

a lack of contrast and a length that defies close attention. At times one wished for the volume of the symphony orchestra to supplement the hard glitter of the piano and give the all-compelling sound needed. Yet, after all has been set against it that should be, the *Ballet Mécanique*, if judiciously cut, would well merit further hearing.

As for the riot, the New York audience, ever polite, employed that cruelest weapon, a gentle apathy. The circus proved a wash-out and the elaborate and sensational publicity merely served to aggravate a bad criticism. The real gifts of Mr. Antheil were obscured in a network of boasts, criticisms and arguments. It is only to be hoped that when Antheil again returns to these shores with the fruits of future labors, he will earn the serious attention his talent deserves and not be exploited as material for the cheap, journalistic drum-beating of sideshow barkers.

Richard Hammond

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

STRIPPED of publicity and palaver and considered in the perspective of six performances, *The King's Henchman* wears a drab look. This should not be a cause for surprise. To a degree unparalleled in the record of American music, the Taylor-Millay opera had greatness thrust upon it. Its glorification was largely the result of conditions which one year create a heaven-inflaming artist out of a pleasantly talented baritone and the next proclaim a half-baked school girl an empress of song. Its progress has been instructive and should become more so. *The King's Henchman* has consistently sold out the Metropolitan Opera House to palpitatingly expectant throngs. But the applause and obvious favor of these audiences have been strikingly disproportionate to their numbers. The undercurrent of disappointment has been inescapable.

The King's Henchman is a facile, honest, well-intentioned piece of work. But instead of the plumed accomplishment and prodigious beacon discerned in various irresponsible (and, for that matter, responsible) quarters it is a thing basically sterile and commonplace. That Deems Taylor's music proceeds from

easily recognized sources is not the point. Many works, frankly derivative, like *Haensel and Gretel* or *L'Amore dei Tre Re*, are valid and significant documents, with a definite and ponderable contribution. Even Mr. Taylor's modest and charming little *Looking Glass* suite may be admitted to this category. But his opera achieves little beyond an accretion of amiable Wagnerian, Debussyan, and Moussorgskian platitudes alloyed with baser matters. The pattern is orthodox, the fabric machine-made, the process of manufacture only too obvious, the absence of a creative impulse only too palpable. And occasional little melodic effects, turns of phrase and pretty devices of harmony and modulation that Mr. Taylor has made known in previous compositions can no more be construed as projections of an essential individuality than blue eyes or brown hair can be interpreted as signs of some personal characteristic or temperamental slant.

That the musical idiom of *The King's Henchman* is in no sense adventurous seems to have provided partisans of the work with one great cause for rejoicing. Undoubtedly Mr. Taylor must be commended for having resisted any temptation to make a gratuitous stir by the use of sensational means uncongenial to his nature. But this does not alter the fact that his opera lacks even the interest of harmonic or orchestral experimentation which might lend it a tang of contemporary significance and alert enterprise. Better novelty that says little than conventionality which says no more.

"The best American opera so far" has been the virtually unchallenged qualification of the work. Just what does this mean? Mr. Taylor has been credited with a sense of the theatre over and above the composers of American opera who have played the losing game these past eighteen years—men like Frederick Converse, Horatio Parker, Walter Damrosch, Victor Herbert, Reginald de Koven, Henry Hadley, Charles Wakefield Cadman, Joseph Breil. Now some of *The King's Henchman* is, in a general sense, "good theatre," despite the handicap of Edna Saint-Vincent Millay's absurdly touted book with its affectations and preciosities, its sophomoric conceits, its verbal awkwardness, its pseudo-poetics, and its lack of anything like

real dramatic conflict. It is theatrical sense that enables the composer to deal with the rapid, ejaculatory chatter of most of the first act and which drives him to write that terrible glee club ensemble to bring down the curtain on something properly effervescent and noisy. But it was not skillful "theatre" that helped him fashion the second act—the episode of the knight's forest encounter with the lady of his mission—which drags itself heavily onward in music of a fatal chromatic sameness, void of characterization, monotonous in rhythm, strained in melody. At no performance has the public responded to this act as by all calculation it should. It hangs fire where it was most meant to blaze.

There were scenes and music of indisputable operatic quality and stage worth in Damrosch's *Cyrano*, in Cadman's *Shanewis*, in Herbert's *Natoma* and even in De Koven's paltry *Canterbury Pilgrims*. It is by no means a certainty in minds inclined to press the point that the total sum of theatrical skill and operatic intuition is appreciably greater in *The King's Henchman* than it was in *Natoma* or *Cyrano*. Revisited, those works of a bygone and more exigent day might assume a strange, unwonted lustre. The suspicion is in order that if *The King's Henchman* is really as great as claimed, they are far from being as bad as painted.

Herbert Peyser

COPLAND'S JAZZ CONCERTO IN BOSTON

ASSUREDLY Mr. Koussevitzky manifested courage and the sincerity of his convictions when he introduced Copland's *Piano Concerto* to the conservative audiences of the Boston Symphony concerts early this year. His courage is the result of an admirable perception that contemporary music, even of a radical type, has a right to figure on programs of an avowedly educational institution. Despite the preference of his public for pieces of established or even waning repute, Mr. Koussevitzky has continued to present new music which, in his opinion, was worthy to be made known. In Aaron Copland's case, the performances in 1924 of his *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* and in the