

been marked with the indication: *Tempo di Gregoriano!*

The *Three Choruses* by Jacques Pillois were shamelessly cheap and stupid. There was an antique finish on the *Cantique Béarnais (Nouste Damo)*, but that was all. The other two were good radio music.

Paul Bowles

NATIVE OPERA—METROPOLITAN AND JUILLIARD

THIS season's American novelty at the Metropolitan proved disappointing; it was neither a contribution to American opera or to contemporary music. *In the Pasha's Garden* was produced at a January matinee with its composer, John Laurence Seymour, a shy man from California, present to accept the usual curtain call and the David Bispham medal, awarded annually, supposedly for the best American opera. Just why the work was accepted for performance at all is enigmatical. Perhaps on paper the role of the Pasha promised another triumph for Lawrence Tibbett. Perhaps the negligible cost of production influenced the decision. Or perhaps the fact that an unknown composer from across the continent had written his seventh opera seemed the stuff that press agents' dreams are made of. Be that as it may, the music was undistinguished and reminiscent, the orchestration amateurish and ineffectual, and the English none too well adapted to the vocal line. The libretto by H. C. Tracy (based on a story by H. G. Dwight) failed to carry its dramatic suspense. The one item of interest from a contemporary point of view was the original and modernistic stage setting designed by Frederick J. Kiesler. Exaggeratedly large foliage was thrown by lights on a white cyclorama. Most of the action took place on a raised circular dais (reached by a ramp) where was revealed the chest in which the Pasha's blond wife had hidden her French lover. The Pasha was in a conventional tuxedo, the wife was an effective figure in a white evening gown with green draperies; the Eunuch wore native costume and sang disturbing roulades purporting to be Turkish music.

The Juilliard School's presentation of *Maria Malibran* was another matter. Robert Russell Bennett and Robert A. Simon

collaborated on a "musical romance" in which they made an evident attempt to forget opera tradition. The background is New York City of a century ago, and the subject draws on the social life and customs of that day and the presence of the famous opera singer, Maria Garcia Malibran.

The work is neither musical comedy nor grand opera, although it borrows from both, with definite experiments in declamation, orchestration, and stage setting. Mr. Simon's libretto moves smoothly and swiftly, and as a vehicle for music is well planned. He has not sought to write poetic English, his language is every-day speech. In some spots a more glamorous effect might have been attained by avoiding the "homely" idiom. But if we are to have native opera in the vernacular we must grow accustomed to commonplace words not veiled by the colorful sounds of a foreign language.

One of the difficult problems of opera from Gluck to Debussy has been how to get the story across the footlights. Mr. Bennett's procedure is novel. In place of time honored recitative or spoken dialog without music, he uses an uninterrupted flow of music depicting the action and accompanying the voice, which breaks into speech or song as the composer sees fit. To many who have set notions as to what opera should be, this unexpected shift, frequently in the middle of a phrase, was disturbing, but it had elements of surprise and novelty. It brought the words clearly (in most cases) to the listener. Mr. Bennett's orchestration also was planned so as not to submerge the spoken or sung word, and was one of the best points of the opera.

The music is neither ultra-dissonant nor has it the mannered simplicity of some of the younger composers. It betrays Mr. Bennett's experience in musical comedy and the theatre. He interpolates *Home Sweet Home*, one of the popular song hits of the day frequently sung by Mme. Malibran, and the aria, *Una Voce Poco Fa*, from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, and he makes the heroine a coloratura soprano although in reality she was a mezzo. The opera becomes frankly romantic music in the third act, which is probably the most spontaneous and sincere.

Mr. Kiesler has, in my opinion, designed his most successful stage settings for *Maria Malibran*. All three acts reveal his

gift for creating an atmosphere with distinctly individual and new effects. The first represented the old Vauxhall Gardens in Spring, 1826, the second was an interior in blue and white with a perspective created by simple means, the third a charming picture of Malibran's apartment.

Maria Malibran is the third opera by American composers and librettists to be presented by Albert Stoessel and members of the opera department of the Juilliard Graduate School (the other two were Gruenberg's *Jack and the Beanstalk* and Antheil's *Helen Retires*). Malibran, however, is the first to deal with an American subject, and has an atmosphere which could have been created only by Americans.

Marion Bauer

SPRING FESTIVAL, WASHINGTON, 1935

THE Library of Congress, in its biennial burst of enthusiasm, brought three new works to first hearing last April: Béla Bartók's *Quartet No. 5, in B \flat* (commissioned by the Library); Malipiero's *Sonata à Cinque*, for flute, violin, viola, violoncello, and harp; and Werner Janssen's *Quintet No. 2, in E*. Other composers represented on the program, in some cases by first American performances, were Alban Berg, Albert Roussel, Jean Cras, Quincy Porter, John Alden Carpenter, and Igor Stravinsky.

The high spot of the festival was none of the brand-new works but rather the impassioned performance of Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* by the Kolisch Quartet of Vienna. This notable group, playing from memory, presented the work with such glowing warmth, and yet with such perfect ensemble, that the occasion became an unforgettable one, calling to mind the enthusiasm aroused two years ago by the reading of *Verklärte Nacht* by the Kroll Sextet. It was good to realize that the finest playing of the present festival was devoted to a work which is, on its own merits, one of the landmarks of recent music. A part of the *Lyric Suite* was given several years ago in New York, by a string orchestra conducted by Erich Kleiber; this however, was the first complete American performance of the work in its original form.