

works. His *Three Epitaphs*, from Walter De La Mare, were especially fine, the evidence of a very real gift for this special form of expression. Another program devoted to songs for voice and piano offered Marion Bauer's *The Harp*, a splendid lyric achievement, probably one of the best contemporary American pieces in the medium. Paul Nordoff's *If There Are Any Heavens* is interesting enough in material but arty and so sophisticated that the total effect is artificial and dated. Much more disappointingly self-enclosed and eccentrically hopeless was John Cage's *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*, a monotonous chant for voice with toneless percussive taps for accompaniment. I hope this example is unrepresentative of his talents.

A program presenting works by Robert McBride shows another kind of attitude, most unfunny and embarrassingly cheap in an effort to achieve brilliant showmanship. Works for saxophone and piano by McBride are so far beneath the entertainment level of Duke Ellington that one wonders why they were notated at all.

Vincent Persichetti's *Trio for Piano*,

Violin and Cello is indicative of a sensitive, promising talent. The young composer has already achieved a great degree of personal authority and individuality in style. A slight tendency towards mannerism is suggested by parallel melodic scoring for the strings in the first movement, but it never becomes ungrateful or obvious in effect, and may be only a necessary accent of delivery. Normand Lockwood's *Sonata For Piano* was one of the most curious of the serious works heard in the Festival. It is very rich in good sonorities but most disappointing in tonal content.

David Diamond's *Concerto For Two Solo Pianos* is a dignified and well managed score, though it is by no means one of this prolific composer's best. The form, in all three movements, is well designed, convincingly balanced. Harmonically, the texture is distinguished and grateful, though at times somewhat grey and non-committal. It is perhaps in the inner thematic developments that one feels an interesting, but somehow uninspired content. And I should like to say also that Carl Stern and Vivien Rivkin gave an excellent performance of my own *First Sonata For Cello and Piano*.

THE TORRID ZONE

By MERCURE

FOR all the advance to-do about it you'd have felt that something momentous in the history of jazz would be achieved when the *Esquire*-picked all-star band took over at the Metropolitan Opera House on a Sunday night in January. What actually happened was one more jazz concert

that never really got off the ground. The ill-assorted stars took a long time to thaw out in spite of the beaming look-where-we-are-now-boys air of the MC's, and the heat towards the end of the program could not be described, even by Rodzinski, as conducive in any way to moral delinquency.

The actual list of names was dazzling, with Mildred Bailey and Billie Holiday as vocalists, and a lot of top-ranking instrumentalists. For me the high spot of the evening was the lovely singing of Mildred Bailey, whose tender and sensitive voice projected beautifully in spite of the sudden vastness of the theatre. Coleman Hawkins and Sidney Catlett were superb, as usual, while Louis Armstrong, alas, was lost completely. Piping Benny Goodman in from Hollywood, was a stunt that added little to the evening's spontaneity. Further disruptions were the giving out of awards, and a goon announcer who held forth for the Blue Network half-hour.

Five-thirty on a Saturday afternoon is the ideal time for the far more real and stimulating jazz concerts that Eddie Condon is running in Town Hall. The series has been increasingly successful, and now the hall is jammed each time with a youthful and enthusiastic crowd. The poster outside bears the words *Le Jazz Intellectuel*. The ticket office is in a state of siege. Inside the lady ushers look aghast. Ahead of me, at the gate, a midget of nine holds on to his father's hand and asks urgently, "Did you get the tickets, father?" We shove through into the hall. There it is not intellectual at all but warm and relaxed. The concert gets off to a good start with the group from Nick's in the Village. Then come the solo improvisations with Schroeder accompanying at the piano and Catlett on the drums. The trumpet and singing of Hot Lips Page rightly bring down the house. Intermission. Piano solos by James P. Johnson, with Wettling on the drums.

Not so good. Finale; impromptu ensemble — collective improvisation by the group directed by Condon. On the stage two pianos, and two sets of drums with Wettling at one and Kansas Fields at the other. Fields is a slim colored boy, in the Navy; his playing is fresh and vigorous, and has beautiful solidity. One by one the men come on, colored and white, play a twelve-bar solo and subside to accompaniment. There is exciting contrast of styles, the Negroes with more colorful intonation, richer melodic imagination, the whites cleaner in inflection and tone. I find I grow bored with Pee Wee Russell's shrill clarinet (philosophic clown locked out all night in the rain) and the purity of tone from Miff Mole's devout and at times Lutheran trombone, and prefer the warmer, racier music of Page or Edmund Hall. Catlett takes over from Wettling on the drums, and in the last five minutes the dozen men really get going. A highly satisfying program that brings forth terrific applause when it's over, although on the way out individuals (intellectuals, no doubt) are heard to remark disparagingly.

Uptown at the Apollo the audience, without benefit of the higher jazz-criticism, knows very well what it likes, and appreciation is keen if not especially articulate. Count Basie's band, heard last month, still continues to be one of the prime favorites; it still has that drive and power of a fire-engine, that peculiar resonance which is metallic but never harsh. Solid, two-hundred-and-fifty pound James Rushing has just the voice for this ensemble, and he seems less a soloist than an integral part of the

band. The audience still would rather hear him do *Going To Chicago* than anything else, although the band's present version can't compare with the way they played it three years ago. I should like to have heard more piano-playing by Basie, and seen much less of Peg Leg Bates, ingenious but incredibly boring one-legged tap-dancer, with an insatiable love for the spotlight.

The popular recording news of the moment is the surprising number of small new firms that have recently appeared on the market, devoted to the reissuing of discs that are now collector's items, and to new recordings of the top men in the field of hot jazz. The list is long, and only a few may be noted here — Asch, Beacon, Blue Note, Commodore, Firestone, Hit, Jazz Information, Keynote, Musi-craft and Signature. This last firm re-issues at present a series of early Paramount records that includes such names as King Oliver, Ida Cox and Ma Rainey. The Asch album *Jazz Variations* is an assortment — reissues of the bands of Fletcher Henderson and Jess Stacy, and a new James P. Johnson, *Snowy Morning Blues*. Johnson still stands with jazz fans as one of the front-rank pianists, and Blue Note has recently added to the list of his recordings eight new twelve-inch sides, of which I prefer *Arkansas Blues* and *Mule Walk Stomp*. Commodore puts out four new sides devoted to the band that played at the Met, under the name of Leon-

ard Feather's All-Star Band, and admirers of Coleman Hawkins will find him in true form in *My Ideal*. My preference is for *Esquire Blues*, with eloquent solos by each of the men in turn, although I find the ending abrupt. *Mop Mop*, with its harsh-sounding unisons and artificial rhythm seems to have a spurious energy, nor do I think the tunefulness of *Esquire Bounce* will wear well. New records of the Hampton Sextet, with Hampton on piano in *Homeward Bound*, on drums in *Salty Papa Blues* (Keynote) are just out, but what will happen to the edition is uncertain, for Hampton is under contract to Decca, and already there is squabbling. Decca at present is too busy coining money with the albums of music from *Oklahoma* and *One Touch of Venus* (to be followed by *Winged Victory* and *Carmen Jones*) to pause and consider the cause of righteous jazz, but a second Red Nichols album is promised before too long. A brand new Ellington to appear under Victor has *Main Stem* on one side, *Johnny Come Late-ly* on the other. Both these vigorous numbers show the band to be in top form, resonant and colorful but not lush, with exhilarating solo work from Rex Stewart and Johnny Hodges. In spite of Petrillo there is plenty of activity around, and apparently there are still plenty of ways of finding material for at least a limited edition. But do not be astonished if you find your record played out after the tenth time.