

straight out of the hymnbook. If the procedure was once creditable because it was autonomously Harris, by now it is tiresome. From the same publisher comes Morton Gould's *Spirituals*, five slickly orchestrated abstractions of Negro folk elements, done up with his usual skill and usual concession to semi-popular taste. Delkas Music has issued the orchestral version of Milhaud's *Le Bal Martiniquais*, with its very pleasant *Chanson Créole* and brisk *Biguine*. There is also Douglas Moore's *In Memoriam* (Elkan-Vogel), a sincere gesture that expresses, I assume, the common sentiment of these post-war years. Much more pretentious than any of these, finally, is Artur Schnabel's *First Symphony* (Edition Adler), its *Modernismus* lengthened out for almost two hundred pages, with spasmodic shifts and frantic gestures. Schnabel's rather private creative pursuits, which are now coming to light, seem inconsistent with his neglect of contemporary music as a concert pianist. But actually, while his idiom borders on atonality, and the elements mount up vertically to produce dissonantly modern effects, the lack of economy and the formal devices stem directly from the nineteenth century.

In Ernst Bacon's neat reproductions

of American folklore (*Songs from the American Folk*, published by Fischer) there is a freshness that makes them more appealing than his Brahmsian songs issued by Associated Music Publishers: *The Commonplace* and *O Friend*. Fischer has also published a reduction with piano of Vladimir Dukelsky's *Cello Concerto*. I miss the intriguing instrumental effects in this version, notably in the slow movement. But there are agreeable melodies along the way. The cello seems to suggest a dull type of passage work to almost everyone who writes for it these days, and this work is no exception.

*A Jubilant Song*, Norman Dello Joio's choral work, published with piano accompaniment by G. Schirmer, contains clean, youthful music, well-contrived for the high school students for whom it was written. The facile diatonic and repetitive short patterns are those that William Schuman has been perhaps most active in disseminating among us. Schuman's "flapping, flapping" becomes "lightning, lightning" in Dello Joio and the interval is now a third rather than a second. Easy as the method is, the results are much preferable to the unctuous music they used to serve up in our schools.

## WITH THE DANCERS

—By MINNA LEDERMAN—

WHEN I go to see a ballet it's with the expectation of pleasure. If the ballet is new I hope to make a discovery. And I hope for more rather than less when Americans have

been at work on it. There must be thousands like me but the managements know us not. They are driving into next season with a club in one hand and a flag in the other.

The ballet war of 1946 will open in New York shortly. This seems to be a return engagement of the battle of 1943-44, with a difference. Hurok's giant new combine and several splinters of old ones have traded dancers much as the leagues buy and sell baseball players. But that is all in the routine of commerce and need not be taken too seriously. In the old companies, except for the Monte Carlo, which fortunately remains intact, the dancers performed as if they didn't know or like each other very well. There has also been a scrambling of repertoires. Some famous pieces are to be revived and many new ones are in production. There's still time to hope they will be mounted with care.

Disturbing however is the sudden fierce competition for native dancers and native works which begins to sound like a challenge to patriotism. Personally I prefer to take the Americanism of all the companies for granted since this is where their home is. The public too should feel free in the theatre to like exactly what it pleases.

III

Is there an American issue in the ballet today? I thought it had been settled ten years ago when the Caravan fought it out the hard way. There was little money then and no audience for Americans, and our dancers were, in general, technically below par. To build a public Ballet Caravan joined with WPA, later, as the American Ballet, with the League of Composers, the Metropolitan, and even, for a last fling, with the State Department. It put the standards of its American ensemble up a notch, gave us a fresh repertory, commissioned scene designers, choreographers

and at least three important theatre composers — Thomson, Copland and Bowles. In 1938, with *Billy the Kid* it definitely altered the course of ballet in America.

After *Billy* it was impossible for any company to risk such a completely alien miscalculation as the Nabokov-Massine *Union Pacific*. *Billy* was so successful that all at once everyone was borrowing from it. In the American line nothing since has been as good — not Copland's later ballet scores, certainly not the choreography that appropriated Loring's cowboy tricks. And no ballet has even dimly reflected the poetic feeling of this piece, its suggestion of a secret life just beyond the violent episodes. *Billy* set up a rather broad masterplan for an effective American ballet. This calls for a story well fixed in a special time and place, a score that adapts folk or popular tunes, a dynamic rhythmic workout with inventions based on native dance steps, some episode, slight or developed, of honky-tonk, and a quality of over-all homely sentiment. The Robbins-Bernstein-Gould adventures in urbanism are recent hardboiled examples.

There have been experiments beyond these limits, ambitious and interesting too. But the popular-folk-form is the prevailing one, most recognizably American, easiest to export and to compare, for instance, with the current British models.

Musically the Americans are more vigorous than the British. British choreography is more sustained and finished. Ashton, Tudor and, I presume, Helpmann too, are *élégants*. The Americans are "simple," they will even dance in the vernacular. The

British, whether their subject is a play, a poem, a novel, or just an idea for one, always end by making a ballet look every step of the way like literature. The American obsession, on the other hand, is with rhythm and that surely is a superior asset in dancing.

But the Americans (apparently the British too) have not yet met the central choreographic problem – how to develop for themselves the modern language of the classical ballet.

This is where propaganda for Americanism has grown so defensive. A deviation from the ballet's high style, a side-step, short-cut, deliberate corruption, might very properly be left to public tolerance. In time the choreographers will work it out their own way and the audience will show its American preference. But our impatient nationalists are unable to wait. And so we now hear from them an anti-foreignism new and strident. Not against the British; Tudor seems to be one of us. (Nor of course against Jooss or Schoop, since German modernism has been accepted as a kind of mother tongue.) The war for American dancing is exclusively a war to give Russian ballet back to Russia. And that is nonsense, for as everyone knows – except perhaps the managers – Russian ballet has been locked up in Russia since 1917.

But if for *ballet russe* – something else again – we read international style, then we do recognize an issue after all. This issue has the dry rattle of isolationism and it is now a little thin and worn from battle in the other arts.

### III

Long before Diaghilev's death and certainly ever since, *ballet russe* has

been an alias for School of Paris. It identifies a repertory that is French, Italian, Spanish, British, Russian, according to the composers and painters who made it. With a few notable exceptions it covers all the important ballets of the years between the wars. Though native to the city of Paris it has been brilliantly recreated in London and New York.

In respect to dancing, the international style is the most contemporary product of the academy. Remove the Russian and Spanish appliqués, and there remains the grand impersonality of the classic tradition, interpreted in this century chiefly by Russian and Italian masters. Americans have studied it – carelessly for a hundred years, in the last ten with rigorous exactitude. Our youngest dancers show the brilliant results. In works designed for them by choreographers of the style we already see some adaptation to American physique and temperament.

An attempt to break this long line by appealing to local prejudice is a gesture both provincial and recessive. It may lead to temporary confusion in thinking about ballet, but beyond that it comes too late for much effect. Enough dancers, American and foreign-born, now represent the great style so that the public has a constant visual reminder of what is at stake. And in the ballet world, mass reaction is a preserver of tradition.

For a national school, if we must have one overnight, there are many useful differences in history, legend, taste, rhythm. These happy accidents need not send the ballet on a detour after the regionalist painters and musicians. Regionalism works in bigtime advertising, in show business

and the movies. Like all other art in America, dancing needs more light and freedom.

III

The revival of *Les Matelots* (Marsine-Auric-Pruna, 1925) by the new Ballet for America will remind us of the days when Cocteau summoned his friends to write music and poetry "to the measure of man" in which one can live "as in a house," and to go for inspiration to the cabaret and circus. Last season ballet sailors, ban-

aits, music hall characters were greeted as American inventions. Soon we shall see a few Parisian ancestors. . . . Good showmanship too will be the importation of Ashton's *Patineurs* (Meyerbeer, Chappell, 1937) which Ballet Theatre is now rehearsing in London. All we know here of Ashton are the biting little interludes of *Four Saints*, and *Devil's Holiday*. His wit and lightning swift changes of mood should give some bright relief to the sombre repertory of Tudor.

## OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

NBC presented Marc Blitzstein's symphony, *The Airborne* in a performance by Leonard Bernstein with the composer himself as narrator. This brilliant score is an eclectic hodge-podge of stirring popular music, often very moving passages and patches of dubious origin (à la Puccini, Strauss, Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley), that manages somehow to come off in a fairly stirring way in spite of its indifferently integrated materials. I would hesitate to accuse this composition of being bombastic merely because of its heavy-handed sonorities and extravagantly bold statements. After all, the obvious purpose of the piece is to arouse surface emotions, extrovert feelings and patriotic pride, not far different from the intent of military marches, folk hymns or provincial anthems. This was a second hearing of the work for me. Like a fairly good "grade B" movie, one might like it and recommend it to someone else, but one

shouldn't go a second time. Blitzstein's work is not musician's music; it's not intellectually entertaining or logically exciting. But it's a nice light piece, has some good emotional kicks in it, and it made an appropriate prelude to the usual summer musical events.

Ernst Bacon's *Second Symphony* was played by Frank Black and the NBC Orchestra. This is an interesting and somewhat curious work, which has the esthetic problem of sustaining a monothematic idea throughout four rather large movements. The organization is not cyclical in the Franck manner, or expansively repetitive in the Beethoven development sense. It is somewhat nearer the variation idea in Bach's *Art of the Fugue*, with rhythmic modifications and alterations of the subject in different tempi. If it is not altogether successful, the architectural concept is nevertheless the most distinctive feature of the symphony. No one would accuse this music of being up-to-date or contem-