

(Ballet Russe again). The ballet in itself is full of poetry, of simple and complex romantic emotion. Markova, though perhaps a little prim in the realistic act, was incredibly perfect in the abstract one. The expressiveness of her movements is such that one might think she had invented classic ballet as a personal medium. Her *pointes*, her *developpés*, especially her *seconde en l'air* are no school formula. They have the breathtaking simplicity of a mere impulse, as though these extraordinary coordinations were the natural reflection of a miraculous event. It was dancing as you pray to see it. I also remember Krassovska's extraordinary leaps.

Now I am eagerly looking forward to the Ballet Caravan evenings at the Martin Beck Theatre.

## OVER THE AIR

DAVID DIAMOND

**G**IAN-CARLO MENOTTI is to be congratulated for his radio opera, *The Old Maid and the Thief*. Commissioned by the National Broadcasting Company and broadcast on April 22 with the assistance of the NBC Symphony under the direction of Alberto Erede and a capable group of singers, Mr. Menotti's clever, well-planned libretto, delightful though sometimes crudely set text, and witty, ebullient score, received about as perfect a presentation as is possible.

The very charming story of the Misses Todd and Pinkerton, rivals for the love of an "honest" thief whom they shelter, and the amusing, grotesque situations which arise after they, in turn, commence robbing the small town stores to provide for the supposedly escaped desperado, gives Menotti opportunity to display his indisputable gifts as a composer of opera-bouffe. There is no doubt about it, he has a magnificent technic for this medium, and he uses it with consummate skill. His theatrical sense of timing is enhanced by a keen sense of humor and a command of simple, direct means to approach situations which might appear banal and embarrassing in less skillful hands. In this rarely well done species of opera, there is little to hold against Mr.

Menotti, save that, stripped of its ticklish, slightly risqué situations, the work lags in musical interest; even the rather obvious orchestral tricks and sudden spurts of energy do not pull through the more formally sustained lyric sections. This at present is one of his defects. Another more important fault is his style of musical invention; there is a tendency toward over-lushness in every musical phrase and toward pouring into the necessary harmonic texture an overdose of "sweet" notes. Menotti can solve this problem very easily by being more selective and less pro-forma. I hope he does, for I'm very enthusiastic about his talent, his energy, the neat way he rounds out a musical phrase and the perfection of his technic. I avoid criticizing his musical style. He is a young composer of promise, in process of development. Style evolves if the composer has something to say, and Menotti has plenty. The over-sentimentality of *Amelia Goes to the Ball* is already abandoned for a more energetic and refined musical expression. The harmonic speech of the radio-opera is a vast improvement too, and the vocal style more personal.

There is no pretense about Menotti. He writes exactly as he feels. It's true he does feel too easily; the flair for effect is present from both theatrical and musical standpoints. But the orchestration is fresh and economical, the craftsman's touch is obvious throughout. *The Old Maid and the Thief* offer certain brief moments of striking originality in those subtle, unself-conscious pauses which occur ever so often in passages of conscious virtuosity. And there's a simple beauty inherent in some of the over-garnished melodies. It's nice being young, talented and skillful enough to turn out operas. Something else should of course come out of it all. I'm convinced that Menotti has what it takes to improve the quality of his music which, at the present time, is not very distinguished.

On March 29, the League of Composers presented the third broadcast in its series of contemporary American music over the Mutual Broadcasting System, this time under the direction of Cesar Sodero. Henry Cowell's *Exultation* is a gay, charming, jig-like piece, well made, light, and pleasant to listen to. So fine and able a composer as Quincy Porter should not spend time writing a score like his incidental music for *Antony and Cleo-*

*patra*. This is of the vapid variety we hear much too often over the air. The music was truly incidental to Mr. Porter's gifts.

The strange part of this broadcast followed three minutes playing time of the *Elegie* from Bernard Rogers' *Third Symphony*. What I heard of this noble, truly refined music I liked deeply for its earnestness and smooth-grained musicianship, its highly evocative melancholy and the warm melos of its timbre. Then came one of the most high-handed tricks ever played on any serious composer. Suddenly the work was brought abruptly to an end on a cadence selected by some chieftain of WOR's musical staff. As it is, a composer practically signs away all rights with the release sheet demanded of him before the scheduled broadcast. But when a broadcasting company assumes the privilege of cutting major portions from a score, as in the case of Mr. Rogers, then it is time the American composer made the necessary corrective demands. The serious American composer is still a wide-eyed innocent. He has little practical, first-hand knowledge of commercial tyranny; his music is subject to every abuse—cutting, re-orchestration and frequent "improvements" on the harmony. When works are in manuscript, royalty fees are usually ignored by the broadcasting companies. Despite some initial well-meant efforts, very little has been accomplished to remedy this situation.

A resumé of the programs of contemporary music broadcast in the past few months is very disheartening. It proves conclusively, that there is still a great deal of doubt in the minds of radio tycoons concerning the importance of contemporary music and the need for continued propaganda in its behalf. Music of our day is still considered a strange, maladjusted, over-personalized high-brow art. Composers are accused of ruining the available opportunities by ignoring the more ordinary taste of the radio public. One should therefore remain grateful to the various organizations which sponsor contemporary music over the air. With their cooperation several radio networks frequently present new music. The Columbia Broadcasting System is the most interested but it is not always well informed. Its series of special commissions, which might have effected a vital and important about-face for American music, could have been better selected on a basis of sounder consultation. The National Broadcasting

Company has, in years past, given broadcasts of works by the foremost composers of our day; the quality of music radioed under their auspices was to my mind, of a very high order. Since the inauguration of the NBC Symphony however, important contemporary music is seldom played.

In recent months, a few independent programs have been heard via CBS. The Indianapolis Symphony under Fabien Sevitzky gave works by Harold Morris, a *Piano Concerto* by Fuleihan, and McKay's Fantasy on *Western Folk Songs*. The Cincinnati Conservatory Orchestra gave Hugo Grimm's character portrait, *Abraham Lincoln*, a Gargantuan conception without the energy to see it through. John Kirkpatrick performed the much publicized *Second Sonata* of Charles Ives in two broadcasts. I still feel that if this work weren't such a patchwork quilt, American music might have here one of its most moving musical documents.

Though on a lesser scale, real pioneering in behalf of contemporary music is being carried on by the smaller broadcasting networks. WNYC has presented several programs sponsored by the Alumni Association of the Juilliard School. These included Copland's *Sextet for Clarinet, String Quartet and Piano* and Jacobi's new *Ave Rota*. WQXR and WEVD continue their usual broadcasts of recorded music, and one can be sure to find works by the most representative living composers sandwiched in between the latest boogie-woogie discs. I am very impressed by the influence WQXR has on its large and faithful audience. The *Violin Concerto* and *Duo Concertante* of Stravinsky are becoming fast favorites with listeners, thanks to the weekly repetition of these works. The last year has developed a strong, new, vital group of radio listeners who are as fond of the Adagio from Ravel's *G-Major Piano Concerto* as they are of the latest swing recordings. Prokofieff still attracts a great many listeners. Each newly recorded work is an addition to his long list of facile nonentities, though the early *Violin Concerto* can be heard from time to time over WQXR. Milhaud's *Création du Monde* still retains its place among the favorite recordings. With late additions by Victor of the Opus 11 *Sonata for Viola and Piano* by Hindemith, Roussel's *String Quartet* and scheduled works by

Berezowsky and Harris, a still larger, more varied audience may be cultivated for music of our day. The Federal Music Project has the cooperation of WNYC. Ravel's fine *Concerto* for the left hand was played by Paul Wittgenstein and accompanied by the Federal Symphony Orchestra.

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NBC continues to present the Eastman School Symphony, by far one of the finest student orchestras in the country. Preliminary to the ninth Festival of American music held in Rochester, Dr. Howard Hanson conducted two symposium broadcasts of uninteresting, unmusical, immature music by students of the Eastman School. To close what was optimistically called, "Milestones in the History of Music," Dr. Hanson once more gave *The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan* by Charles Griffes. This much over-estimated score has a great deal of fake program atmosphere and very little actual music. Dr. Hanson's milestones are really the incredibly beautiful works of obscure composers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Three programs of American music were broadcast from the Festival. None of the music save Walter Piston's rather dry *Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* as well as his ballet, *The Incredible Flutist*, seemed to have much to say.

For years now, Dr. Hanson has apparently made it a point to keep from his programs those works most distinguished for vitality, and imagination. Perhaps this is due to the fact that much of the best American music demands a great deal of rehearsal time. The wonderfully trained mixed chorus of the Eastman School is usually heard in standard, substantial works that rarely go beyond the nineteenth century. What an extraordinary service Dr. Hanson might do for contemporary music if for example he presented his highly equipped forces over the air in such masterpieces as Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, *Pérséphone*, or *Oedipus Rex*; perhaps a rehearing of Bernard Rogers' stirring *Exodus* and Malipiero's *La Cena* so superbly and movingly given in Rochester years ago; or Robert Delaney's *John Brown's Song*, as admirable a choral work as has yet come out of America. And what of Paul Nordoff's sensitive *Secular Mass*, and Bloch's *Sacred Service*?