

and achievements of the past dozen years? It is as if Copland had never written the nocturne for the drunken choirmaster in *Our Town*; as if Hugo Friedhofer had not woven the neurotic themes of *The Lodger* into a contrapuntal texture of brutality for the final chase sequence; as if other chase sequences, such as Roy Webb's in *Hitler's Children* or Bernard Herrmann's in *All That Money Can Buy*, had not revealed new ways of treating hackneyed situations; as if Alfred Newman had not composed the vision scene in *Bernadette*, with its imaginative treatment of nature sounds; or, going far back into the past, as if Auric had not shown the effectiveness of playing against the visual, as in the snowball scene in *Sang d'un Poète* with its wistful, almost emotionless waltz evoking the overtones of tragedy. In *San Pietro* we have mere complacency, a willingness to spin out concert music for an imaginary film. It is almost a mockery to watch soldiers spend their courage and fight and die to music that is better suited to a bourgeois domestic drama. Only Rhadames and Tristan die beautifully; soldiers die in the mud.

III

Film music as propaganda might seem to be a far-fetched notion to most peo-

ple, but there is a striking example of it in an RKO short entitled *Power Unlimited*, with a score by Ben Machan. The picture pretends to be a documentary about life in an eastern coal town. It shows miners at work and at home, leading an almost idyllic existence, unmindful of the constant threat of danger, and happy in the consciousness of their service to humanity. Their wives seem to desire nothing more than a continuous opportunity to hang out the family wash, their children thrive in the streets that serve as playgrounds. All this is under the auspices of the company, and so there is an appropriate accompaniment of salon music.

Across the town, on the wrong side of the tracks, there is a mine abandoned by the company but still being worked by a few poverty-stricken families who, for reasons that are not explained, have not joined the happy throng employed by the company. The dreariness of their lives is attested by the dilapidated shacks they call homes, the weary gait and dumb hopeless faces of the women. This record of abject poverty is accompanied by a bucolic shepherd dance which says in effect, "Blessed are the broken in spirit, for no notion of the dignity of man remains to stir their discontent."

IN THE THEATRE

By S. L. M. BARLOW

BEFORE we begin on the more or less painful reflections of this column, I would like to toss into the lap of one of my confrères the suggestion

that an interesting review might be made out of the contrasts — in tempi, orchestration, solemnities, levities, and general effectiveness — offered this sea-

son in the playing of our National Anthem. Almost invariably the few short notes are slighted, quavers made into semi-quavers, with a consequent loss of dignity. I did not hear Stravinsky's version, which was said to have shocked Boston to its fundament; the worst version I heard, I think, was at *Bloomer Girl*. The best was a solo by George Copeland.

It seems to me that latterly the Jovelets have been nodding on Broadway. At least, from these sad reflections, I can come up with the \$64 question. I do know what the Guild did with all the bad operatic bits they cut out of *Porgy and Bess*. They plumped them right into *Carousel*. However, what was inferior Mascagni in the elder sister is now somehow Wagnerian; and, as another indication of the mixed-greens, what was intended in *Carousel* to represent the coast of New England is quite a good drop of the harbor at Rio. Personally, I think Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein got bored with being so successful and said, "Let's swap roles." In no other way is it possible to account for the mawkish verses and the slushy music. As for poor *Liliom*, that charming comedy of character, the suet is left but the vertebra is gone. Of course, there are some good things: one nice song, the singing of Christine Johnson and Eric Mattson, some of the sets by Mielziner (but not all of them), and chiefly the ballet by Agnes de Mille. In one short scene, de Mille shows us the character and the unhappy circumstances of *Liliom's* daughter, with intensity, beauty and wit. And she does it to music which has a split personality, ranging from fair, early Rachmaninov to not very good rag.

The next blow, but in this case not unexpected, was *The Firebrand*, a re-covering of the old horse-hair sofa with imitation plush. (By now, as a matter of fact, the bottom has dropped out.) In spite of Dukes and Major-Domos among the characters, and of the names of Ira Gershwin, Mielziner, Littlefield, and Raoul Pène du Bois on the bill, there was not one ounce of distinction in the proceedings. Lotte Lenya and Melville Cooper worked well and hard. But the real disaster is Kurt Weill's music. What was "the most arresting voice of young musical Germany, a voice with the grinning, pavement pathos of Villon" has become increasingly dreary and now finally clap-trap. The fault is not all his. The poverty of the librettos handed him began with *Knickerbocker Holiday*; and the blindness of producers continues to hand him material utterly unsuited to his talent. Late-ly he has been asked to write in the vein of Gilbert and Sullivan, or of Gershwin, and now of *seicento* madrigals. And this for a man who was notable for the curious individuality of his own style, for a man almost inflexibly remote from any other style but his own.

In *Dark of the Moon*, Howard Richardson has written a poetic fantasy about a witch boy in the Smoky Mountains. It was first produced, at the State University of Iowa, with simplicity and poignancy. By the time the Shuberts had dolled it up for Broadway, the allegory was padded with fake ballads (the version of *Barbara Allen* is pure hokum, it seems), some fake folklore, and considerable sex. The central idea of the play, the androgynous conundrum of the Witch Boy, is still visible, and several scenes, floated on the subdued murmur

of Walter Hendl's music, still project a real poetry. In fact, the play is quite remarkable and well worth seeing. It is several cuts above almost all its neighbors on Broadway. Even so, it does not quite jell. Hendl's music is no great shakes, being designed to furnish a ghostly underground and to avoid any precision of contour. I remember it as good movie music.

It is perhaps a more final way of neglecting the music and lyrics written by Burton Lane for Olsen and Johnson's *Laffing Room Only* to mention them than not to.

III

Now for the good things.

There has been much raving over *The Glass Menagerie*, and all of it deserved. It is an intense, compact and moving study of futility, somewhat in the manner of Chekov. And it is played by Laurette Taylor, Eddie Dowling, Julie Haydon and Anthony Ross to perfection. I doubt if the Moscow Art Theatre or Copeau's or Dulin's theatres in Paris ever molded a script with greater subtlety. And Paul Bowles has added a score which has every desirable quality of discretion and salience combined. It has character and profile, also the peculiar timbres and combinations for which Bowles has so felicitous an aptitude; yet the music stays where it belongs, emphasizing the nostalgic moods of the nocturne on the stage.

The African Academy of Arts and Research presented its second Annual Festival at Carnegie Hall and it is pleasant to have so many good things to record. Asadata Dafora was the chief dancer and the pivot of the first half of the program: a seventeenth century

depiction, in movement and music, of life in Africa, ending with the slave-ship. The second half was laid in this hemisphere, in the Caribbean and in New York. The costumes, by Mrs. Dafora, were excellent, and the production flowing and fast. Except for the boogie-woogie, the accompaniment was confined to drums alone, and in naked intricacy and power was truly amazing. Some of the songs or chants sounded entirely authentic and West African. The Yabo-Yabo was like a college cheer ("We want Barney, we want Barney"). And the unlisted songs of departure, in the well-tempered mode, were curiously touching in their lamentation. The contrasts between Africa and the Caribbean were well marked; and every brief and pungent number flashed with its distinct vitality. The Duke of Iron, peer of Calypso, contributed a splendid ode, to his mandolin, composed for the occasion, and the Princess Orelia (with her partner Pedro) was a suave incandescence. If each segment was evocative and vivid, still the triumph of the evening lay in the hands of the eight drummers. They were out of this world – in some rhythmic zodiac where the angels play harps.

III

For the record let it be stated that the Columbia Theatre Associates in cooperation with the University Department of Music presented *The Scarecrow*, an opera in two acts based on the play by Percy MacKaye, music by Normand Lockwood, libretto by Dorothy Lockwood. The principal roles were taken by Berthe Keresey, Willard Gross, Jean Carlton, Robert Lande, and Lloyd Linders.