

tion, no matter if they come from the best potters and the best salesmen in Hollywood's musical scene.

Other news here is significant. Hollywood plainly expects a European war within six months, and is planning its entire picture output towards that end. Paramount's biggest production will be called *Invasion*. It describes the United States attacked by a foreign power. Most studios have similar plans. Serious minded composers with a theatrical-plus-political point of view should be interested, for if war ever comes Hollywood will be clamoring for a series of "ultra-modern" (whatever that means!) scores which will din the ears of a hundred and sixty million persons, all over the earth, daily. Thus we march into the future and Hollywood claims that "Motion Pictures Are Your Best Entertainment."

## OVER THE AIR

GODDARD LIEBERSON

IT'S not cricket of the F. C. C. to allow Arturo Toscanini to play American music on the heels of the Orson Welles Martian broadcast—the proximity of two such shocks is a little too much for the radio public. For on the evening of November 5th, startled radio dialers heard the NBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Toscanini play two pieces by Samuel Barber, American composer. They were his *Adagio for Strings*, and *Essay for Orchestra*. It is gratifying to have American music in the expert hands of Toscanini, but unfortunately, this great conductor has a faculty for singling out that music which represents the concessionary style of our native art. His opinion of American music must be much the same as the opinion of American life held by those Europeans whose only contact with the American scene comes through the movies or the reading of Jack London.

These pieces of Samuel Barber fall neatly into line with the other American music which Toscanini has chosen in the past. It is contemporary only in the sense that the composer is still

alive. There is but a fraction of the whole which even suggests an individual technic; and instead of melodic creativeness and harmonic invention, Mr. Barber has substituted his wealth of experience in listening to the works of other composers. Expert orchestration need not concern us in this case and cannot be considered as sufficient recommendation for performance, indeed, a clear orchestration sometimes serves to further emphasize the thinness of content. Mr. Toscanini was not entirely fair to these pieces of Barber (though without seeing the score, it is safe to say they received sensitive interpretation); for they were placed between the frank classicism of Graener's *The Flute of Sans Souci* and the completely expressive *Iberia* of Debussy.

And so Maestro Toscanini, in whose hands lies the opportunity to vindicate our native music by his good taste and musicianship, has again shown American music to be what it is most often not—uncreative, colorless, and sub-European.



The Columbia Broadcasting System this summer played its second year's commissioned works in the *Everybody's Music* series. Before discussing the commissioned works, it might be well to mention that Mr. Howard Barlow, with the courage of a Horatius, invited composers other than those commissioned, to submit works and performed a sizable amount of their compositions during the summer months. Although there were a few which might well have been forgotten before they were played (as they undoubtedly were shortly thereafter) at least two from the uncommissioned group take musical precedence over those commissioned. These two compositions were a *Partita* by Paul Creston and a *Symphony* in one movement by William Schuman. Of the first, not enough can be said for its solidity and virility. It marks a great step forward in the creative history of Creston and shows him in a much more advantageous position than he held with his earlier super-chromatic pieces for piano (I'm thinking particularly of those published by *New Music*). One does not mind the echt-Bach approach in the *Partita*, mixed, as it is, with a strong personal speech and certain subtle jazz derivations in rhythmic design. On an arbitrary basis of comparison, it would seem that Creston's name should be included

some time among the commissioned composers in this series.

There is much to be said for the work of the other young un-commissioned composer, William Schuman, though his *Symphony* is not my conception of a composition in that form. Yet, as with Creston, it shows a marked development (especially when one remembers some of the inchoate representations on his first Composer's-Forum Concert) and an individuality, which, whether you find it attractive or not, carries conviction. At least a part of Schuman's technic is derived from the style of Roy Harris; certain rather stark statements of the thematic material, and curiously diatonic-sounding polyphonies. I think the fault of the *Symphony* lies in its too constant reiteration of the original material. After a very strong beginning, there is little feeling of growth or expansion into a large and successful pattern. It is this lack of development and breadth which took away from the effectiveness of the germ idea.

Two other non-commissioned works merit our attention; *Save the Saugatuck* by Edwin Gerschefski, and the *Suite* of Charles Jones. The first is a rather rambling composition which loses impact for just that quality. Its inherent worth is not apparent on first hearing, and to some degree the composer must be held responsible; for all that was said might well have been stated to better advantage in a more codified form, with a little more presumption and with a more direct appeal to the listener. Nevertheless, it is a piece worth hearing again, and I, for one, want that opportunity. The Jones' *Suite* was, as the composer professed, light music with a certain flip charm, though too mannered.

In all, six composers were commissioned for the *Everybody's Music* series, Quincy Porter, Robert Russell Bennett, Leo Sowerby, R. Nathaniel Dett, Jerome Moross, and Vittorio Giannini. Works by five of them have already been played, and an opera by Giannini, *Beauty and the Beast* (libretto by Robert Simon), will be performed on Thanksgiving night. On Giannini's shoulders lies the heavy task of lifting the commissioned works out of a slough of indifferent music, for, with no exception, the other five were a distinct let-down after the auspicious beginning of this series last year.

*Dance in 4-Time* and *Dance in 5-Time* by Quincy Porter were

hardly representative of the composer's talent. Despite their approach to jazz tempo, these pieces had a dolorous air which made me feel that Mr. Porter did not have his heart in the writing at hand. A swishing snare drum and solo instruments at the "mike" are not enough to make a successful radio piece. These dances, more Delphic than jazzy, are not the best Porter and lack his characteristic charm and lyricism.

A lot of jazz made its way into the commissioned works, but none of a quality which would make M. Hugues Panassié's hair stand on end. Robert Russell Bennett's *Eight Etudes* for orchestra has qualities—smooth impressionist harmonies, and a facile orchestration—which make for a good evening in the theatre. Intellectually, the music goes no deeper. The *Eight Etudes* are dedicated to Walter Damrosch, Aldous Huxley, Noel Coward, Carl Hubbell, All Dictators, Human Faith, Eugene Speicher, and The Ladies. The content of these pieces ranges from satire to a kind of youthful adulation. The whole thing might have turned out better had it been dedicated, quite simply, to Music.

If Mr. Gershefski was lacking in presumption, Jerome Moross exhibited too much. *Tall Story* is an example of that glib music which results from a composer's willingness to choose indiscriminately from every musical experience he has ever had. Beginning with a motto theme brazenly sounded in the trumpets, this work proceeds further into several false endings before a final close is reached. Mr. Moross confesses a desire to utilize the American scene in art. In this case, he has expressed this nationalism in most mundane terms, and with a kind of realism in which we hear all but the temple block footsteps of a Ferde Grofé mule, and a kind of picturesqueness which suggests (if we must think of the West) a billboard showing the profile of William S. (Bill) Hart. Well, maybe that's what Mr. Moross meant.

Of Leo Sowerby's *Theme in Yellow*, it is perhaps enough to say that it is music that is characteristic of the composer. I thought it dull, but there are perhaps many who did not find it so. Nathaniel Dett's *American Sampler* was also on the weak side. Too loosely orchestrated in parts and inclined toward the banal. It did not live up to the splendid idea which motivated its composition.

Of the other works played over the summer on CBS, some need only be mentioned, either because their titles indicate only too clearly the limited aspirations of the composers, or because the music proved of a very temporary interest. Among these, was an *Episodic Suite* by a Miss Julia Smith, which was divided into sections of *Yellow and Blue*, *Homage to Griffes*, *Waltz for Little Lulu*, *March*, and *Toccata*. *Misty Dawn* shimmered all over the place, and it is to be regretted that such a skillful orchestrator as Castellini should concern himself with being evocative of other composers. Carl Mathes, blind composer-pianist and organist of South Bend, Indiana, was represented by two of his *Five Tone Pictures* for orchestra. There may have been some point in the performance, but musically, one must regretfully admit that they registered quite low. A first hearing was accorded a *Piano Concerto* by Walter Debel which also seemed comparatively poor and of consequently little interest.

Not included in the *Everybody's Music* series, but heard over CBS, was Henry Brant's *Comedy Overture*, a sprightly piece which successfully satirized conventional overtures with a keen but not too labored humor.