

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-

porary in spirit, but it has a degree of sincerity and unpretentious charm. Another Bacon work, the "*Ford Theatre*" Suite for orchestra, received its premiere broadcast performance over NBC in a program of the "Orchestra of the Nation" series presenting the Southern Symphony Orchestra conducted by Carl Bamberger. Only three of the seven movements were given, a *Preamble* of Handelian poise, a *Telegraph Fugue* with imaginative and entertaining counterpoint, and *Moonlight on the Savannah*, a colorfully scored sentimental piece with particularly nice writing for deep woodwinds and solo trombone, somewhat reminiscent of the better Villa-Lobos orchestral inventions.

Dmitri Kabalevsky's *Second Piano Concerto* was brilliantly performed by Leo Smit with Black and the NBC Orchestra. The writing for piano in this score is fairly competent in a neo-romantic style, but more superficially attractive in designs, sonorities and motions than it is gratifying to the higher esthetic faculties. The content of the work is even less rewarding, exhibiting a flamboyant array of emotional patterns that recall the Max Reger extravagances of fake counterpoint. Kabalevsky's orchestration in this concerto is decidedly on the dull side. That the work manages to stand up as fairly entertaining is due mainly to some imaginative treatment of the solo instrument in lyrical developments, and to a Russian folk-song flavor that gives it style and atmosphere. Some of my colleagues have referred to this composer as the Soviet Walter Piston, but there's definitely no connection.

I was glad to hear the Finale from Richard Arnell's *The War God* a second time. In NBC's "Story of Music" series, on a program devoted to the cantata, it made a fairly good radio impression. Arnell's talent leans toward the dramatic, his most successful statements being forceful, decisive and dangerously near the bombastic. Much of this piece needs orchestral and choral thinning-out for a better dynamic balance. It shows a strong harmonic gift and fine expressive possibilities, many of them unrealized because of a curious melodic restraint and a somewhat static organization.

The "Concert of Nations" series, a new NBC weekly program presenting music of the United Nations and aimed at international unity, got off to a slightly stuffy and respectable start with Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Folk Song Suite* and Quincy Porter's *Ukrainian Suite* for strings. Another NBC event was the performance of *Panambi*, a ballet suite for orchestra by Alberto Ginastera, conducted by Erich Kleiber. This is a violent and sometimes effective piece, savage in the manner of *Le Sacre* but never as intense as its great model.

CBS presented a *Passacaglia* for organ and strings by Ellis Kohs, performed by E. Power Biggs with a string group from the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by William Strickland. This broadcast was a complete success, partly because of the charm and beauty of the baroque organ at Harvard's historic Germanic Museum, but mostly because of the excellence of the composition by Kohs. This music is somehow related to a modern French tradition, aca-

demic in character but in the better sense of the word. Formally the composition is a little too four-square, sectional and jointed in design, but this is greatly offset by vague, illusive harmonies and distinctive melodic and rhythmic treatment of the theme.

III

ABC offered an interesting program

with Roy Harris as conductor and composer. After doing an excellent job on Bach and Mozart, Harris interpreted his own compositions: the second movement from his *Fifth Symphony*, one of his best slow movements, and *Play Hour*, a charming piece, of zest and wit, from his more recent *Memories of a Child's Sunday*.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

THE brilliance and wit of Ben Hecht's dialogue make *Specter of the Rose* appear to be a great film. Certainly it is no assembly-line product; it is custom-built from beginning to end. It has a thousand virtues, but every virtue has its antithesis in some salient defect. Smartness and sophistication are countered by snobishness, keenness of intellect by a contempt for the passions that move men. The artistic frequently becomes phony, and skill becomes mere virtuosity. The story is a genuine tragedy but it engenders no compassion because it is peopled by caricatures. The impresario, Polikoff, is an actor's role, a receptacle for droll stories that might have been told about Diaghilev, De Basil and Hurok. Judith Anderson promenades through the picture bearing the ridiculous name of La Sylph and giving the role of the faded ballerina an aura of travesty. The dancer Sasine, vaguely modeled after Nijinsky, is afflicted with a psychological malady so complicated, both in its manifestations and in its analysis by the other characters of the

play, that he achieves only the kind of reality that the Einstein formula has for the man-on-the-street: both are comprehensible only in terms of the disasters they provoke. There is no genuine humor; it is mostly of the perverse kind that takes for its objects the economic insecurity of artists and musicians. In short, *Specter of the Rose* is a tour de force of cynicism.

George Antheil's score is the perfectly wedded mate for Hecht's script. It has none of the charm and buoyancy that one would expect from the bad boy of music. It has no real drama, since there is nothing on the screen to inspire drama, even to justify it. It maneuvers the formulas of ballet music just as Hecht maneuvers the superficialities of his characters. The score emerges as a symposium of waltzes with occasional excursions into concerto-like piano passages, a polka and a few other dance patterns. In style, it is a potpourri of Ravel, Rachmaninov, Strauss, Prokofiev and others and the adaptation of these styles is so consciously worked at and so plainly exposed to the ear that it