

ingly better than any of his orchestral music I've heard. A *Trio Sonata* for flute, cello and piano by Marion Bauer received its first New York performance. This charming little score is light, unpretentious and well-written for the instruments.

Elliott Carter's *Pastorale* for English horn and piano, a broadly conceived work, has delicate poetic fancy and nostalgic charm. Folklike material forms its thematic basis without a provincial result; the long and somewhat difficult line is sustained with a convincing impression of effortless ease. The piece was beautifully performed by the composer, at the piano, and Josef Marx, whose fine artistry was also evident in a *Sonatina* for oboe and flute by Godfrey Turner. This was the best of a group of works by Turner whose gifts are primarily lyrical. Thick harmonies and over-colored sonorities marred the effect of the piano pieces and

songs. Music for violin and piano that proved attractive included sonatas by Walter Piston, Virgil Thomson, Joseph Wagner and a *Duo Concertante* by Boris Koutzen. Norman Dello Joio's *Prelude: to a Young Musician*, performed by the pianist, Andor Foldes, is based on the beautiful Gregorian chant, *Ite, Missa Est*, and develops a simple mood appropriate to this ancient melody.

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With the exception of Theodore Chanler's songs and Aaron Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait*, the programs for voice and those for orchestra were the most disappointing of the festival. Some of the particularly unimpressive items were George Kleinsinger's monotonous *Western Rhapsody*, Eda Rapaport's bid for sentimental sympathy, *Adagio for Strings*, and probably the worst setting the Twenty-third Psalm will ever get, for voice and piano by Paul Creston.*

IN THE THEATRE

By S. L. M. BARLOW

THIS particular Stylite is delighted to climb back on his column with some good news. *Annie Get Your Gun* has come to town, clothed by Lucinda Ballard, set by Mielziner, with Ethel Merman as Annie Oakley displaying her hoarse-operatic charms at their most fetching, and above all with the best score Irving Berlin ever (well, hardly ever) wrote. Not only are the tunes fresh, they have a qual-

ity not often associated with Berlin. The modulations are surprisingly deft and unexpected; several songs have a crisp folksong air about them, casual and spare, with no padding, no pulling out into the usual pattern of verse and chorus, with the chorus in that eternal ABA. If the verse is two lines long, so is the music. And it is in the verses that Berlin is most astonishing. The broadest humor and the

* In the radio column of the last issue, the premiere of Morton Gould's *Viola Concerto* was erroneously credited to William Primrose. The work was first given last June, with the N.B.C. Orchestra, by Milton Katims.

neatest wit jostle in the rhymes. These songs are also the real innards of the book – for the show moves along through them and through the character of Annie, almost in spite of a libretto whose chief virtue was to have hit upon Annie Oakley and to have entrusted her to the matchless Ethel Merman. The mating of words and music, both by the same hand, is a constant joy; and *Doin' What Comes Naturally*, *You Can't Get a Man with a Gun*, *Sun in the Morning* and *Anything You Can Do* have haunted this reviewer from New Haven (via Boston) to New York.

Billion Dollar Baby has few of the faults and also few of the virtues of *Annie Get Your Gun*. The scenery by Oliver Smith is as imaginative and light as Mielziner's is pedestrian and plushy. The orchestration (I presume by the masterful Morton Gould) is a delight of inventiveness, whereas Annie's is run of the mill. The dances, staged by Jerome Robbins, speed across the stage with just the right satyric comment. The production is taut and shaded to perfection, always on center, whereas Annie tended to sprawl. But, really, the audit of virtues ends there (and, at that, has added up to a good show). Unfortunately, the songs are indifferently put over; only William Tabbert sings well enough, and to him is allotted the best song, *Bad Timing*. The trouble, I think, is that we are invited to spend the evening with a bunch of heels, gangsters and trollops, each more repugnant than the other; and though each gets his come-uppance, and though the music, often very skilfully, and the verses and dances take off or excoriate the follies perpetrated in the

gangster twenties, still you cannot create an engaging mood exclusively by panning. Among so many heels there should be at least one ball-of-the-foot; the slight climb to a tendon Achilles would be welcome. On the whole the lyrics are poor; and the music suffers from this insistence on poking fun, on commenting acidly, on "taking off" so much that there is no lyric garment left. I suppose a composer should be entitled to *one* character in the play that he could possibly like, for whom he could write sympathetically. Obviously, the authors of the book forgot, as far as their male leads are concerned, one rule in the Official Navy Manual which reads that, when splicing, "seamen must tuck against the lay."

There have been many dream-sequence ballets of late, to tell what might happen if . . . , or what poisoned the heroine's childhood or prenatal days, or what is going to happen, maybe. . . . In *Billion Dollar Baby* much of the second act is such a ballet: what life with a gangster would really be like. It's the best of such ballets I have seen, and for it Morton Gould has written his most apt and expressive music.

Well, it seems to be the old question of values. Ethel Merman, as Annie, puts over a dozen songs because there is the stuff of real humor and human beings in Berlin's words and music; in the same way, this dream ballet, entering briefly the realms of tragic imagination, elicits from Gould and Robbins, and from Joan McCracken who dances it, the best of their powers.

It is difficult to bring *Lute Song* into this protracted comparison. Here

is no Americana, pleasant or acidulous, but a stately Oriental legend, a pantomime interspersed with words and music. The colors and costumes and scenery are opulent, often stunning; but the voice (from the tomb) is the voice of Maxfield Parrish though the hand is the hand of Robert Edmond Jones. There is a score by Raymond Scott – out of Cio Cio San by the Tambourin Chinois – with harp, celesta and glockenspiel predominant. All it needs is a dulcimer. A galaxy of good actors strive to retain the Chinese atmosphere on the stage, but in the pit, under a thin glaze of celadon, the music is not millet but corn. Neither Mary Martin nor Yul Brynner can sing the songs, such as they are, assigned to them. In fact, it is sad to relate that as far as *Lute Song* is concerned, Confucius say, “The curtain went up to denote a long, long lapse of time.”

St. Louis Woman at one stage of its career was a stark folkplay, by Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen, with some of the vitality and the touching quality of the first, unencumbered *Porgy*. Then the Hollywood backers looked upon it and found it too simple for their tastes. Mamoulian was called in to dress it up and stuff it, and he did. He might have let it die before he stuffed it.

Yet the good is there, the pulse and emotion, but struggling for air. The music, by Harold Arlen, is largely orchestromony, with a few barometric reminders of *Stormy Weather*. Under the Midas touch from the West Coast, the score was inflated and Lemuel Ayers's sets were cluttered with crowds. Pearl Bailey is a knock-out; she sings the two best songs in the show, putting them over as a mistress of the art. In these two songs, the lyrics by Johnny Mercer are up to standard.

From these four musicals there emanates a conviction that the revolution from sugar, from the *Desert Song* or *Prince of Pilsen*, has now itself become a cliché. Just inflated noise and rhythm do not create that response in the audience which a “musical” must have. Only a *tune* will build a scene, fortify the moment, capture the house. “Musicals” are geared to work on your emotions, not your nerves. In today's list, only Berlin is in the right path (of Kern, Gershwin, Rodgers, of Berlin himself). Fresh lettuce comes before the dressing. The nourishment is not in the vinegar. *Billion Dollar Baby* is a hit because it is so slick; but *Annie* is memorable, permanent, effulgent because Berlin has given Ethel Merman words and music to sing.

THE MUSICAL PRESS

By FRANI MUSER

HAPPY augury of France's reviving musical vitality was the recent arrival of the first post-war issue of *Le Revue Musicale*. Its familiar format quite unchanged, its various

departments still intact, the magazine is one more testimony to the peculiarly indestructible character of French tradition. Articles on Lully, La Lande, Berlioz and Mozart remind us that