

were once considered so inseparable from "modern" style. The work is, however, notably robust and poses intriguing, though sometimes awkward, rhythmic problems to its performers.

Quite in a class by himself is Alan Hovhaness, the last of the new names that I shall bring up. Though he has been hailed as an experimentalist, he seems quite mild and unstartling in his innovations. Like his other works, *Mihr* for two pianos (New Music) adroitly reflects the florid, sinuous oriental improvisations which are irresistible in small doses as folk art, but which require some further substance to hold the attention in serious, larger forms. The writing is mainly unisonal (often doubled in octaves) and there is a constant rapid alternation of the hands, somewhat in the naive manner of xylophone playing. For long stretches at a time, while

the left hand changes its notes, the right hand may return to one note, often repeating it in tremolo fashion. This, added to the unvarying modality, results in monotony. The strong rhythmic impulse occasionally makes up for this, but not enough, since even rhythmic patterns become stylized.

Three smaller items that remain to be mentioned are Copland's *Hoe Down* from *Rodeo*, arranged for violin and piano (Boosey & Hawkes), and Virgil Thomson's *Five Inventions* for piano and *Piano Sonata Number 4* (*Guggenheim Jeune*) (both Elkan-Vogel). The *Inventions* are more intricate than the *Sonata*, which accomplishes its modest ends with simple and disarming means and is easy enough for a teaching piece. The intentional archness and insouciance of the canons that do not always quite fit are rather on the cute side.

## WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

AFTER raiding the *Moonlight Sonata* Massine has taken over the *Archduke Trio*. This is an operation less violent but quite as fatal. He calls the new work *Les Arabesques* and with it Ballet for America made a bow to Bridgeport in September. The small company of eleven dancers is in the first stages of a concert tour and travels, reasonably enough, with minimum musical support. Unreasonable however is Mas-

sine's decision to arrange the *Trio* for two pianos. He says the choreography is "inspired by the music; the characters and their relation by the mood of it." But the mood of the *Trio* is developed by the colloquy of its particular instruments. When their color is rubbed out the lines fade too. At the premiere the whole structure seemed to collapse in a rubble of shapeless sound.

The ballet is without a story, almost

without a subject. We see a fresco of lovers' meetings in an eighteenth century Elysium which makes its point by a certain perverse and aerial charm, a quality of lightness too fitful, however, to sustain the whole. Three long-legged, rococo graces appear. They don't so much announce the theme as insinuate themselves behind it. Soon there are two more and then five gentlemen in pastoral costumes. They meet, they part, they wander in aimless groups, they stop and arrange themselves in pairs against the blue curtains. They take the Scherzo as a romp, with a good deal of *brio* and no nod of recognition toward the dark cello theme which can be heard even in this version. The third movement disappears as an air and variations – the form that, we know from *Mozartiana*, lends itself to such beautiful choreography. Now it is an *adagio* and four dancers toil through it laboriously in a series of slow, very elaborate lifts. Though the mechanics are obvious, Massine does here achieve a few triumphant sculptural impressions of arrested flight. The finale with only ten on stage is the same hyperactive mass climax we know from the symphonic pieces.

Massine has a tremendous reputation for these interpretive ballets, although they cannot be said to interpret the music. They are glamor jobs, large prestige machines erected on the standard musical repertory. Their music is chosen much as Hollywood buys a book, for the use of the name but with dubious intentions about style and content. Try as I will I cannot adequately separate my memories of one symphonic ballet – Shostako-

vitch, Brahms, Beethoven – from the other. They are all vaguely impressive and quite stuffy, and when over, for me they are gone with the wind.

It's not necessary, in fact it's a little pedantic, to "justify" Massine by Vigano. No one any longer objects categorically to non-theatrical music for dancers, and that, in our time, is the consequence of Isadora. (Chiefly it was the journalists and balletomanes whom she infuriated. The artists – musicians included – and the people, she always had deliriously with her.) A composer naturally prefers to make a ballet to order. That's his occupational bias. But he rarely forbids the use of anything already written. Ready-made or made-to-order, a work must in the end be interpreted. And if that's what he's afraid of, like Stravinsky he will worry rather over the liberties conductors take.

The sensible point about music and dancing is that their union should be more than a passing convenience. It should be felt and visibly realized. That seems obvious enough to the music specialists in any dance audience, but it matters even more for the average man. The musician can, if he must, separate what he hears from what he sees. Everyone else gets a unit impression, and only when the ear reinforces the eye and the attention is held without distracting competition, can the pulse be excited, the heart stirred. Isadora's powerful instinct for music brought thrilling drama to the romantic symphonies. Balanchine takes possession nightly of the City Center, by direct communication of experience that, however subtle and rare, is indivisible. Figures of lesser size – the young

Negro, Pearl Primus (in her simple non-intellectualized solos) — do at times convey this same overwhelming feeling of simultaneity. Massine himself can satisfy us, be brilliantly with and of the music when he dances.

But there is no such compulsion in his Famous Works by Famous Masters. "If the music," Massine once said, "does not give it to me, I contrive to introduce the opportunity for light and shade." He is indeed a frantic contriver, and these inventions, over-extended and heartless, are, I find, easily forgotten.

III

*Les Matelots*, revived by Massine himself, was also on Ballet for America's program. This celebrated little work of the twenties is what I came for, and this was the big disappointment. You get a much better idea of Auric's earlier music from *Le Sang d'un poète* which is generally on view in some New York movie house. How melodious, fresh and clear in all its detail that score still is. In the present arrangement of *Les Matelots* (for two pianos of course) one hears some hurdy-gurdy circus tunefulness but all the beginnings and endings are muddy in a way that couldn't be Auric's. And the simple story of the sailors and the girls is now also confusing, its episodes interlaced and over-gay, the feeling of a water-front dive gone. I expected the work to date but not to lose its identity. . . . Remembered from pre-revolutionary Petersburg is a morsel called *The Gentleman Chooses a Bride* (Kuzmin-Romanoff). When polished and toned down, it may do as a slick Chauve Souris number.

The dancers of Ballet for America are very hard working, and Nana Gollner is, of course, a handsome ballerina with a special dark glitter. She came on only once though, with Petroff, in a pas de deux from *Sleeping Beauty* and her grandeur seemed a little isolated. Young Kathryn Lee has lovely long American legs and she can, remarkably, ogle for sadness as for joy. Grantzeva, Razoumova, Lazowsky, Shabelevsky, all the rest are a little too arch and insistent. I am not sure that a tour of provincial one-night stands is the way to develop ballet intime. What's missing now is a sense of style and that, it seems to me, can be formed only by considerable trial, and some exposure to a discriminating audience. At the moment, Ballet for America looks too much like Massine's Ballet Russe Highlights which introduced itself at the Stadium in 1945 and today is no more. . . . The costumes were on the whole pleasing, the two little screen sets negligible.

III

Danilova's accident and Tallchief's indisposition put a severe strain on the Monte Carlo earlier this month. Now it's clearer than it was even last spring, with Franklin out, that the company is too precariously staffed at the top. Without Danilova, *Raymonda*, *Mozartiana*, *Beau Danube* decline in splendor and *Baiser de la fée* loses its specific meaning. But everyone now recognizes in Ruthanna Boris a rising star. Her reserves of power grow with each demand made on her. In *Sérénade* she is wonderfully eloquent and restrained as she moves on the long even line of the waltz into the stillness of the *adagio*.

To *The Bells* (Poe-Page-Milhaud-Noguchi) I can only cry, Nevermore. I did try to see it twice but though it was the company's one novelty, the management denied me that privilege, so I am still as confused and depressed as I was at the opening.

Miss Page's intentions toward the poetry of Poe I take to be serious, but I fail to understand them. With their expanding fulness the four verses of *The Bells* are like the waves of an incoming tide; each one ebbs and flows on a widening arc. Neither this inundating movement nor the sound patterns have affected the ballet. A story is invented but the dancers are too statically rooted (also too hampered by encumbering clothes) to project it. The first moments of whirling, tinkling joy were pleasant and quite strange. But the Ghoul episode at the end is more childishly horrid, more irritating than most balletic orgies. Trapped in a space that is crowded to the wings, the dancers jiggle vainly up and down while all about them the scenery is in violent motion. And why Noguchi? His props have often been neat, his framework spare and quietly arranged. But to the already over-fantastic *Bells* his extravagant orientalisms add the last impossible note.

The choice of Milhaud was logical enough. The French know and like Poe, and we all know and admire this particular Frenchman. But his score seemed as baffling as the choreography. The *Suite Française* of 1944, is altogether unlike *The Bells* — a clear and transparently beautiful piece. Nothing in it prepared me for the relentless hubbub of the ballet.

Perhaps Milhaud had a prophetic view of the *mise-en-scène* and so wrote a piece strictly for use.

The Monte Carlo has more obligations in the American field than it meets. *Rodeo* is its only original; both *Frankie* and *The Bells* were brought completely packaged from Chicago and I believe a third ballet is on its way. This is not how a major company functions. It should explore, be thoroughly advised, commission, and do its own mounting.

### III

*Giselle* with new Berman décor is on Ballet Theatre's schedule for October. (The Original Ballet Russe will "adapt" the old Benois sets.) I look forward to this, but I should like also to see, within that frame, an arrangement besides Dolin's of the dances.

The work comes to us thickly encrusted with traditions, some old and some recent. You can learn from Cyril Beaumont's *The Ballet Called Giselle* (published by him in London last year) how complex it was in the making, how many streams fed its sources, and you can read there a long choreographic analysis. Much seems to have been lost or changed with the years. What I miss is a nuance in the bearing of the Willis. They look too much at times like tender Sylphides, at others like indignant Peris out of *Iolanthe*. But they are "dreaming demons," spirits of vengeance and we are meant to see them actually drown a man. (In the Dolin version this is barely suggested, the gamekeeper simply stumbles out of sight.) Although their steps are all rigidly prescribed, the corps should manage to give a more sinister, der-

vish effect. When well danced the Queen has just such a quality, she soars through space regally and yet seems malign.

## ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

**B**ERNARD SHAW had a right to snicker at Lilian Nordica when she turned Elsa of Brabant into Elsa of Bond Street by wearing a corset. And we have a right to snicker and guffaw when Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* arrives on the screen looking for all the world like a Cecil B. DeMille extravaganza. The film was doubtless intended to be a denial to the world that Britain had been impoverished by the war, an affirmation that if the United States would not finance His Majesty's Government with a loan, the British film industry could. The cast, deeply conscious of its responsibility for bringing to life a Shavian script, delivers each line with an almost choreographic eloquence, as if it were an epigram being engraved on Bartlett's deathless tablets. Vivien Leigh's Cleopatra is a kind of mechanized Shirley Temple; and by the end of the picture she is far from being the queen Caesar hoped he had made of her, still farther from being the woman Mark Anthony will expect when he arrives in Egypt, and hardly more than a mouthpiece of the character Shaw thought to create in two hours of unmitigated brilliance. Claude Rains is somewhat better; but spending himself in rendering unto Shaw the things that are Shaw's, he has very little left

to render unto Caesar.

Part and parcel of this sumptuous but shallow production is the score of Georges Auric. It begins with a modest and dignified unison passage bespeaking a proper humility in the presence of the Great Name of Shaw. A few bars of this suffice, however; and as Technicolor takes over, the music, not to be outdone, swings into a grandioso section heavily bejeweled with finger exercises for the woods and harp. Set to a livelier rhythm, the whole would serve nicely for the main-title of an MGM musical. Actually, it introduces us to a little crap game in the courtyard of Cleopatra's palace. This scene of barracks domesticity is interrupted by some horse-racing music that serves to bring front and center a bearer of evil tidings: Caesar's legions are only an hour away. There is much to-do over this dire announcement, much running hither and thither; Auric wisely leaves the sound-track in possession of screaming women. But a night scene on the desert recalls him to his task, and with infinite patience he weaves an elaborate pattern of string glissandi and harmonics with which to evoke the infinite mystery of night and stars and the beyond. But hark! the noble and melancholy notes of a horn break the stillness, and a solitary figure