

pedantry. The introduction of Mexican folklorist elements is also very skilful; a popular song uttered *a soli* by school-boys, the fine duetto of women's voices accompanied by guitars and strings during the market-scene, the *paso-doble* of the caricatured *corrida* (children disguised as *toreros* and a dog as a bull), are agreeable incidents that give the audience a relaxation from the yoke of atonality and help create local atmosphere.

Still something is lacking. What it is seems to evade definition. *Forgotten Village* is a sad story about witches and magicians who oppose the work of doctors and nurses during an epidemic. It presents a plea for science and civilization. And Eisler's music is composed like the most perfect, the most efficient serum.

It is, also, together with Steinbeck's story, all on the side of science and against superstition. But music has more to do with witchery and magic than with doctors and serums.

III

It is seven years since I last saw *Le Sang du Poète* and now I have just come from its New York revival. Like many others I am saddened by the present politico-social attitude of both Jean Cocteau and Georges Auric, once "collaborators" in a far happier sense. Today I still find the fantasy of their celebrated film, its simplicity of means, its extraordinary sensitivity and charm as delightful as on the day of its premiere. Their skill in mixing *savoir-faire* with *savoir-vivre* comes close to genius.

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

ONE of the best of Columbia's cycles, the "American Music Festival," has sounded its last note. This weekly offering had exceptional interest; it gave us a quite spacious view of American talent. Not always distinguished, it has nevertheless been consistently entertaining. C.B.S. now plans a "British-American Festival," which indicates a healthy and stimulating if journalistic policy towards contemporary music in general. As a whole the American Festival unveiled no panorama of the lofty peaks, the more imposing achievements of our native music. Instead we had an encouraging glimpse of what appears to be the vast undercurrent of chamber music and slight orchestral pieces which our younger men are now producing in

such amazing abundance. Amusing and colorful was the premiere of Dai-Keong Lee's *Introduction and Allegro*, beautifully played by Howard Barlow's Columbia Concert Orchestra. The introduction is a bright, singing moment, conceived in simple lines and fresh harmonies; the allegro, less successful, had enough jerky and convincing rhythmic statements to offset a somewhat ordinary orchestration. Throughout, the work displayed a strong, natural unity of harmonic color, accents, melodies. Most important was the impression of inner integrity and a feeling of logic which strengthened the contour of the formal design. *Music for Chamber Orchestra* by Alvin Etler, written in 1938, still remains a promising piece. It is unashamedly youthful, though by no

means naïve, in spite of its excessively high-colored textural fabric. There is a sense of economy and order in the harmonic, thematic and architectural treatment. The first movement is direct and concise; the second, is lyric as a whole, and expressive in purpose (a nice modal melody for bassoon provides a curiously mixed quality, like a Mexican Ravel improvising a Chinese lullaby with old Greek scales); the third movement, a bit too like the first in quality and flavor for good balance, is also more monotonous, a fault modified to some extent by a hard, biting brilliant ending. The musical surprise on this series came with Henry Brant's *Two Lyric Interludes for String Orchestra*, a slight but grateful work which proves that the composer can actually rise to the level of a fairly respectable and normal musician, when in the mood. Everyone knows his other stuff which, in the composer's own words, goes in for "satire, violent contrasts and style collisions."

Quincy Porter was represented by his music for *Anthony and Cleopatra*. This score is unpretentious and not very exciting, but quite grateful and well made from an instrumental and tonal standpoint. The musical materials display stylistic Orientalisms, but of the inoffensive variety. Another composer not represented by work worthy of his best talents, was Paul Creston, whose piece for orchestra, entitled *A Rumor*, was written especially for the Festival. Creston writes that his work records "the metamorphosis of a rather insignificant tale as it is passed from person to person (or, musically speaking, from instrument to instrument)" and, further, that "the form, such as it is, was not born of the title, but the title invented to fit the

form." Let us hope so, at any rate. The piece was playful, even interesting, but the excitement engendered at various high points never seemed quite inevitable. Alan Schulman's *Piece for String Orchestra* was even less successful, although, it must be admitted, quite unpretentious. This was nice, polite and well managed in its limited tonal sphere, but totally devoid of imagination or energy.

The best work of the series was Boris Koutzen's *Concerto for Five Solo Instruments and Orchestra*, which has been reviewed here before. It stands up very well on repeated hearings. The worst pieces were undoubtedly the group given last on a program including Deems Taylor, Lynn Murray and Alexander Semmler. The latter's *Times Square* was made up largely of busy string-writing, Gershwinisms and a persistent attempt to charm with pseudo-jazz effects. However, the part for solo piano did actually achieve its aim to please, a solitary portion that gave the piece at least a mark of sincerity. Semmler's *Two Indian Scenes*, also a descriptive work, was no better; all the old misterioso effects in string tremolo style were trotted out for the same old purposes. Semmler's *Wolfiana*, a piece based on the writings of Thomas Wolfe, was the best of his offerings; a short work, fairly brilliant and concentrated, it has its say and is done. Lynn Murray's two songs gave the very simple impression of being over-lush and juicy, completely insignificant. Deems Taylor's *Music from Job* is a ludicrously funny composition; it is impossible to associate the noble patriarch with music so romantic and slushy; and how stale the writing!

Another C.B.S. weekly series which has at least local interest is "Milestones

in American Music." These programs are not yet important from a contemporary angle, but the opportunity to hear the finer works of our early musicians is welcome. *Rhapsody and Finale* from the sixth string quartet of David Stanley Smith is an academic and scholastic work, but of a sound, vigorous nature, thematically alive and intelligently organized with a solidity of textural substance; all these merits notwithstanding, it remains a bit prosaic in form and never quite frees itself from dullness in the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic sequences. Less imposing, but more interesting as a radio piece because of its colorful sonorities, was Edward Burlingame Hill's *finale* from his *Sextet* for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon and piano. This music is amazingly fresh, it has vitality and clarity. The mood is convincingly playful throughout although the piece is weakened by an arbitrary rather than natural form. One of the slightest but certainly most exciting compositions heard on the series was Charles Ives' two brief morsels from his *Set of Pieces for Chamber Orchestra*; it is always a joy to hear from this original visionary. A far cry from the daring courage and beauty of Ives was Henry Hadley's lukewarm, clap-trap, the *In Bohemia* overture. This work only serves to clutter up the orchestral repertory, which, if anything, needs a tremendous thinning out to make room for more distinctive and significant modern music. More deserving of performance, but not much, was Ernest Schelling's *Victory Ball*, a post-World-War-Number-One piece which concerns itself with the programmatic idea of ghostly intruders at the festivities, spiritually a parallel to Debussy's *Fêtes*, but orchestrally far beneath the level of that finely

chiseled score.

To date this series has been better in the chamber than orchestral department. Arthur Shepherd's *Triptych* for high voice and string quartet is another fine work which bears occasional repetition. This is good, solid, diatonic writing, instrumentally and vocally gratifying as well. Mabel Daniels' *O Holy Star* for choir, brass, organ and harp proved to be massive indeed, but far too sentimentally colored for its religious purpose. The series also gave us some amusing compositions for symphonic band by Tuthill, Mason, McKay and Sousa. As music, these pieces were ordinary enough, but the program was interesting as a sample of sonorities in that comparatively undeveloped medium of expression.

Columbia also continues to broadcast the Sunday Philharmonic and as a result of its anniversary policy we are now getting a weekly series of contemporary American works over the air. These have included Virgil Thomson's *Filling Station*, Hermann Wetzler's *Adagio and Fugue*, and David Diamond's *First Symphony*. The all-Busoni program with Dimitri Mitropoulos conducting and Josef Szigeti and Egon Petri as soloists, was also broadcast, a reminder of the great musician's creative gifts. A smaller C. B. S. offering from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music gave us the performance of a string trio by Jean Françaix. This work, composed of four very short movements, is characteristically cute and ornamental in a youthfully sophisticated style that doesn't wear too well, but somehow manages to come off as a fleeting glimpse of poetic fun. The trio seemed slight, almost dainty, but its entertaining scoring and amusing sonority make it eminently suitable for a moment

on the radio.

Columbia's only near rival in airing modern music is WOR, but the race between them will never end a photo-finish. One of Mutual's most amusing broadcasts was a Philadelphia Orchestra concert of four works by Haydn, Mozart, Rossini and their twentieth century disciple Virgil Thomson. Sir Thomas Beecham merits recognition for his stylistically unified program-making. Another interesting broadcast by the Philadelphia presented Russell Bennett's *Nocturne and Apparitionata for Piano and Orchestra* with Saul Caston, conductor, and Milton Kaye as soloist. They gave a beautiful performance of this somewhat uneven work. The scoring of the nocturne, a very sleepy fantasy, is neater and less thick than most of Bennett's work. The outer sections are done with sentimental lines which sound acceptable enough by virtue of their sensitive thinness and depend largely for their appeal on a kind of crisp melodic design. The rhythmically nervous and choppy middle section saves the pieces from lapsing into dreamy improvisation. But the apparitionata seemed a less successful movement, sagging, after a good start, in quality of materials as it approached its unconvincing ending. This program also included Gian-Carlo Menotti's overture to *Amelia Goes to the Ball* which is well scored, bright and flowing as a whole. The light materials are often repetitious in a kind of well managed way and occasionally the orchestration sounds too thick for the obviously intended brilliance, but these fat spots are gratifyingly too rare to create a real obstacle for its otherwise racy motion.

A very different type of work, but one which certainly is its equal for inevitable, flowing quality, was Bernard Wagenaar's

Sinfonietta, beautifully played by Alfred Wallenstein's orchestra. There is musical interest enough here and to spare, yet the flow of each of the three movements is spontaneous in a very convincing way. As a radio piece this work is a natural. No one could fail to find the instrumental timbres and mixtures in the piece exciting; there is always an intrinsically musical rightness in the choice of color and combination. Less important by far, but showing nevertheless a sincerity and objectivity in mood, was a *Pastoral Ode for Flute and Strings*, by Mabel Daniels; the flute writing sounded grateful against the light, impressionist setting.

A surprisingly nice work that received its premiere on the Russell Bennett Notebook programs, was a *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* by Bennett himself. This is undoubtedly his best piece, and a definite improvement on the general quality of compositions that the series presents. The solo writing is excellent from an instrumental standpoint and often brilliant in melodic invention. The orchestral texture remains discreetly light for the most part, showing an apparently natural instinct for balance and weight, which greatly enhanced the clarity of the solo design. Its most essential weakness was a vague looseness in thematic relationship within each separate movement; a final recalling of the themes in the first three parts seemed a cyclic trick rather than a naturally achieved retrospect, and failed to modify the impression of a rhapsodic standstill. But as a whole, the *Concerto* was entertaining. This program needs more works of such calibre.

The most interesting of N.B.C.'s rather meager contemporary offering was the radio debut of Juan José Castro's *Symphony of the Fields*, written as a tribute

to the pampas of Argentina. Castro conducted his own work and apparently very well too, as the motion and sonorities seemed lucidly defined over the air. The symphony is an uninhibited riot of violent color, but in spite of its rich, heavy, thick orchestration the general spirit and flow are spontaneous and clear. If this is regional music, it is of a healthy and spacious sort, neither narrow nor localized. However, lack of distinction in the quality of materials does not strengthen its ultimate significance as an orchestral expression. The solitary modern work aired by Toscanini was Samuel Barber's conservative and unoriginal but expressive *Adagio for Strings*. Far less interesting were the pieces offered by Stokowski, whose guest appearance with the N.B.C. orchestra was expected to produce more progressive results. A sinfonietta movement by Philip Warner proved to be stylistically haphazard with slushy materials orchestrated indifferently. Even less successful was Robert Kelly's movement from his *Adirondack Suite*, a piece which makes no contribution to contemporary music, but is, instead, a naïve and sentimental tribute to early Debussy.

WNYC presented a modern concert from the Frick Mansion consisting of trio music by Maurice Ravel and Walter Piston which was well performed by the Sanroma-Burgin-Bedetti trio. The Ravel piece represents the more cozy, stylistic

drowsiness of this great musician. Throughout its movements there is a limpid, yawning inertia that is almost static except for rare flashes of vitality in the instrumental treatment. The Piston *Trio* has energy enough but seems a bit dry and is repetitious in a too literal manner. The slow movement however achieves a calm, moving reflectivity which reaches a high point of passion surprising in this composer.

Also heard was the first performance anywhere of a *Sonata for English Horn and Piano* by Paul Hindemith. This, although divided into several parts, is an amusing and entertaining set of variations on a single theme. The instrumental writing is geared to the usual highly competent standard of the composer, but it remains largely objective and, I find, none too imaginative. Its melodic lines are full of trill-like mannerisms though of an exciting and thematic rather than merely ornamental nature. This seems as a whole to be one of the best and most original of Hindemith's many, many sonatas for solo instruments and piano.

WQXR improves the quality and program interest of its recorded contemporary music, which now begins to include the more significant orchestral works of Americans like Harris and Copland, and the orchestral and chamber music of Stravinsky, Bartok, Hindemith, Shostakovich and Chavez.