

to estimate the work without having put it to the test. In many ways it appears to be a most valuable series; each piece is the perfect presentation and solution of a certain technical problem, both from the standpoint of performer and composer. The pupil becomes aware from the outset of modal melody and scales that are unfamiliar and enticing. Folk-song plays a large role, and the absence of conventional harmonizations ought to create from the start a broader conception of music. But, admirable as they all are, many of the little pieces seem rather dry and abrupt and, in spite of their exotic color, as impersonal as a Euclidian theorem. The writing is consistently thin, hard, brittle. In some pieces the persistent dissonance becomes definitely *agaçant*. The pieces finally reach a stage

(in the sixth volume) of great rhythmic complexity, although from the standpoint of passage-work they are still around grade three. One likes to speculate on the possible psychological effect such a series, if persistently followed, might have on the pupil. It ought to be satisfactory, but there are dangers.

The only other published music to be noted for the present is the continuation of Hindemith's series of sonatas for solo instruments and piano. Two more have just been published, (by Schott of Mainz) one for clarinet and piano, the other for horn and piano. There is also a sonata for harp. For me the chief interest in all these works is the idiomatic treatment of the instrument in each case. Musically they cannot be said to contribute much that is new to Hindemith.

OVER THE AIR

By CONLON NANCARROW

SWING, JAZZ, BOOGIE-WOOGIE

NOW that swing has come, gone, and left its mark on popular music, it may be in order to review the results. For several years the word "swing" has been used to denote almost everything outside the dreamy, Guy-Lombardo-school. Its characteristics are inclusively held to be a heightened individual and orchestral virtuosity, a certain freedom in solo work (*solo*, but not *collective* improvisation), rhythmical precision, faster tempi, more advanced harmonic progressions, slick orchestration (including the ability to get from one block of music to another with less stumbling) and a refinement of nuances and phrasing.

The best work done in jazz has very little in common with swing. Besides advancing the idiomatic technic, the main achievement of the swing fad has been to call attention to the existence of certain groups of players. Good jazzmen were summoned from their dives, clothed with respectability and allowed to play at being king. And now they must hang on the bandwagon or go back to the dives and pursue their art.

The outstanding characteristic of "hot jazz" has always been *collective* improvisation. This can be heard in certain recordings by Louis Armstrong's old "Hot Five" and "Hot Seven", Bix Beiderbecke and the "New Orleans Lucky

Seven." The kind of counterpoint achieved in their type of playing violates almost every academic canon except that of individuality of line and unity of feeling. Ignoring accepted precepts (it is not a matter of discarding them; most of these musicians have never even heard the word "counterpoint") they have built up their own system of unorthodox counterpoint. Although the unifying element in such a collective effort is a definite and pre-established harmonic progression, played by the "rhythm" section, the result is not harmonic figuration, or even harmonic counterpoint. It is a counterpoint of phrase against phrase, even if at times such crude (from an academic standpoint) progressions as octave, diminished octave, octave are produced. However, the intensity of effect makes quibbling pointless.

As distinguished from what is generally known as "swing," the best hot jazz has little individual or orchestral virtuosity. Although there is some solo work it usually serves to build up the whole, and not vice versa. There is less rhythmical precision than rhythmical relaxation (although Virgil Thomson's "quantitative rhythm" might be said to apply to both). Harmonic progressions are of the most elementary kind, with very few modulations. Sectional coherence is usually of the crudest sort, and there is little sophistication or refinement of nuances. But with all these crudities it is a far more exciting product than "swing," even when a swing orchestra uses five brass playing with a synchronization that should be the envy of any symphony musician; more exciting than the clock-work-like neatness of a Raymond Scott Quintet (either the five- or fifteen-piece one), or the subtle shadings

of a Benny Goodman Trio.

Another manifestation of the swing era, Boogie Woogie, deserves some consideration, since it has now been taken up by the esthetes. This primitive (elementary rather than primal) style, with its drone bass, omnipresent I-V-IV progressions, childish tremolos and wearisome sameness, is the casual by-product of lack of technic in certain honky-tonk pianists. From the left hand only strength and endurance are required, from the right, a one-finger technic with the tremolo always in reserve. On first hearing its naivete is amusing. If one cares for period atmosphere, Boogie Woogie on a tinny piano is appropriate in a joint.

Jazz, which is radio's bread and butter, is handled over the air in just the same way as serious music. Certain things are not played "because there is no demand." It's the old vicious circle. There is no demand because they are unplayed and hence unfamiliar. The timid steps taken on an occasional sustaining or "art" program usually result in one step forward, two steps back.

For jazz, radio accepts the "plush" theory followed by certain movie producers (in whose films the poor but honest stenographer comes home from a hard day's work to her modest, eight-room penthouse). Everything must have pomp and splendor, big orchestras, luxury, cascades of sound. Jazz of the collective improvisation type is best exhibited by groups of five or six musicians. But apparently soap can't be sold with such a small orchestra - the public might think the soap manufacturer couldn't afford a larger orchestra; and if he didn't have much capital, how could the soap be good?

BACK TO THE "LONG-HAIRS"

We should, I suppose, be grateful for the one step taken by radio in the direction of contemporary music during the last few months, so let's skip the two steps back. The presence of Stravinsky and Bartok in New York inspired several programs in their honor. Stravinsky was heard on a Philharmonic broadcast and in a lecture-recital on his music from WQXR; also from WQXR came a Bartok program. I don't understand why we must be restricted to hearing Bartok's first two string quartets and the *Rhapsody*; those quartets are already fairly well known here and his presence might be expected to stimulate performances of the other four.

The final regional broadcast of the League of Composers was from New York and consisted of newly commissioned works by Marion Bauer, Norman Cazden, William Schuman and Randall Thompson. As a whole the program showed a noticeable preoccupation with modal writing and offered nothing in the least problematical. Most of this music was specially written for air transmission; it would be interesting therefore to know whether the result was due to a deliberate attempt to "find" the radio audience, or whether it indicated a more general mass retreat into the past. The compositions were handled with varying degrees of skill, but only Schuman's

Quartet (commissioned for a Town Hall premiere) revealed an awareness of the contemporary scene.

Toscanini's NBC performance of Harris' *Third Symphony* was of course a notable event. One can only hope it will not remain an isolated phenomenon. What we need is less effort devoted to a new *Aida* overture, less loving care in the preparation of a *William Tell* and a more consistent program of worth-while contemporary music.

Notes at random: WQXR has recently given two recorded programs of Harris' music. On one of them, the composer in person presented his "rhythm-of-race" theory. I wonder if he feels that it "can't happen here" and that therefore, because of immunity, all this doesn't really matter; or that it can happen here and would be a fine thing. . . . Villa-Lobos was not heard at his best in a "Salute of the Americas" program from Brazil. The first performance of his *New York Skyline Melody* sounded an unhappy World-fair note. . . . Norman Dello Joio's refreshing *Sonata* for violin and piano was heard over WNYC's "Composers of Today and Tomorrow" series. This is completely uninhibited music; full of ideas, going its own merry way with no concern for tortured theorizing. . . . Wallenstein continues to give programs over WOR which at least avoid the hackneyed; little known music of the past and such scores as Honegger's music for the film *Harvest*.

ON THE FILM FRONT

By PAUL BOWLES

THERE's not much to talk about this time. Franz Waxman's score for *Re-*

becca is not even as good as Hitchcock's direction, which in this film is certainly