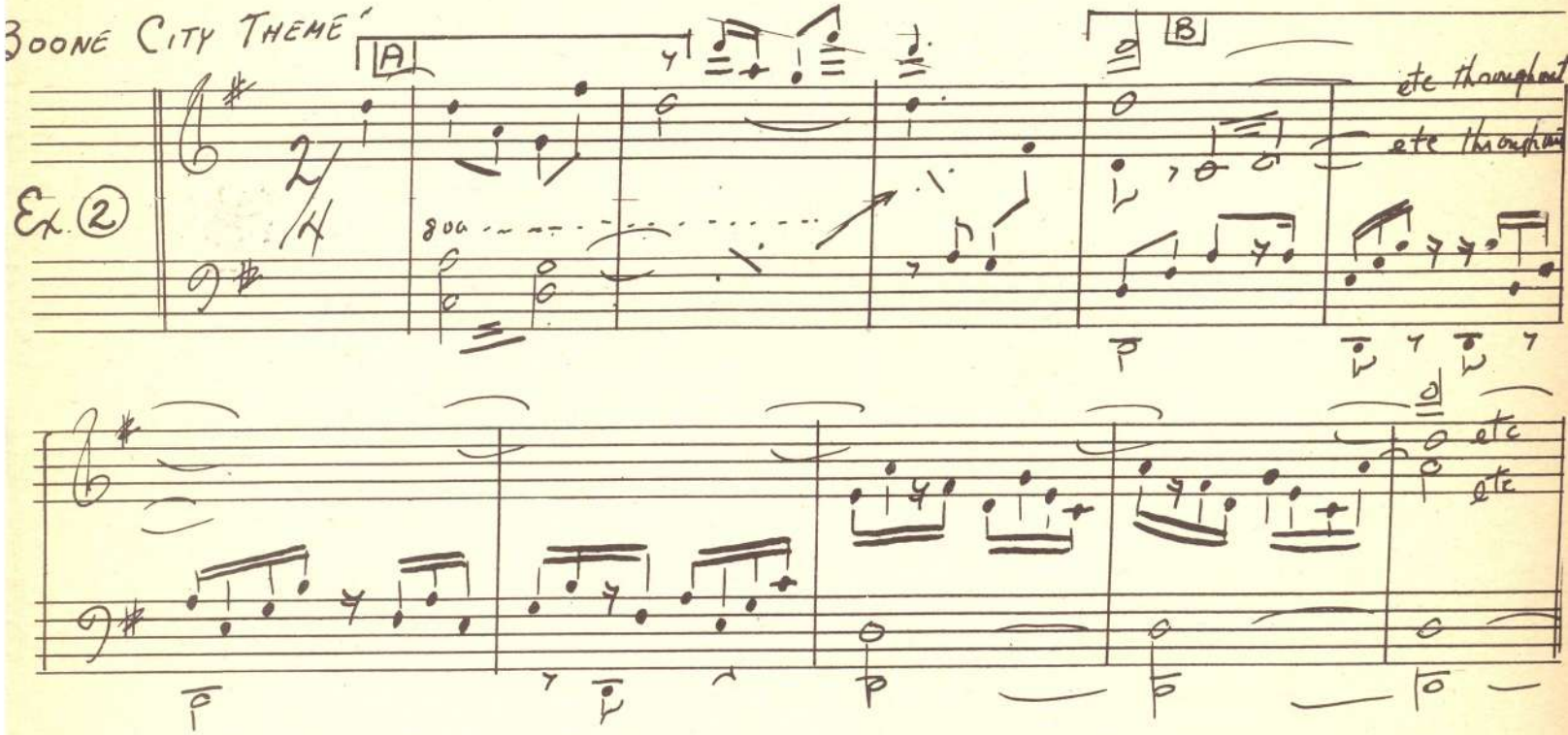
The most important of the themes is the one on which the Main Title is based. In the score it is called the "Best Years Theme".

" BEST YEARS THEME"



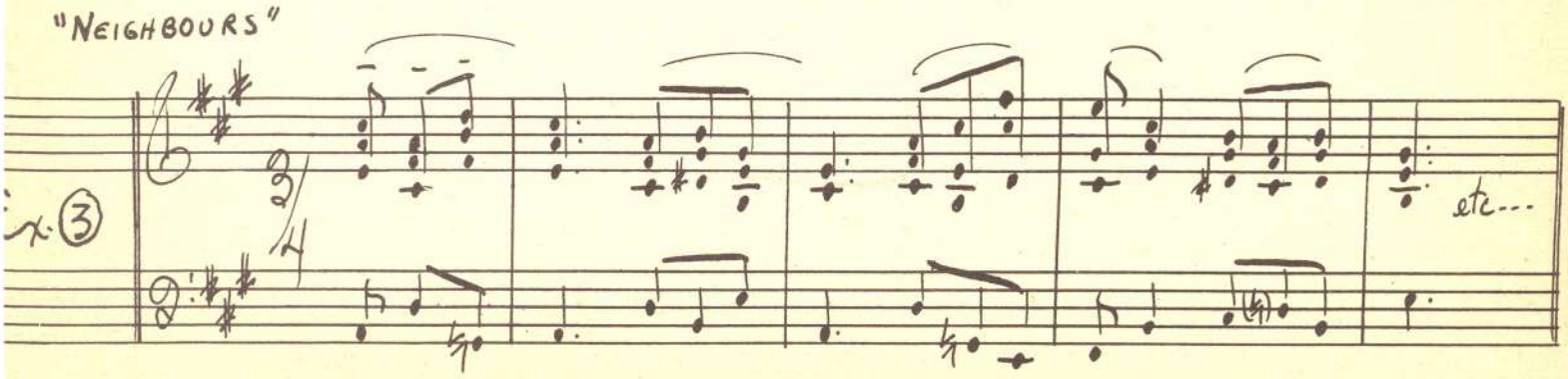
Its simplicity, based as it is on the triad, its straightforward, warm harmonization, ably reflects the general theme of the film, principally as it concerns the Harold Russell characterization of "Homer". It has two main sections, each of which is used and developed separately in the course of the score. The first section, A states the triad motif, the second, B, a chordal, almost hymnal phrase, both easily recognized and capable of developed treatment.

The second theme to appear is here called "Boone City".



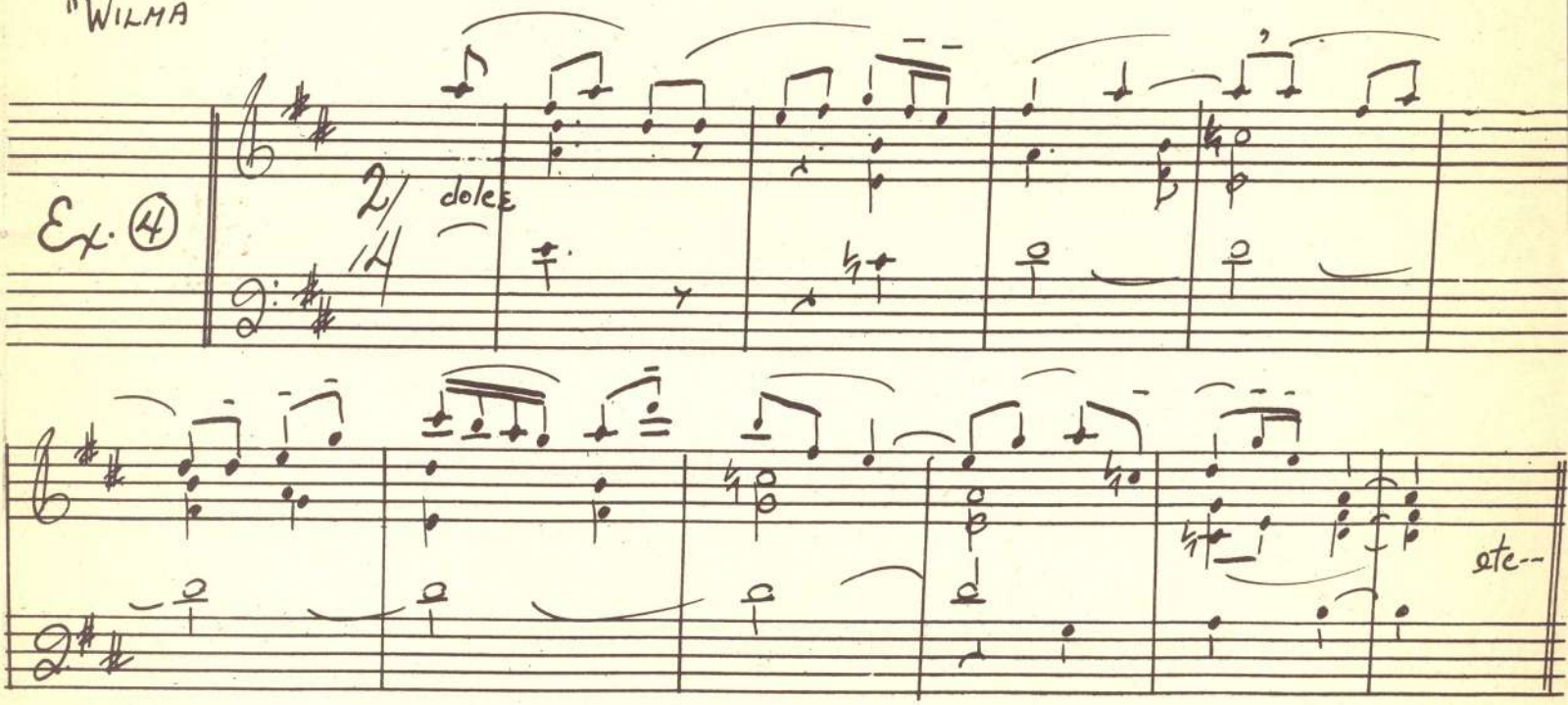
It too contains two ideas: A, a 5 note motif with the characteristic leap pf the major 7th to set it apart, and B a syncopated, moving, broken-triad motif. The A motif occurs often, and its major 7th interval manages to add interest to the melodic structure of the score. As will be seen later, it was eventually enlarged into a separate theme.

A third theme is once more chordal in structure. This one, associated with the neighborly relationship between the families of Homer and that of his girl next door, is most interesting for its harmonization of a tune that is, like the others already mentioned, derived from the simple triad.



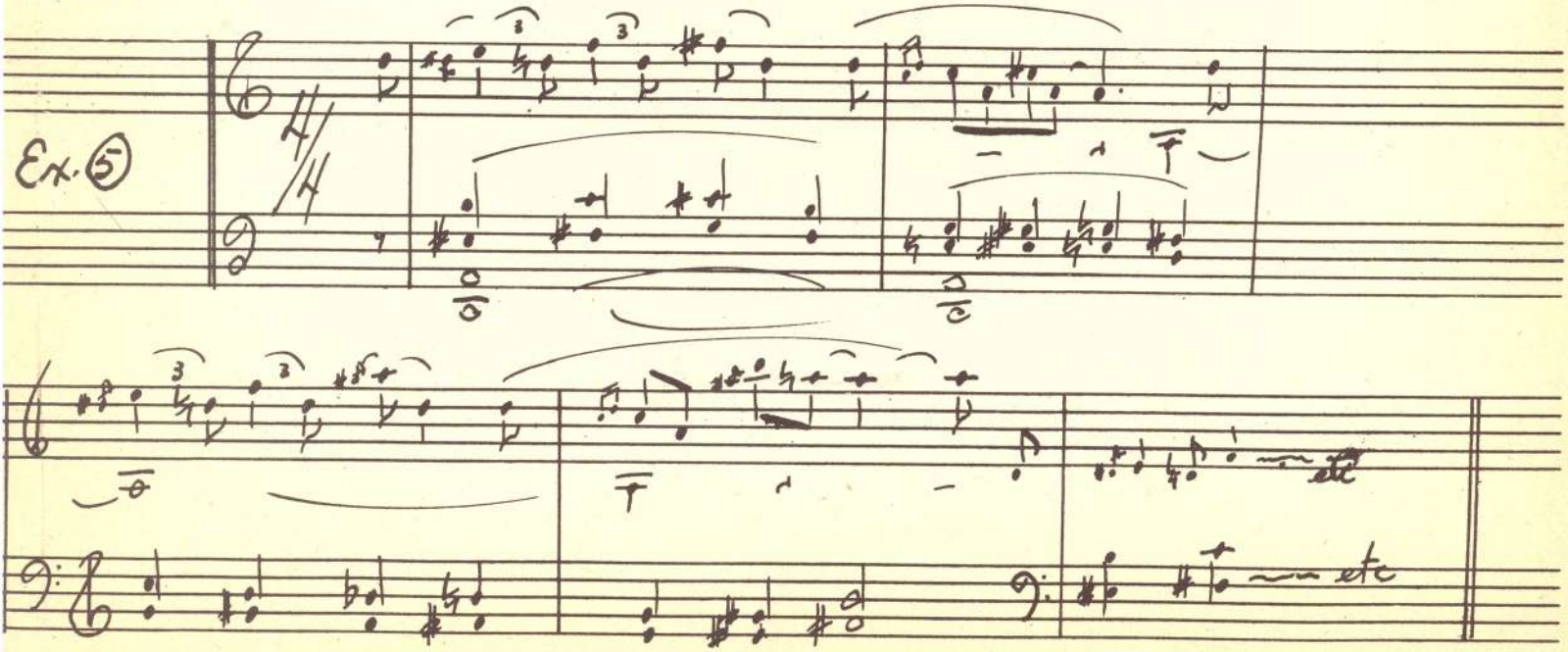
It seems to suggest strongly the feeling of much of Aaron Copland's recent writing. The remaining motifs are, fortunately, quite different in character. One, for Homer's girl, Wilma, is simple, delicate, folksy, almost plaintive,- like the girl herself.

"WILMA"



Another, rather Gershwinian, underlines the relationship between Fred and Peggy:

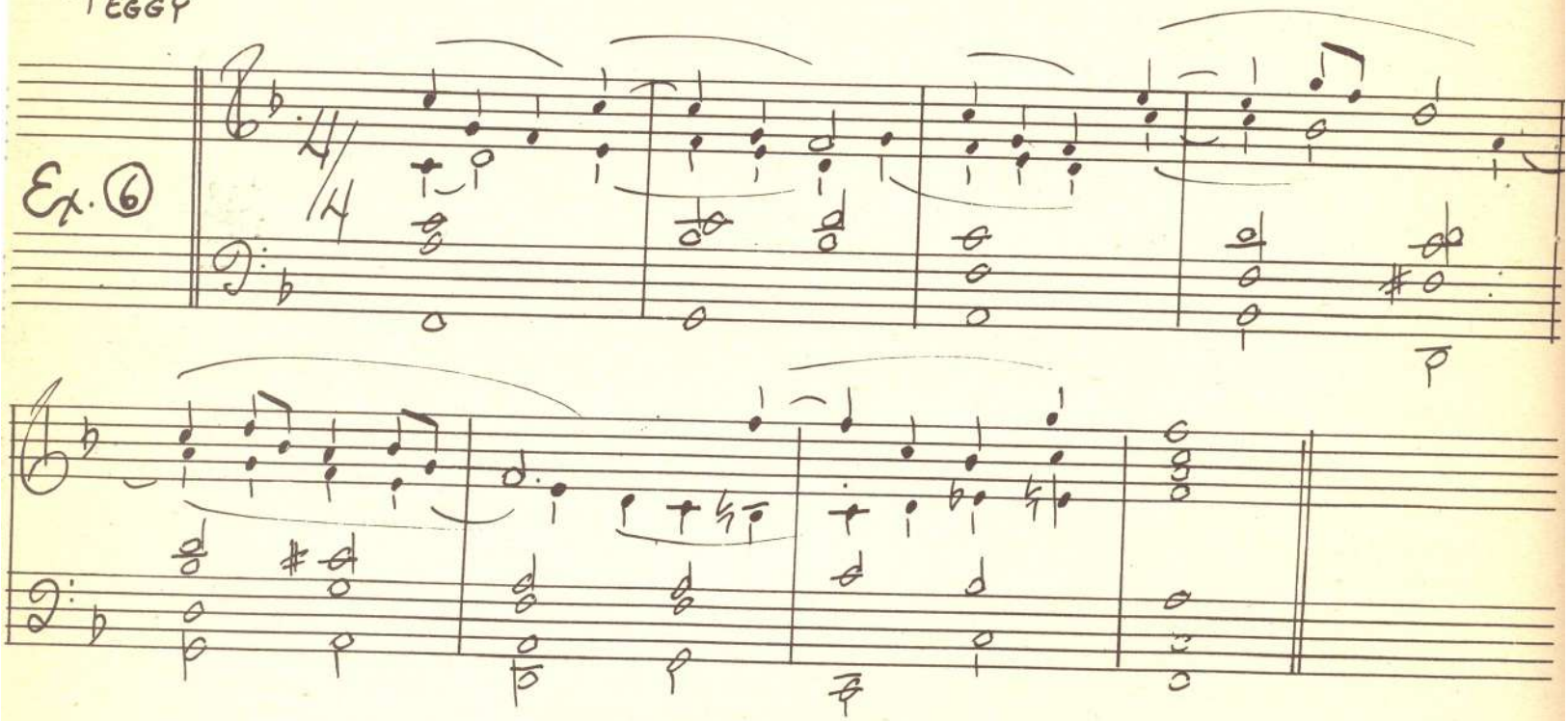
"FRED AND PEGGY"



The theme that results from the expanding of the (A) part of the "Boone City" theme is rather conventional, almost"popular" suggesting that there glimmered, perhaps a faint hope of being able to make the Hit Parade list with some aspect of the score. The fact that this was not realized, as it was by David Raksin with his score for "Laura", need be no reflection on either the score or its effectiveness. The theme called "Peggy" follows:

"PEGGY"

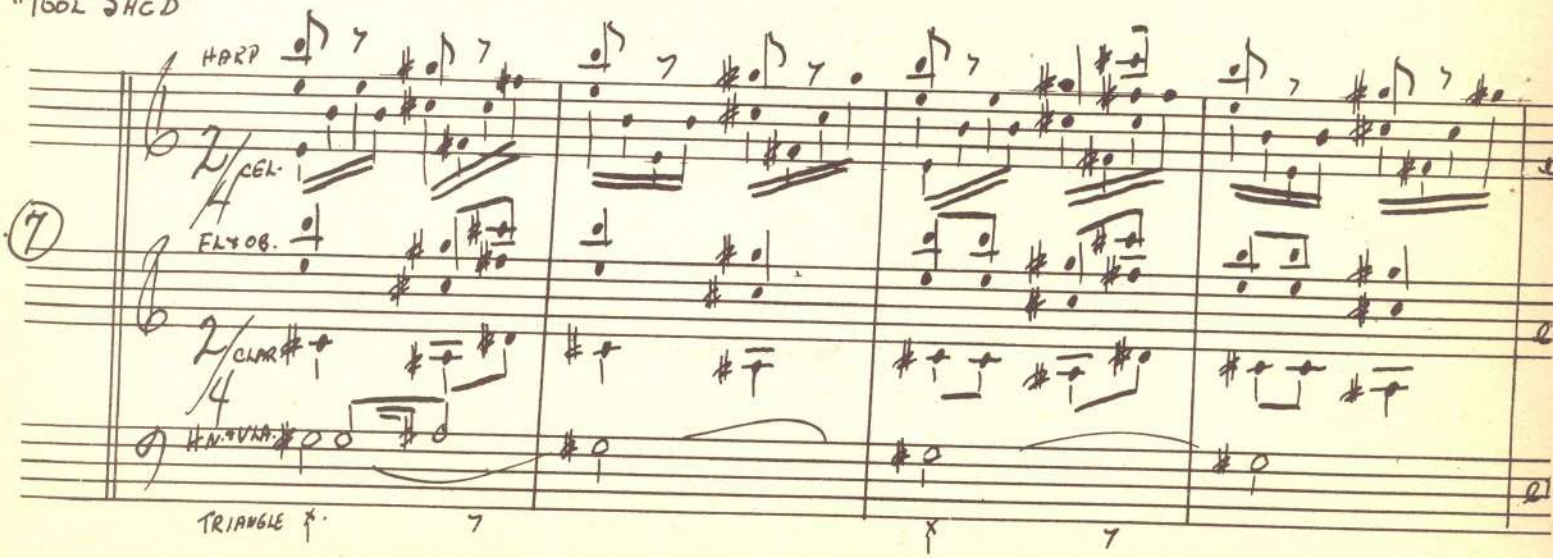
Ex. ⑥



Two or three dramatic sequences in the film received special treatment, with no reference to any of the principal motifs. There is, for instance, the hyper-dramatic moment in the tool shed, when Homer, in frustrated embarrassment, is driven to smash the window. Mr. Adomian mentions Friedhofer's use of the childrens' play-song. It is quoted here for its interesting orchestration and harmonization which can but be suggested in this limited space.

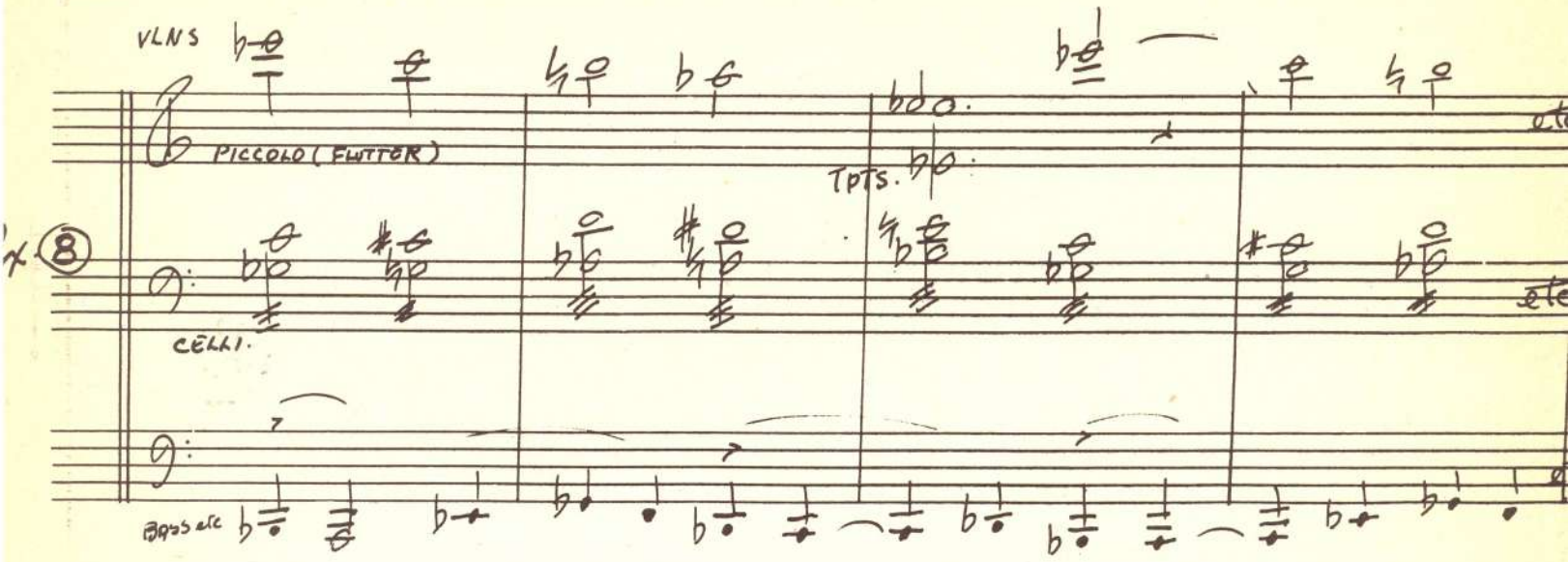
"TOOL SHED"

Ex. ⑦



Orchestra coloring of a different kind, plus the full utilization of a minimum of musical material, in this case mostly the interval of the 4th, make an exciting moment of Fred's nightmare, his vivid memories of awful war experiences.

"NIGHTMARE"



Here Mr. Friedhofer's clear orchestral thinking, his appreciation and understanding of the orchestra's resources, his sensitive feeling for tone color, and his good taste are apparent.

It is sad that present utilization of film music material does not allow for any kind of distribution of the music itself. True, in rare cases, excerpts from film scores are recorded on commercial discs, and when popular songs are used, they are published; but the full scores, even notable ones such as this are all but ignored. The song, "Among my Souvenirs" which was used often in "The Best Years of Our Lives", can undoubtedly be found in many thousands of homes, but those interested in the score have recourse only to the meager and too sketchy quotations appearing in reviews such as this one. The only alternative is to go repeatedly to see the film in order to become more familiar with its music. "The Best Years of Our Lives" offers one of those rare cases where this will prove worthwhile.

OTHER MUSIC CREDITS:

Musical Director, Emil Newman
Orchestration, Jerome Moross, Leo Shuken, Sidney Cutner, Hugo Friedhofer.
Dance Arrangements, Herb Taylor, Charles W. Bradshaw.