

less to the credit of the Ballet Theatre than to that of the Ballet Caravan which first commissioned it.

The Ballet Theatre novelties this year, *Gala Performance*, *Pas de Quatre*, *Capriccioso*, and *Three Virgins and a Devil*, are all right (the first is even "dandy-iste") but not particularly novel. The dancers are all talented and sincere and I can add nothing to the praise given them here last year by Peter Lindamood. I was much moved by Nemchinova in *Swan Lake*. She brought on the stage the

radiance of the great style, and showed again how enormous is the difference, even in a technical point, between the competent and the imaginatively real.

### III

Anna Sokolow's recital was interesting on account of the three Revueltas pieces played. As a dancer, Miss Sokolow has a very fine thing, the innocent style, but though like a little girl she can be innocently wonderful, that only happens a few times in the course of an entire evening; too few, really.

## OVER THE AIR

—By CHARLES MILLS—

**E**VEN the most ardent modern-music lovers have at the present moment no reasonable complaint of neglect by the radio. A mere listing of all the contemporary works heard during the last two months would completely fill this column. However rare and temporary, that is a grateful condition. Let us hope that it will become more usual, more standard. Indeed it must if the networks are to keep pace with our expanding cultural needs.

WNYC runs off with major honors for sending out its American Music Festival to the metropolitan area. Whether the festival presented our most important and significant works may be open to question, but certainly a fairly varied, interesting cross-section of American talent was covered. Aaron Copland's *An Outdoor Overture* made a favorable opening for the first concert, but what followed was a let-down both in musical quality and as radio entertainment. *Station W GZBX*, a satirical suite by Philip James, turned out to be an unfunny re-

minder of the good old days when radio was peppered with static and other objectionable noises. As a piece of concert music it is merely a specifically dated commentary: as radio music it's too much like the object of its parody. George Gershwin's *Concerto in F* for piano and orchestra brightened up things for a moment, but the orchestral texture of this piece is not clean enough to sound well on the air and its musical interest wears thin. *Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight*, Elie Siegmeister's choral work, sounded dull and pretentious without any compensating virtues of strength or logic. A moment of freshness came to the program with Morton Gould's *Spiritual* for string choir and orchestra, but that soon stretched out too long; some sections are a trifle overwritten. Gould's gifts are best perhaps in lighter vein. The closing work, Deems Taylor's *Highwayman*, for baritone, chorus and orchestra, is music ripe with slushy harmonies, thick, heavy orchestration, and stale, derivative ro-

manticism.

Other festival programs contained many fine orchestral works — Roy Harris' direct and lyric *Third Symphony* and the well heard, imaginative and entertaining *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* by Nicolai Berezowsky. Walter Piston's *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* remains as dry and charming as ever, despite its slightly cynical, amusing tongue-in-the-cheek quality. A sensitive choice of timbres and well balanced writing in general insure good air reception for this score. It was Piston, in fact, who once said he believed works which sound well in a concert should as a matter of course also take well over the microphone. His own music seems to bear him out, and of course there is general truth in his view, but it is also a little narrow. Almost certainly, tonal technic is destined to be modified, even to actual changes in composition methods, when the radio becomes a practical incentive to serious composers.

Of the film music broadcast in the festival, Copland's *Our Town* appeared the most successful. Douglas Moore's *Youth Gets a Break* was a rather pale reflection of the spirit of pre-swing days. Had the composer ever heard a real jam session, or absorbed the spirited rhythms of our up-to-date dance bands? Many examples of the true style were heard in the programs devoted to "folk music of the city." Good and bad jazz were played by the hour. Only the most devoted students of swing could have listened to, much less liked it all. It's just not the kind of thing one can take for very long. Interesting and clever, strident and savage, even inspired at times, it always beats the same fatal metre. As jungle tom-tom it excites dancers and even onlookers,

but it makes a poor staple for concert music. One of the instrumental problems of the radio jam session is the failure of long drum solos to take well over the air. Only television will bring complete justice to that kind of orgy; imagine what it will do for Gene Krupa. However, the jazz numbers were much more interesting than the Caribbean programs, which had neither skilled technic nor convincing spirit. Worse yet from the standpoint of radio entertainment, was the American Indian music program, which was too utterly monotonous and repetitive. Specialists in exotica and the musicologists may want to hear these authentic natives wail and holler to the accompaniment of drums and rattles, but the result doesn't make a well balanced show for the ear alone. Sole interesting note was the sound of a primitive Indian flute, nostalgic and fiercely out-of-tune.

The chamber music concerts of the festival were both revealing and promising. Leonard Bernstein's *Sonata for Violin and Piano* has fresh and vital qualities, youthful energy. One good program was devoted entirely to Norman Cazden's chamber sonatas. The *Sonata for Solo Clarinet* was more grateful than its moody companion for viola, but more entertaining than either was Cazden's *Sonata for Clarinet and Viola*, which shows a hitherto inhibited flair for real charm and humor. An unusual but very effective combination was Norman Dello Joio's *Trio for Clarinet, French Horn and Bassoon*; this made very good radio music. Although his materials are by now familiar, his treatment is sensitive and amusing.

Besides the festival, WNYC put on another very important series, the idea of which the larger networks could well af-

ford to take up. Each week the music of an American composer is played by the N.Y.A. orchestra; the program is followed by an interview with the composer. After Harris' *Third Symphony* was performed – and fairly well at that – Harris was asked on the spot to write a theme signature for the program, to which he immediately agreed. The same series offered Virgil Thomson's suite from his ballet *Filling Station*. It makes poor radio music, appearing in this form to be slung together without love or patience. Paul Creston's *Two Choric Dances* for orchestra also appeared on one of these programs. The first is emotionally static, the second more interesting orchestrally with, in general, a more convincing feeling of inner impulse.

Bela Bartok's very interesting *String Quartet, Number 5* was also heard on this station. It was beautifully played by the Kolisch String Quartet. Although the work is a bit tortured, it justifies its individualistic methods by an amazing fertility of instrumental and tonal device. Bartok's economy and clarity must be apparent to all, however one may feel about the spiritual and emotional content of his ideas.

Over WOR, Philip James as guest conductor gave us Darius Milhaud's *Fourth Little Symphony for Strings*. This three-movement work, scored for ten solo string voices, was very well contrived in sonorities, weight and balance. The many high harmonics and deep basses sound well over the mike. Also from this station came Paul Hindemith's eloquent *Meditation for Viola and Piano*, beautifully performed by Milton Kay at the piano and Milton Katims at the viola.

WQXR did itself proud by presenting Copland as guest on the program called

"I know what I like." Copland's choice ran from recordings of Belgian Congo rhythms and primitive Mexican music to Milhaud's *Création du Monde* and Hindemith's entombment section from *Mathis der Maler*, the latter to show that all modern composers don't depend entirely on rhythmic or clever effects for successful expression. The introduction and polka from Walter Piston's *Incredible Flutist* he offered as an all-around knock-out job by an American, and a college professor at that. Copland said he hoped that he had made a good case for music without the masterwork label, music off the beaten track.

WQXR also presented the radio premiere of *Abasuerus and Esther*, an opera by the Polish refugee, Ignatz Waghalter, a dreary work with dull, conventional harmonies, mostly minor, and melancholy moods that were listless and unconvincing. A brilliant contrast to this sad tale was Gian-Carlo Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*, put on by the Philadelphia Opera Company over station WJZ. Several slight changes were made in the orchestration; the brilliant new overture, added for the concert performance, confirms the composer's talent for a light, running, flowing style of writing. This successful work has charm and wears amazingly well. Another piece from Philadelphia, this one over WEA, was Stravinsky's *Concerto for Two Pianos* fairly well played by Leonard Bernstein and Annette Elkanova. It is a beautiful work, we should hear it more often.

Howard Barlow over WABC conducted *November*, a suite for orchestra by the Austrian-born Erich Zeisl. These four descriptive pieces are competent enough, but undistinguished and without freshness. On the same program

Berezowsky appeared as soloist for his own *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*. This is a very natural kind of music, especially beautiful in the splendid slow movement and gratefully entertaining throughout in the treatment of the solo violin. Also heard on this station was a disappointing and only mildly amusing work, Darius Milhaud's *Saudades do Brasil*. These four early dances, in popular Brazilian rhythms, are a good example of how very bad the composer can be when he's careless. However, a whole set of works no better than this was played over the same station by Hugo Balzo, a

South American pianist whose two concerts were devoted to Uruguayan and Brazilian talents which as a whole lacked distinction, originality, and character. The best piece was by Villa-Lobos, *A Lenda do Caboclo*, a rich, dissonant mosaic, more sensitive than most of his writing but just as monotonous. It is difficult to know whether all these South American pieces are being performed to show a natural affinity of culture and temperament, or as part of the now all-inclusive national defense policy. At any rate, we appear to be in for a lot of tangos.