

Malipiero's short string quartet entitled *Cantari alla Madrigalesca* and Ravel's songs, *Ronsard à son âme* and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*. The Italian composer's work especially should be heard by anyone who wishes to estimate him by one of his best works. It is music that is deeply felt, and written with absolute clarity of intention. Moreover it is beautifully played and recorded by the Quartetto di Roma. The three *Don Quichotte* songs, written during the years of Ravel's decline, show a falling off of inspiration but *Ronsard à son âme* is one of his finest lyrics.

A curious feature of the past five months is the absence of any outstanding contemporary work from the lists of the Columbia Phonograph Company. It is the more remarkable in view of the amount of modern music issued by that company in the past. What can the significance be? If the reason is simply one of sales resistance, then we must point out that although the marketing of records may be primarily a business enterprise, it cannot be merely that. Its effect on musical culture is much too widespread. Everyone knows that record sales have climbed with unprecedented speed during the past three years. That makes the companies' responsibility to provide well-balanced lists greater than it ever was. A representative contemporary work may not earn as much money as a well-known classic, but the musical interests of the country demand that it be made available nonetheless.

IN THE THEATRE

—By JOHN GUTMAN—

IF adequacy were the standard by which to judge a composer's work in the theatre, one could wholeheartedly endorse Kurt Weill's latest extravaganza, *Knickerbocker Holiday*. His score is not in the least extravagant, and in that rather negative way it is a perfect match for Maxwell Anderson's lame story and fairly insipid lyrics. Mr. Anderson was evidently meant to be a disciple of Tragedy; he is much better in grim *Winterset* than in the jolly somersaults which he now tries so desperately to turn. This, however, is his own concern. But we want to know what the composer has done for a work so dependent on music that it would be quite unthinkable without it.

Anderson's plan would naturally appeal to Weill; New Amsterdam is not very far from *Mahagonny*, and the *Three-Penny-Opera* touch in the story is obvious enough, there is even a little social significance, never wholly absent from Weill's stage work, although the often maltreated issue of dictatorship versus democracy (corrupt) has seldom been less convincingly handled.

The libretto, despite its many shortcomings, was susceptible to a Weill treatment, to that stylization between dream and jazz which has been Weill's remarkable contribution to contemporary music. But no moon of Alabama rose over the Battery, and the bar of Mandalay never even opened up on these dry shores. Surabaya Johnny, Mackie Messer and all the rest are now superseded by a conventional opera beau. Instead of all the stirring songs which (sung by Lotte Lenja of blessed memory) rent our minds if not our hearts, we now have the warbling of a fair, sweet maid who has about as much artistic profile as an ingenue in an early Lortzing opera. The reminiscent note in the new scenes and situations makes the disappointment only the keener. In *Knickerbocker Holiday* the young hero, about to die, is left for a moment alone in his cell. Who that has ever heard *Mahagonny* can fail to recall the beautiful farewell song of Johann Ackermann, a little masterpiece that Weill built out of the elements of the good old "exit aria" and of his own purely personal style? Of all this nothing is left. Of course, over there Johann Ackermann was executed; here Brom Broeck, the new hero, sings a duetto.

I do not doubt that all this expresses an entirely conscious, deliberate change in the composer's outlook. Ten years ago Mr. Weill discovered that music could be made "communicable," though retaining artistry. It was his secret to blend a crude material with a highly developed style so that the connoisseurs forgave the crudeness and the profane forgot the style. Now he attempts to cut down the art and conquer with substance alone. It is greatly to his credit that he has (in my opinion at least) failed to achieve his purpose.

In the *Three-Penny-Opera* Weill, for his overture, very ingeniously transposed the formal pattern of the Handel sinfonia into the idiom of chamber jazz. But listen to the *Knickerbocker*

prelude and what do you find? A menu of the main hits, naked, rough and meaningless. It is out of such ragged remnants that the score is built. Of course Kurt Weill has not succeeded in completely disguising himself. The song in the first act, *There's Nowhere To Go But Up* has some of the old verve. In the much praised *September Song* one may discover a trace of the old melodic turn although it bears a fatal resemblance to an Italian hit, *Serenade in the Night*, which had a vogue here too.

After all, for the invention of "haunting" melodies, we still have the Messrs. Berlin, Porter, and Kern, who do them very well. Revivals of the Savoy Opera (if that be something desirable) can only be accomplished by people who have genuine naiveté. But for composing a Kurt Weill score, there is only one Mr. Weill. Let us hope that he will soon try again.



The music which Lehman Engel has written for *Hamlet*, in Maurice Evans' full length version, is very incidental indeed, which is exactly as it should be. Shakespeare's dramas vary greatly in their need for a score. Music seems to spring quite naturally, in many of the comedies, from the interspersed songs. The "fairy tales," the *Dreams* and the *Tempest*, which are almost romantic operas, cannot do without a sound background of ample development. The tragedies are different. A composer who did not confine himself to mere patches of sound here and there would weaken the vigor of the action and the emotional élan of the speeches. Ten bars too many, and drama might degenerate into melodrama. Marc Blitzstein saluted this truth last season in *Julius Caesar*. Mr. Engel respects it also. Someone is listed in the program book as "orchestra leader" so I suppose there must be an orchestra in the covered pit, but there is also the Hammond organ, and plenty of it. The dark registers prevail. Flourishes and fanfares, a slow-paced march, some measures of a chorus, the light touch of a chirping harpsichord for a court scene—that is about all you get, and all you want. The distant trumpets to punctuate the ghost scenes are a good solution; they create the right atmosphere of unreality. The tympani that accompany the ghost's speeches, however, seem unnecessary, even disturbing. On the whole, the tiny little score is highly adequate

and, in this particular case, that means excellent.

For the still smaller number of notes which are in Orson Welles' production of *Danton's Tod*, Blitzstein has acknowledged authorship of two songs. He is, I presume, also responsible for the arrangement of the few bars of instrumental music parsimoniously strewn here and there through the drama. The songs are of course competent, *Christina* more so than the other. The apparent discrepancy between their modernity, and the "period" style of the instrumental pieces creates a kind of ironic high-lighting. This stream-lined production—quick, dry and a little colorless—would I think have gained by a more ample score.

Sing Out the News is Friedman and Rome's new set of pins and needles, minus some of the pricks. Moving from Labor Stage to Music Box, some originality would naturally be lost in transport. Everything has become a little less sharp, less concise, less intense, even the sentimentality is less poignant; as a hit *My Heart is Unemployed* is not half as good as *Sunday in the Park*. But there remains enough to make a very entertaining show, and nothing is wholly insignificant although the significance is now a little more socialite than social. Compare, for instance, the amusing *Cafe Society Sextet* with the ensemble of the opera crowd in the earlier work. It is the same theme, the same approach, the same squib, but altogether without the pungency of its predecessor when the old decrepit habitue of Metropolitan splendor started shaking to the rhythm of the Big Apple.

Mr. Harold Rome, who has a definite if limited musical talent, enjoys the advantage of being his own poet. In the field of light music this combination is almost invariably successful. It is a time-honored tradition with French chansonniers. In the pre-Hitler Berlin "Kabarett," in those miniature revues, for instance, which made the name of Frederick Hollander justly famous, it produced a very efficient type of chanson, a type which, with all its superficiality, gained the importance, of a document. Mr. Rome is a worthy trustee of this small but precious heritage. Light and commonplace as the music may be, it fits its purpose like the proverbial glove, and it is as smooth. His score as well as his text has suffered from removal into more pretentious surroundings. Clad now in a conventional orchestration of brass and wood,

it sounds less colorful than it did in black and white. The greater wealth of means is, however, a gain for the ensemble scenes. But in any case Mr. Rome seems destined to go on providing us with entertaining shows.

WITH THE DANCERS

EDWIN DENBY

THE oddly written publicity for the new Monte Carlo states: "The arrival each year of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo automatically mobilizes the ballet-fans of the nation, and the resulting enjoyment is prodigious." This sounds as though we were to derive prodigious enjoyment from being automatically mobilized; almost as though we were to plunk down our shekels, raise our right arms, and shout, Heil Hurok. Of course the sentence quoted and others like it are ridiculous. It was a great pleasure to see the new Monte Carlo, it was a pleasure too that it was such a success. But it isn't yet all it set out to be; it hasn't kept as many of its campaign promises as it could have.

This new Monte Carlo is subsidized by our own money, so it isn't a gift horse; we have a right to look it over, and there are several front teeth missing. One of them is music by our own composers, whom we have a hard enough time hearing anyway. Thanks to the WPA and more to the Ballet Caravan, anyone interested in ballet music already knows that you can get it as satisfactorily here as abroad. We want it not for the pleasure of saying it's ours, but because we are curious to hear it, and an American enterprise seems a natural place; especially an enterprise which promisingly entitles itself "Universal Art, Inc."

So much for propaganda; now to the pleasure of praising. Massine deserves the greatest praise for the company he has chosen. The freshness of the corps de ballet is wonderful. Especially the girls, as Willis, as Swans, as Sylphides, as Parisiennes, as Transylvanians are a constant pleasure. The soloists are excellent, with a clarity of profile and a physical zest that are first rate; and the boys even outdo the girls. I particularly enjoyed