

thedral chimes, which almost gave the effect. What they finally recorded was the *echo* of the bells, cutting the impact of the clang out of the sound-track and leaving only the hollow reverberation. This is a sample of the tone-sorcery possible to film-music, if and when the industry wakes up to the need for experiment.

Of course there are bad spots, mo-

ments of banality and overstriving for effect. The film after all has been designed for mass consumption. But what is accomplished as a whole remains important. This is the first of a series Dieterle is making independently, in which he plans to use young, unrecognized artistic forces, musical, literary, and dramatic. Let's hope that the rest of the productions attain the level of this one.

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

ALTHOUGH we are now all presumably absorbed in meeting the problems of national destiny, I still don't see why the big networks can't show some stiff competition in exploiting our native music. In fact, and in view of the emergency, that's just what they should be doing. Yet competition of this kind is what we are not getting, or apparently very likely to get. An overwhelming lead with American works has been taken by C. B. S. who seem to have clinched it for the winter. Though the Columbia hook-up merits its well-earned orchids, it would be more fun if N.B.C. and M.B.C. were in the arena too and fighting for place.

WABC now has a set of weekly series partially or entirely devoted to American music — "Columbia's American Music Festival" and also the "Milestones in American Music." Not all the programs contain distinctive, important or vitally entertaining compositions, and no one can really demand that much. But they mark a step forward, healthy and necessary. A refreshing composition heard on the

American Festival series was David Diamond's *Elegy in Memory of Ravel*, a piece free of strict stylistic confinements and an expression of ingenuous feeling and great simplicity. This piece, revised from an earlier score for strings and percussion, is orchestrated originally and effectively. From the standpoint of radio it was particularly interesting in sonority and timbre, and surely more grateful than the first version for brass, harps, and percussion, although that was much more exciting.

The harmonic textures in this music are disarmingly persuasive and entertaining. They have great richness, and are neither soggy nor fat. There are also strong unity of color, severe economy, and no dull moments. The form is clear in design, though some may find a bit curious the frequent dynamic indentations. The mood is convincing, even if a little too dreary and grey. The greyness may be due perhaps to a great emphasis on melancholy subjectivity, appropriate enough for elegiac effect. As a whole the composition is highly successful; the

treatment throughout is objective and free in its flexibility. The performance by Howard Barlow and the Columbia Concert Orchestra was competent enough in intonation and dynamics, but there was a slight feeling of unsympathetic routine, especially toward the very expressive phrasings and the tempi in general. This is exceptional, not a habit with Barlow's orchestra. Let us hope his fine musicians will continue to bring us music like this, contemporary and stimulating.

Another C. B. S. offering was the first performance anywhere of Bernard Herrmann's *Symphony No. 1 for Orchestra*. This large, four-movement piece sounded like one more industrious conventional attempt to add to the enormous literature of big works whose tradition stems from the *Eroica*. The first movement was quite properly in sonata-allegro form, at least in design and shape and it made a fair amount of respectable sense, considering the purpose. One couldn't down the feeling however that the materials were bound in a straight-jacket — as if they needed a good, healthy, free-for-all ballet, opera or movie score to set them free. As thematic germs they were a bit super-size, and so of course the development section was a little embarrassed with itself. The pastoral subordinate theme, more musically convincing than the dramatic-tragic opening motive, seemed, in the working out of its many frenzied and striking outbursts to be curiously timed, often just missing a real effect. Some of these frustrated moments were weakened perhaps by the violently extravagant instrumental garb. The scherzo movement was more natural and flowing as a whole, although the outer sections were a bit heavy. In quality of materials the middle section trio

proved far superior to any other part of the symphony, and some gratefully dissonant counterpoint in little woodwind dialogues made one even patient enough to sit through two other movements; an *élégie*, which had an exquisitely beautiful ending, just a whispering touch of basses (but which came far, far too late) and a finale rondo with epilogue, a uselessly complicated affair, wild and pagan in mood, but more coarse than passionate. With all its faults, and they are many and obvious, this piece gives ample evidence of fertile imagination and an inventive energy that seem a little dogmatically confident. They are perhaps misdirected in this particular work.

A brilliantly diverting score was Charles Jones' *Suite For Small Orchestra*, beautifully played by Barlow and the Columbia Orchestra. Although not important, it is definitely a success as entertainment, abounding in sparkle and exciting rhythms which, as everyone knows, only come off when they're genuine. The melodic writing seemed a bit slight and easy, but the harmonic texture throughout is fresh, natural and stylistically unified. The weakness of this amusing suite was a monotonous handling of certain cunning little effects that lose their charm on repetition.

Among the pleasanter items on Columbia's Philharmonic broadcasts this fall were the two pieces by Roy Harris. *A Folk Dance for Strings and Percussion*, when isolated from its original setting in the *Folk Song Symphony*, makes an extremely short orchestral bit, but it is a clean-cut and well made little morsel at any rate, and if shrewdly spotted on a program, as it was not at this hearing, might quite advantageously replace some of the stale and threadbare miniatures of

the more usual variety. His choral piece, *Freedom's Land*, is a simple, unsophisticated patriotic song for mixed chorus based on the Archibald MacLeish poem *The Western Sky*, and seems to achieve its unpretentious aim quite adequately. Also on these Philharmonic broadcasts was a *Guaracho* by Morton Gould, which is a movement from his *Symphonette*. Gould has a flair for this type of writing. It is slightly, only slightly better than his weekly clam-bakes at WOR.

III

Which brings us to the somewhat disappointing present showing of Mutual. Last year was extremely good. If there is to be a change for the better, the pile of Music Box Operas by Robert Russell Bennett cannot continue indefinitely. The last one (Number 5), *My Old Kentucky Home*, came complete with Southern banjo effects and syrupy harmony, a hybrid of barber-shop, blues and Broadway. These harmless, hopeless programs got off to a fair start, but they grow progressively weaker as an entertainment feature. What holds them up at all is the business of amusing plot and dialogue. The vocal lines are curiously mechanical, dull in musical interest, often awkwardly unsuited to verbal inflections and meanings. The most natural bits are the pure, unadulterated jazz songs, the tin-pan pieces that don't try to forget their native alley. Not all of Bennett's programs present his own music box operas. *Impressions of Coney Island*, a piece for orchestra by Anthony Paganucci, is a sample of something else again. I hope I'm right in thinking this was offered all in fun; even so it remains the A-1 prize package of sure-fire stock routines, complete with Oriental tripe, unfunny carnivalesque, sentimental slush, tinsel,

"weird" stuff, and a clap-trap flourish for coda — authentic, pure corn, right off the cob. Another guest on the Bennett free-for-alls was Henry Brant, who seemed to divine the exactly correct temperature of things, for he brought along his own tin whistle, and proceeded to play it! The title of this work was *Homage to the Marx Brothers*; whether they were pleased or not, Brant sounded slap-happy enough.

WOR also purveys a more dignified brand of corn. *The Humors of Bath* by Julian Herbage, and *Winton Suite* by Adam Carse, two orchestral pieces performed by Alfred Wallenstein's Orchestra, are British stuffiness at its most boring. This music is really a curious exhibit. It was composed by musicians actually alive today, who have a case of arrested development, and are proud of it. What a display of gusto, of jaunty, "sportive," rhythms right out of the gay nineties! This kind of drivel makes its way a bit too often on what has been till recently a quite distinguished radio program.

N. B. C.'s most recent contemporary offerings of any importance date back to Frank Black's New American Music Series. These should most certainly be revived. Surely there must be some half hour of soap opera a little more dispensable to our civilization than a program so progressive and so musically valuable. What is this line about the absence of mass appeal in symphonic programs? The polls show that serious music programs are on the way up. And if the networks won't do their bit to preserve these outlets today, what will happen later? From now on it will be interesting to check on how much, if any, contemporary music, American or European, is played

by the N. B. C. Symphony, and what new programs are established or even tried out. The facilities are all there, are abundantly, luxuriously well within the National's set-up. They only need to be used.

Among the best of last spring and summer's programs sent by N. B. C. was the one that, as part of the radio festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, gave us the late Charles Naginski's *Sinfonietta for Chamber Orchestra*. This is a distinguished work which makes exceptionally good radio music. It sounds in fact almost as if it had been conceived for that medium. A hard and fast line cannot be drawn between what is and is not good for radio. But one demonstrable asset of this particular work was the successful use of subtle timbres, quite often at the dynamic level of *piano* or even less, woven in thematic devices throughout the fabric of the composition. Obviously, the soft chalameau clarinets or the deep flutes, along with delicate pizzicati on the strings are at a distinct advantage when their volume is strengthened by nearness to or sensitive affinity with a microphone. Another very good

N. B. C. work was the Concertino for *Flute and Strings* by Norman dello Joio, a composition well conceived for the solo instrument and skillfully managed in the accompaniment as well. The piece has a light running quality in its allegro sections, which cannot be dismissed as merely facile. The slower portions are expressive, perhaps even a little too pallidly sentimental, but the talent shown here is destined to develop and go much further.

NYC continues to improve steadily in its broadcasting of modern recorded works, but actual performances such as that by the Kolisch strings of Bartok's *Third Quartet* remain all too rare.

A series called "Meet American Composers" has been started at WQXR. It is conducted by Sigmund Spaeth and presents guests of varying distinction. Not much has come of it so far. The music is strictly from recordings and much of the time goes to early Americans or fairly conventional contemporaries. The idea, however, is promising. What the venture needs is to utilize more exciting material, and to indulge less in a generally condescending tone.