

OVER THE AIR

By CECIL MICHENER SMITH

THE first broadcast this season by the League of Composers under the sponsorship of the NBC Music Guild was given on December 10, 1936. As a consequence the program had to struggle for its life. For on December 10, 1936, as you may remember, Edward VIII had just abdicated the British throne. This event was quite rightly held by NBC to be a matter of universal interest. So the program was repeatedly cut off the air to make way for the latest news flashes from the Press Radio Bureau.

Between interruptions however the broadcast pursued its way serenely, presenting the first movement of Ernest Bloch's *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, played by Nicolai Berezowsky and Paul Pisk; a group of three songs by Lazare Saminsky, sung by Dorothy Westra, accompanied by Dr. Pisk; two songs by Dr. Pisk, sung by Mme. Sylvia Alvers, with the composer at the piano; and two movements of a *Duo* for violin and violoncello by Zoltan Kodaly, played by Mr. Berezowsky and Victor Gottlieb, cellist.

The music sent out over the air lanes is usually familiar to many readers of MODERN MUSIC. In the event however that Dr. Pisk's songs are unknown, I shall take the luxury of speaking with approval of *Lilie der Auen*, the smooth vocal style of which scarcely suggests the hand of a follower of Schönberg.

The technical quality of this initial broadcast was excellent. Both voices projected excellently, and the tone of the stringed instruments was grateful in quality. Evidently the National Broadcasting Company put its best resources at the disposal of the League. On the League's part, however, the result was not quite so satisfactory, for the program was badly timed; the four minutes of Gluck's music indifferently played by an absent-minded studio pianist to fill out the period, added little to the occasion.

The Columbia Broadcasting System is now presenting a fine series of weekly programs on Saturday nights, from 8 to 8:30,

under the general title "Modern Masters." Advance announcements promise that "a number of the foremost composers of our day will be guest pianists on this series, giving their original interpretations of pieces which may be the classics of tomorrow." Soloists include Ernst Toch, Serge Prokofieff and Carlos Chavez. Aaron Copland, Alexander Tansman and Paul Pisk have already appeared in the series.

A recent broadcast was devoted to compositions by American holders of the fellowship at the American Academy of Rome. Composers represented were Hanson, Sowerby, and Elwell. Several talented fellows of the Academy were distinguished on this occasion by the omission of any of their works from the program, which was, after all, responsive to the limitations of time.



The three awards in the N.B.C. Music Guild competition for American Chamber works were announced recently. First prize was awarded to the late Mitya Stillman, the second prize to Dr. Aloys Reiser of Hollywood, and the third to Rudolf Forst of New York. The stipulations of the award were not too restricted. Each composition was required to be from twenty to twenty-five minutes in length, but beyond this, much latitude was allowed. Of two hundred and eighty-six compositions submitted, twenty were finally considered by the judges. All twenty of these were recorded so that in the inimitable words of the announcer "the judges were for the first time, enabled to hear as well as see the music they were judging."

The first Columbia Composers' Commission issues press notices from time to time, describing the work of the six American composers who were appointed last fall to write works for radio presentation. Of these it seems that Roy Harris is at work on *Time Suite for Radio* in five movements, for full orchestra, designed to occupy a half-hour program; Howard Hanson is preparing his third symphony; Louis Gruenberg is "dreaming of an opera of about twenty minutes' duration for radio purposes only;" and Aaron Copland wants to "tackle a musical setting for a short radio script." The others—Walter Piston and William Grant Still—are less lucid about their intentions.