

cingest people on earth. We dance singly, by twos, and by groups. Ballet is a group performance. If ballet in the United States turns its back on Americans, then ballet is lost for us here. If our stories and our steps get into and remain in Court Ballet, as the mujik's did in Russia, then ballet will survive.

Ballet Theatre gave *Billy the Kid* as its only single American ballet. It is of vast importance that the great impetus to our native composers, choreographers, designers and dancers, given by the

American Ballet and Ballet Caravan, and a few other groups, has been submerged by a welter of neo-Viennese valentines or a rehash of Massinic escapism.

I like Russian Ballet. I like hybrid ballet. But I see no excuse for hybrid ballet in New York out of which everything American has been left except the American Ballet and Ballet Caravan and as in the case of Miss Kaye or Miss Hightower, their brilliance has saved Mr. Hurok's skin.

## OVER THE AIR

BY CHARLES MILLS

**R**ADIO, along with all the other propaganda media, definitely means us to know there's a war on. Every big network has a morale series and some of the shows have made progress in quality and technical finish, though no single one is consistently effective or distinguished.

N.B.C. has the largest number of these programs; among the best is *Wings To Victory* which presents action that is largely exciting, but seldom witty or clever. It is convincing enough however, in a realistic sort of way, to be entertaining. The background music is handled intelligently, and the sound engineers manage to avoid interference with other descriptive effects or the clear projection of dialogue pitched at a low, dynamic level. The orchestration of these more or less subdued scores is fairly good. *Cavalcade of America*, also N.B.C., not strictly limited to propaganda, has a higher level of excellence than any purely war program. Originating in Hollywood, it wins an obvious

edge in popularity by using screen actors. The scripts have dramatic timing, continuity, and intelligently developed excitement and I've not yet heard a bombastic or overwritten program on the series. One particularly fine job was *Continue Unloading* with John Garfield. Sound effects, musical score and script were compact and intense, the streamlined timing of the orchestral high-points hit the dramatic climaxes right on the nose. Precision like this makes for good propaganda and entertainment. Another N.B.C. presentation, *Meet Your Navy*, is a sort of variety show that hardly does justice to the service it is dedicated to. A big disappointment was a performance of Harold Rome's *Remember Thomas Jefferson* which was martial in rhythmic motion only, banal in melody and stale in harmony. *I Sustain The Wings*, also N.B.C., is unpretentious but much more attractive. Glen Miller's clever arrangements are more colorful than those of any similar ensemble, Morton Gould's for instance, or Kostelanetz'.

Though mechanical and sentimental in its weaker pieces, the band often works up a drive and strident excitement seldom found outside an authentic jam session. Other N.B.C. war programs are *Men, Machines and Victory* and *This Nation At War*, but they use music only as a prelude and postlude.

Mutual's *This Is Our Enemy* has made marked improvement during the summer. The dramatic material is credible, the sound effects skillful, and the background music unobtrusive yet sometimes subtly effective. But *Victory Is Our Business*, another offering, is hopelessly unconvincing, its jazz embarrassingly tame and the pseudo-ballads pathetically sentimental.

Though inconsistent in quality, Columbia's *Man Behind The Gun* is one of the best of the purely war programs. The music is sometimes too heavy, but often fresh harmonically and instrumentally. Background noises — ocean waves and other nautical effects — are very well placed but not always well managed for volume. As a whole the shows are adequately highlighted for their rough, hard-boiled materials.

### III

A very grateful musical offering by C.B.S. was the *Chorale For Organ and Brasses* by Roy Harris, one of the most successful pieces yet written for radio. The harmonies are clear, the sonorities suave and interesting, and the timbres effectively mixed. Much of its success can be attributed to good composition, and in particular to purity of harmonic style — that complete consonance for which Harris is already noted; but a certain legato and piano treatment of the brass gives evidence of instrumental cunning and instinctive orchestral bal-

ance as well. This work has a quiet dignity and ecstasy, warm, summer-like and pantheistic. The performance by E. Power Biggs at the organ and the Boston Orchestra brass under Arthur Fiedler was excellent.

Another Columbia item of interest was the premiere by Vera Brodsky of the Shostakovitch *Second Piano Sonata*. There's some fine piano writing in the first movement; its thematic economy based on one descending minor third leap is saved from barren monotony by very neat, sometimes exciting, accompanimental figuration. Sensitive feeling, dryly expressed by a line drawn fine over chords in certain severe rhythmic ostinati, and by other delicate treatment of thin material, is sustained through a long, quiet, almost drowsy slow movement, perhaps too much like an impressionistic improvisation to hold the interest of anyone save the pianist. The finale, a fanciful, late-romantic *Theme and Variations*, gets off to a good start with a naked statement in sparse melodic line only. The contrapuntal early variations and certain later harmonic and rhythmic developments provide interesting textural contrasts and entertaining sonorities before a soft, indeterminate close is reached. This seems to be one of Shostakovitch's best works, but as radio music it's a little long. Incidentally, the harmony throughout is oddly reminiscent of nineteenth century post-Wagnerianism and Scriabin.

The C.B.S. American premiere of Edmund Rubbra's *Third Symphony* was a disappointment. If this performance by Bernard Hermann and the Columbia Orchestra was even fairly representative the composer would deserve only pity. However, it is my opinion that the scor-

ing in this work was fairly good, much better in quality than the substance and form of the musical ideas. But none of the four movements show inspiration or originality of development, or give the impression of inner necessity. Colorful in texture, and romantically impressionistic, it seemed strangely lacking in vitality, due perhaps to the unnaturalness of its harmony, the arbitrary resolution of very tame dissonances to other altered dominants, which, when they arrived, seemed as flat as a dull text book cadence of concords.

N.B.C.'s finest offering was unquestionably the broadcast by Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony of the premiere of Stravinsky's *Ode for Orchestra*. This piece, dedicated to the memory of Madame Koussevitzky, is a three-movement chant for instruments. The opening eulogy, tragic and convincingly serious, is projected in the dark timbres of low woodwinds and the larger, more magnificent sonorities of the fuller orchestra. The middle movement, an eclogue, a very brilliantly scored allegro, is in a persistent dance-like rhythm and sounds extremely well via radio because of many fresh color combinations and the streamlined convergence of tones to exciting but completely natural points. The epitaph is obviously intended as the communication of inward experience, and less concerned with objectivity of style or manner of presentation. As a whole the work has a very real, very intense and serious dignity.

Frank Black and the N.B.C. Orchestra gave the world premiere of Robert Russell Bennett's symphony, *The Four Freedoms*. Without going into painful detail over its four movements, I might note that I found none of them good,

all of them stale and pretentious.

WNYC presented a very good performance by Carl Stern, 'cellist and Vivian Rivkin, pianist, of Boris Koutzen's interesting but somewhat over-written *Concert Piece for 'Cello and Piano*. It is unashamedly romantic and dated as well by the intrusion of unimpressive whole-tone scale effects.

Andor Foldes and the WQXR quartet offered the first New York performance of Leroy Robertson's *Piano Quintet*. This is a fine and convincing expression in an idiom that seems to be natural to the composer, which, if not wholly contemporary in technical apparatus is nevertheless eloquent and genuinely sincere. Erno Balogh chose sonatines by Morton Gould and Burrill Phillips for inclusion in his recitals over this station. Neither of these neat little pieces shows great charm, wit or originality; both sounded very much like second-rate Gershwin.

### III

Here is a statement that Bela Bartok wants published over his signature:

"In the last Nov-Dec. issue (p. 63) of MODERN MUSIC appeared the following criticism:

"'Bartok's *Three Roumanian Dances*, also from Columbia, do not make good radio music. The dances are scored with a somewhat excessive treatment of cymbals and crashing percussion; these effects either were poorly handled by the sound engineer, or they may be a specifically bad case for microphone transmission.'

"I am compelled to make the statement that this radio performance must have been played from an unauthorized score, made arbi-

trarily by some incompetent person. I did not introduce into the score, written in 1927 for small orchestra, any *percussion instruments*."

*Bela Bartok*

I regret very much having innocently collaborated in creating an inaccurate impression of Mr. Bartok's work. Of course this is one of the great problems in listening to and writing about radio music. As everyone knows, much license is taken by broadcasters with composers' work, unless composers themselves are present and, knowing of such changes, specifically forbid them. I don't know if Haydn and Beethoven

have any legal rights today concerning the proper performance of their music. But I have talked to a number of executives of the big networks and they have unashamedly admitted that their arrangers do often and, as a matter of course, score a Beethoven symphony for twenty men. A few years ago Frank Black wrote in *Esquire* that he had introduced four saxophones into a Haydn symphony, and proudly boasted that he believed no one heard the difference. I know several contemporary composers who have suffered in this respect, but I don't know if any of their legal rights are violated. If they are, the simple solution would seem to lie in directly communicating with the radio company involved.

## THE TORRID ZONE

By MERCURE

THE Apollo Theater seems the one sure place in town for a lively stage-show. There is no comparison between the tired elegance of the Ellington performance at the Capitol and the fresh young band of Buddy Johnson, which made its first appearance there this summer. There is nothing strikingly new in the Johnson band, but their boogie slides in the smoothest of grooves, and both Buddy and his young sister Ella put their songs over with a personal charm that wins the house. Johnson has a knack for creating hit tunes, and *Let's Beat Out Some Love* (Decca) — one of his best — is still a terrific favorite uptown. At the Capitol with Ellington is Lena Horne, but her glamor and beauty cannot make up for her anonymous voice, now completely ironed-out and smoothed by the Hollywood process.

High spots during the summer months at the Apollo were Teabone Walker, Billie Holiday and Lil Green. Teabone sings blues to the electric guitar in a way that makes them yell for more and more. He is no crooner but a magnetic personality who is felt in the last seat on the top floor. "Send!" the women's voices cry out in the dark. "Send! Baby, aren't you goin to *send* for me?"

Billie Holiday had them too in the hollow of her hand, but strangely enough this time the adored Lil Green got a low reaction. This I feel sure was the fault of Tiny Bradshaw's band which played in a harsh noisy way that had no connection with the complex intonations of her voice. She has to be heard as pure soloist, with the lightest of accompaniments. When she sang *In The Dark* they turned out the lights in the