

Another point long in question is whether or not moving picture music should follow the picture's action, or attempt its own individual symphonic expression. It must now be plain to everyone that if the music *constantly* follows its picture's action, a spotty and choppy score will be the natural result. But—and so it seems to me—if motion picture music attempts a purely symphonic solution it will find itself in the same hot water as the symphonic music which has so misguidedly appeared in various modern operas of the past. Picture music is more closely allied to the dramatic forms than to the symphonic. By its very nature it must be loose in form and style. It is, quite simply, a kind of modern opera. And operatic music in turn must certainly follow the emotional content of its drama and its accompanying poetry. Unless it does so, it will seem totally beside the point. This is just as true of picture music.

■

Stokowski's appearance in *The Big Broadcast of 1937* is significant for one thing. It is extraordinary that audiences lured into a motion picture theatre upon the pretense of seeing and hearing the remarkable hat-cha Martha Ray, will likewise swallow a Bach fugue and love it. But this is because the Bach is presented with a technic of showmanship comprehensible to them. Stokowski is entirely equal to the occasion. And since Stokowski remains—for my money at least—the world's greatest orchestral director, so far as I am concerned he can do as he pleases. We have just heard that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has signed Stokowski to play the part of Wagner in the production centered about that composer's life. That, indeed, should be something!

George Antheil

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

DURING the last six weeks New York has been a pleasant place for a person who likes ballet. I have seen one absolutely first class piece, Nijinski's *Faun*; Bérard's sets for the *Symphonie Fantastique*, the second and third of which are as

good as the best ever made—probably the best we'll see all winter; and then a new dance group that is full of freshness and interest, the American Ballet Caravan. I have also seen other things I liked more or less, or not at all, and I have not by any means seen everything that has been done.

The revivals of the de Basil Ballet Russe are as carefully rehearsed and as freshly executed as its novelties. Last year's *Noces* and this year's *Faun* are things to be very grateful for. The *Faun* is an astonishing work. After twenty-three years it is as direct and moving as though it had been invented yesterday. It gathers momentum from the first gesture to the last like an ideal short story. From this point of view of a story, the way the veil is introduced and re-emphasized by the nymph is a marvel of rightness. From the point of view of visual rhythm the repetition of the nymph's gesture of dismay is the perfection of timing. It is, of course, because so few gesture motives are used that one can recognize each so plainly, but there is no feeling of poverty in this simplification. The rhythmic pattern in relation to the stage and to the music is so subtly graded that instead of monotony we get a steady increase in suspense, an increase in the eyes' perceptiveness, and a feeling of heroic style at the climax.

It is true that most of the gestures used have prototypes in Greek reliefs and vase paintings, but, in addition to that intellectual association with adolescence, the fact is when the body imitates these poses, the kind of tension resulting expresses exactly the emotion Nijinski wants to express. Both their actual tension and their apparent remoteness, both their plastic clarity and their emphasis by negation on the center of the body (it is always strained between the feet in profile and the shoulders *en face*)—all these qualities lead up to the complete realization of the faun's last gesture. The poignancy of this moment lies partly in the complete change in the direction of tension, in the satisfying relief that results; and the substitution of a new tension (the incredible backbend) gives the work its balance. But besides, the eye has been educated to see the plastic beauty of this last pose, and the rhythmic sense to appreciate its noble deliberateness. That it is so intensely human a gesture, coming after a long preparation of understatement, gives it, in its cumulative assurance, the

force of an illumination. This force of direct human statement, this faith in all of us, is the astonishing thing about the *Faun*. It is as rare in dancing as in the other arts. These last moments of the *Faun* do not need any critical defense. But they have been so talked about that I am trying to point out for intellectuals that they are not a sensational tag, but that the whole piece builds up to them, and reaches in them an extraordinary beauty.

The de Basil company danced the *Faun* beautifully. Lichine in the title role excelled. It is a part that demands exceptional imagination, as well as great plastic sense. And Lichine had besides these a fine simplicity.

His own ballet *Pavillon* (music by Borodin) was pleasant but left no definite impression as a piece. Its lightness was often commonplace, and its inventions often plastically ineffective. I hope he will show us a new ballet next year in which his admirable sense of dance will find a more definite form.

The other novelty, Massine's *Symphonie Fantastique* (music and book by Berlioz) was at the opposite extreme from *Pavillon* in point of definiteness and effect. Massine is without doubt the master choreographer of today. He has the most astonishing inventiveness and the most painstaking constructivity. He is an encyclopedia of ballet, character, specialty, period, and even of formulas from modern German dancing. In the *Fantastique* for instance, his "musician" runs the whole gamut of late romantic gesture, and the prison scene is glorified Joos. Besides this gift of detail he has a passion for visual discipline, a very good sense of dramatic variety and climax, and one watches the whole *Fantastique*—except perhaps for the last finale—with a breathless attention. The prison scene in particular moves as fast as a movie thriller. In the *Fantastique* Massine uses even more successfully than in *Présages* or *Choreartium* the device of a number of simultaneous entrées, giving an effect like a number of voices in music; and his gift for following the details as well as the main line of a score is remarkable.

But notwithstanding these many great attainments I personally do not enjoy his work. For me, the activity of his ballets is an abstract nervousness that has no point of reference in a human feeling. The physical tension remains constant, it has no dra-

matic subsequence. The gesture motives are ingenious, but they allow no projection of any imaginative reality, they allow only the taut projection of a gesture in the void. His characters are intellectual references to types, they do not take on a mysterious full life of their own. And I imagine that it is this lack of humanity in his work that has limited such dancers as Toumanova and Jasinski; though he has developed a fine visibility in Zoritch.

For me the great treat of the *Fantastique* is the extraordinary sets of Bérard. Their proportion, both in themselves and to the dancers in the course of the scenes, their space, repose, and coloring are miraculous. Much of the lighting was fine too, among other things the dark opening of the ballroom scene, which disappeared in a later performance.

The American Ballet Caravan, composed of members of the American Ballet, presented, the evening I saw them, *Promenade* (Dollar-Ravel), *The Soldier and the Gypsy* (Coudy-de Falla) and *Encounter* (Christensen-Mozart). The Mozart was the best, with the right quality of definiteness and play, of stage magic and tender friendliness. The Spanish number had an interesting and appropriate attempt to combine dancing with *parlando* movement, so to speak; and the Ravel had a sense of style and several happy inventions. The costumes were interesting, those for the Ravel remarkable. But it is a shame they chose to dance against that old eyesore, black curtains. The company is well-trained and unspoiled. They are pleasantly un-Russian. There is an American freshness and an American modesty that is charming. There may be as yet the usual faults of beginners,—lyricism, too timid a dramatic attack, too little concentration choreographically, and occasionally by some dancers more projection than the moment warrants. But the important thing is that young talents get a chance and that the enterprise as a whole is lively and real and part of us. I regret that I missed the second program which contained a ballet by a young American composer Elliot Carter, *Pocahontas*, and *Harlequin for President* (Loring-Scarlatti).

The novelty by the Joos ballet, *The Prodigal Son* (music by Cohen) was not a success, but I do not think it necessary to analyze it, as it may well be thoroughly revised. The Joos Ballet,

accurate as they are, could learn a good deal in theatre effectiveness and in invention from Massine.

From the standpoint of new music the season has not been very rich. *Concurrence* by Auric is nice but not new. Tansman's new version of his *Sonatine Transatlantique* for Joos is excellent music and good for dancing. I didn't like Cohen's *Prodigal*. The best new ballet music I heard was Paul Bowles' score for *Horse Eats Hat*. This whole production is much the most interesting thing in the season's spoken theatre from the standpoint of movement.

Edwin Denby

OVER THE AIR

By CECIL MICHENER SMITH

THIS abbreviated column, appearing for the first time in this issue, is presented principally as a hope for things to come. It is the assumption of MODERN MUSIC that the air channels will, from time to time, carry programs of contemporary music worth writing about. When such happy diversions mar the smooth routine of our broadcasting studios, I shall make note of their boldness by printing a record of it in these pages.

As a reporter of contemporary music broadcasts, I am somewhat hampered by the accident of residence outside the broadcasting range of New York City stations. Many programs are not carried by the local stations to which I can conveniently listen. In many instances, therefore, I shall be forced to imitate the precedent set by some other music reviewers, of covering musical performances which I have not attended.

This irritating state of affairs may have at least the virtue of calling the attention of our readers to the special privileges enjoyed by residents of the New York area. It is quite appropriate to New York's metropolitan position among American cities that the bulk of the nation's concert and operatic performances should be presented there.

The radio, however, has been highly advertised as a democratic means of providing large city advantages for those who dwell in smaller cities and rural localities. And many radio