

something rare and wicked as the Duck.

On the distinctly less successful side chalk up *Dark Elegies*, Agnes De Mille's refurbishing, with her Negro group, of Milhaud's historic *Création du Monde*. This at best was a commendable effort, not a distinct achievement. She has however communicated to her dancers a remarkable unity of movement. Other works, less intellectualized in their conception of racial erotic heritage, may fulfill De Mille's vision . . . *Goyescas* was too genteel a portrait to leave us with much more than a memory of pastel pleasure in sound chirped out by multitudinous castanets heard above the Granados melodies. . . The absolutely unpardonable was finally achieved in *Voices of Spring*. Strauss in duration requires delicate treatment from the dancer-mime; Conrad and Leo Danielan in unduly minor roles, alone captured the elusive essence. The whole thing was a prolix essay on men, maids and mincing; a Mordkin libel on coquetry set on a Simonsonized canvas of the Jardin Public.

There remains the triumph of Fokine's *Les Sylphides*, restored to forgotten significance by the creator himself. After three decades of popular debauch this work again revealed the momentous significance of the romantic revolution in choreography. A regasp in treatment gave us, in a fresh way, Fokine's

majestic pattern of wistfulness. Tribute should not be grudged to Karen Conrad's sensational galvanizing elevation. Her phenomenal technic is sheathed in a personality full of typical American Girl health and sex appeal; her fierce batterie and leaps are well under control of an excellent if not immaculate line. Superb dancing also was here offered by Nina Stroganova and in other roles demanding her special quality of the lyric and the poignant.

Happily the thoroughness of newspaper controversy has relieved us of further critical duties toward *The Great American Goof*. Between so much outrage and so much enthusiasm, I find myself unimpressed. Loring had the unbelievable task, as choreographer and principal dancer, of creating positive appeal out of an irresponsibly Nihilist exegesis. Result—an enormous plaintive platitude. The sets were dated constructivism with little spatial gain (why not flash Walker Evans photographs on the screens); the costumes effective black and white bargain-counter for the chorus but little imagination for the human types. In spots the dancing had excellent stylized conception, most notably that of the Dummy postured and spoken by Tudor. And no amount of whacky program-noting will ever justify the inconclusiveness or cover up the nakedness of Saroyan's libretto.

## OVER THE AIR

By CONLON NANCARROW

AFTER having been politely browbeaten on my radio about acid stomach and nervous B. O. — to the tune of

*Hearts and Flowers* — I was definitely revived by WNYC's ten-day "American Music Festival." This, according to Di-

rector M. S. Novik, was not designed to be all-inclusive, but merely "to give listeners a fairly representative cross-section — a sampling — of American music, old and new." Surprisingly, it did just that. The programs ranged from Schönberg to Barber Shop Ballads, with emphasis of course on the latter. In many cases, and often unfortunately, the composer had to provide for the performance of his music.

Three or four programs were heard each day for ten days; among those I could tune in on were several of unusual interest. The one called "New American Chamber Music" offered a string quartet by Wallingford Riegger and a sonata for 'cello and piano by Norman Dello Joio, a composer of whom I had never heard. The *Sonata* was well written and original without being too unconventional. Writing for solo cello is difficult; here it was done neatly with a thorough knowledge of the instrument. The music itself was fresh and the frequent introduction of new ideas, plus new treatments of earlier ones gave the work variety and unity, although probably not so much unity as certain followers of the "autogenetic" school would wish. It is sometimes possible to unify down to plain boredom; I'll take variety any day.

Riegger's *Quartet* is more forbidding music. It is written in the twelve-tone system — a style which is not exactly riding the crest of a wave today — and it shows that Riegger knows his way around in those waters. Every detail is worked out with meticulous care, and the technic is consistently followed. Developments are carried through in all voices with the use of a large array of contrapuntal devices. But what is most interesting about

the work is the fact that it is written for the ear as well as for the eye, which cannot be said for a great deal of twelve-tone music. Though poorly performed, it still sounded as if it were made to be heard. That such a competent composer as Riegger continues to write music without winning recognition in any practical way is admirable but also depressing. Although Schönberg's music is seldom played he at least has the rather dubious distinction of being the ogre of modern music. And even today *Verklärte Nacht* is generally introduced with the comment that this is how Schönberg wrote before he went off the deep end.

For some time musicians have justifiably been waging a fight against the tradition that only foreigners can make music. Now, in certain groups, the opposite theory seems to be winning favor; namely that the only good music is American, and that foreigners ought to go back where they came from. This chauvinism, closely related to certain present political trends, will lead to even more disastrous results than our former habit of provincial inferiority. Musical Americana is coming to the fore, even the "dean" of American music critics is discovering America. This doesn't necessarily mean that good American music, and certainly not experimental American music, is getting a wider hearing. Of course all the byways of American culture should be discovered, but I suspect the motives of some of our latest explorers.

A bit of American music which the Festival offered was Morton Gould's *Sinfonietta No. 2*. This same piece played by a dozen musicians as accompaniment for dancing arouses no comment. When

it is called *Sinfonietta*, and fixed up for a hundred musicians with the blocky phrases slightly smoothed out, it suddenly becomes an object of learned consideration. One section sounded like a corny trumpet solo by Henry Busse. However, there was some slick orchestration and the second movement showed promise, but the whole thing got nowhere.

Herbert Haufreucht's *Ferdinand the Bull* suite received its premiere at this festival, but it was very dull with all the obvious trombone glissandi and slightly distorted waltzes.

What the festival really needed was to be spread out over a much longer period of time, to help bridge the endless empty spaces in which nothing of interest happens on the radio. Among the many other items in this crowded space there were: Earl Robinson's effective *Ballad for Americans*; Randall Thompson's choral tour de force, *The Peaceable Kingdom*; explanations by Charles Wakefield Cadman of his reasons for not writing Indian songs any more; a program called *New Americans*, consisting of music by Schönberg, Von Zemlinsky, Eisler and Krenek; spirituals; blues; swing; music by Copland, Harris, Diamond (of whose interesting quintet only two movements were played without an announcement to that effect), Brant, Bowles, Dukelsky, Schuman and many others.

### III

A recent "Town Meeting of the Air" was given over to the subject: "Is there a revolution in the arts?" which here meant literature, painting and music. The musical angle was covered by Copland and Damrosch. Copland gave a competent analysis of the present-day

musical scene and Damrosch dwelt with loving tenderness on the past, berating the anarchy of the present. He said there was still time for the young composers to come back to the fold; all would be forgiven; virtue would be restored—no taint. Someone asked about swing and it was at once made clear that Damrosch gets hot and bothered at the mere mention of that word.

For several weeks there has been a weekly program called "Musical Americana," with a large symphony orchestra and Deems Taylor as commentator. It is designed "to better acquaint Americans with what has and is being done in the field of serious American music." This "serious" music has consisted mainly of works by men like Herbert and Friml, who are hardly dying of neglect. One program announced Copland's *El Salon Mexico* and forthwith an excerpt of about two minutes was played; this modulated into a choral fantasy of unknown origin, without the slightest acknowledgment of the mutation.

CBS recently gave the first of the League of Composers' regional broadcasts from Philadelphia; the music was by Arthur Cohn, Vincent Persichetti, Samuel Barber, Isidor Freed, Leonard Bernstein, Paul Nordoff and Oscar Levant. It made a very dull program, the most interesting item being *Three Pieces* for two clarinets, two bassoons and piano, by Leonard Bernstein, presented almost apologetically, with explanations that it was really a student work, and perhaps ought not to be on the program at all. It seems clear also that Oscar Levant shines more brilliantly as a musical pundit than as a composer.