

Thomson has written. It has a large beauty that never appears in the choppy little musiquettes Auric, Shostakovitch and Honegger write for the movies.

## OVER THE AIR

GODDARD LIEBERSON

**A**N answer! An answer to all those who say that the American composer does not have an audience in America! Here is part of a letter sent to the Columbia Broadcasting Company from somewhere in Ohio by a listener who had just heard a piece commissioned for radio. This simple document is one of the most touching comments on music that I have ever seen. It came as a reply to Aaron Copland's request for titles for his new composition: "first part fast means work. second part quite (quiet) means lunch. third part fast, work. fourth part quite going home from work." That letter must have been interesting to the officials of the C. B. S. too, coming as it did, from a source seldom considered music-conscious. It also proves that C. B. S. had a good idea in commissioning six Americans and justifies their faith in an American audience for American composers.

When the Columbia Compositions Commission (a committee headed by Deems Taylor, C. B. S. musical consultant) chose Copland, William Grant Still, Howard Hanson, Roy Harris, Louis Gruenberg, and Walter Piston to write especially adapted works for radio, they provided their audiences with six very different types of music. From the point of view of radio exigencies and possibilities, none of these men can be said to have plumbed the depths. Still did the best job with his *Lenox Avenue*, but musically it did not stand up beside Copland's *A Saga of the Prairie* (the winning title for his composition) or Piston's *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra*. This latter work and Howard Hanson's *Third Symphony* were straight pieces of music with no particular significance for radio production. Piston set out to write a simple and clear piece, feeling that to be the best possible style for radio. The result was exciting music, particularly as performed in the piano solo by Jesus Maria Sanroma. Harris

was represented by a work called *Time Suite*, by no means the best he has ever done. Compared to the other works it was on the stodgy side; it could have been quite a little brighter for this writer's taste. As a matter of fact it seemed less suited to radio than the short and snappy *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*.

Two composers, Still, in his *Lenox Avenue*, and Gruenberg, in his non-visual opera *Green Mansions*, utilized chorus and solo voices. Still produced a very sprightly and entertaining piece of semi barrel-house jazz, with a narrator, solo jazz piano, and mixed chorus. It was a smooth running composition, remindful of the Willard Robinson Sunday afternoon *Deep River* series. Gruenberg's *Green Mansions* was unfortunate in choice of subject. The burblings of the forest primeval, the white girl in the midst of savages, the terrifying yell of cannibals over the protests of the Great White God, all conspired to call to mind the usual five o'clock radio hours of *Tarzan* and *Flash Gordon*, while musically the illusion was not heightened by the heavy Straussian orchestration. Gruenberg, however, gets the prize for the neatest trick of the week, his use of the musical saw. It is a very effective sound over the radio.

Copland's work clearly stated what he thinks of music for a general public. There were concessions to the non-concert hall listener, but they were attractive sallies into melodiousness and simple harmonizations.

C. B. S. has now awarded its commissions for 1938 to Quincy Porter, Robert Russell Bennett, Leo Sowerby, Jerome Moross, and R. Nathaniel Dett, and one to Vittorio Giannini for a twenty-nine minute radio opera. I have asked how these composers are chosen, and the answer from C. B. S. is: "on the basis of ability and variety . . . not all serious-minded, and not all commercial-minded. . . ."

Another commissioned work that has recently been produced is Marc Blitzstein's song-play for the Columbia Workshop Hour, called *I Have a Tune*. I held high expectations of this work, knowing the wit and talent of Blitzstein, but I found it disappointing after *The Cradle Shall Rock* of last summer. The music wasn't nearly as good, nor did the dialog hold up. Nevertheless, Blitzstein made more interesting use of the radio than any of

the composers commissioned on the other series. A swell song was the one given to the purple-shirted cohorts, which went, "our captain is so peaceful". . . . this followed by the sssssss-bang! of a trench mortar being fired.

## WITH THE DANCERS

ELLIOTT CARTER

THE dance season began brilliantly with new works by the Littlefield and Russian Ballets, and a revival of some old ones by Joos. Miss Littlefield's troupe revealed great improvement over last year's *Sleeping Beauty* (repeated during the summer at the Stadium with Smallens correcting the tempi). The choreography is more imaginative, and the dancers are better trained; they showed up well in a small hall and danced with verve and sureness. Poulenc's *Aubade* was offered with Alexis Dolinoff's version of Balanchine's original and more piquant choreography, with Dolinoff in the main role. There was also a miniature *Fantastic Symphony* entitled *Poème* to Ravel's *Pavane* and a miniature *Choreartium* to music by Bach. This last was healthy and vigorous and quite decently danced. As always in Miss Littlefield's work there was a powerful touch of the vaudeville troupe doing something pretty swell. You cannot expect much careful and delicate workmanship from her but you can expect good, obvious theatre even if it's pretty cheap. Miss Littlefield played very safe in her choice of ballets, giving imitations of already proven successes. A little original work would be appreciated.

The morose, none too elegant evenings staged at the shabby Metropolitan have already achieved an air of nostalgia befitting the institution which the Ballet Russe has now become. Few surprises can be expected. The freshest of the new works was the *Gods Go A-Begging* which, with the help of a Handel score, was once a gay little piece. Lichine as choreographer built this up out of scenery, costumes, score and choreography created for Diaghilev. It is much less delightful now. Danilova and