

SOLOMON AND BALKIS IN CAMBRIDGE

THE first staged performances of Randall Thompson's new one act opera, *Solomon and Balkis* (commissioned jointly by the League of composers and the Columbia Broadcasting System), took place under the auspices of the Lowell House Musical Society in Cambridge on April 14th and 15th. With the exception of Philip Stolar, a talented tenor, who sang the role of the Butterfly, the presentation preserved complete amateur standing, the remaining members of the cast, the chorus and the orchestra consisting entirely of Harvard and Radcliffe students. The performances were successful, the response of the distinguished audiences, enthusiastic; much credit should be given to Malcolm Holmes, who conducted, and Leonard Kent, the dramatic director. It is clear that Thompson's opera can be effectively presented by amateurs.

The music is written practically for the voices and instruments, but its delicate shades of expressive nuance and subtleties of instrumental color were more evident in the C.B.S. radio premiere of March 29th. In style there is a curious mixture, for Thompson does not hesitate to accept direct influences from Handel, Monteverdi, or even Wagner. Except for the clever setting of the words, which are accented in true American fashion, there seem to be few strong native influences such as we find in his other music. It is the work of a fine craftsman in the best of styles, but only as the climax is reached, does the music become twentieth century in feeling. Throughout this middle section there is greater freedom, as if the composer had quite completely lost himself in the drama. Its effect after what has gone before is outstanding.

The last part seemed too long, as it had in the radio performance. It contained some of the lines which most interested the composer, the human side of the drama dealing with the effects of Solomon's magic, but the audience could not help being more excited by the magic itself. At points where the phrases were widely spaced, the only stage business consisted of watching for cues. One more strong climax nearer the end might have helped. If there was a feeling of let-down, however, it was only because interest in the first two-thirds was so great.

Let us hope that the League's splendid project will be continued, and that more of our composers will be encouraged to write practical works such as this one which may be performed in many communities with modest resources.

Quincy Porter