

—and one wonders whether the artistic sum total of the *Suite* is commensurate with the amount of ingenuity and complexity involved. Still, they remain fascinating works to study.

RECORDS

The Christmas rush was too much for our recording companies, so far as modern music goes. They seem to think Santa Claus hasn't gotten beyond Brahms. With the exception of Darius Milhaud's *Piano Concerto* there was a complete hiatus,—and that work we shall concern ourselves with next time.

IN THE THEATRE

—By VIRGIL THOMSON—

THREE SHOWS WITH MUSIC

ERIKA MANN'S *Pepper-Mill*, billed as an intimate revue, is neither the Chauve Souris culture-vaudeville nor yet the sort of small-but-costly girl-show formerly associated with the Music Box. It is the authentic European "literary cabaret," unpretentious, intellectual and actual, a form of art and entertainment that has flourished on the continent for longer than anybody knows and that is the parent stem of the *opéra-comique*, as distinguished from the *grand opéra*. I know the model better through its French than through its German representatives, because I have been more in France than I have in Germany, but I gather the essential formula to be the same. The Parisians call it the *revue chansonnière* or the *cabaret montmartrois*.

Its main function is satirical and corrective. Predominantly politics, but also society, manners, morals and the arts, are the subjects of its satire. Glorification of the home, of motherhood, of the American girl, of young love, of the luxury trades or of the white-slave traffic, all the preoccupations of what one might call the "serious" revue, are a "serious" business, and any theatre dealing principally in such merchandise is in the tradition of the serious, or devotional theatre. Such satirical numbers as occasionally get introduced therein, like Will Rogers in the Ziegfield Follies and the depression witticisms in *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, are usually incidental and inoffensive.

Just as a heavy or emotional tone is the mark of the devotional theatre, so is a light or intellectual tone the mark of the satirical theatre. The literary cabaret addresses itself to no tickling up of Tired Business Men. Still less does it provide Soul-States for Sensitive Stockbrokers. It presents with a minimum of devotional accessories (that is, lights, dresses, scenery, and fancy orchestration) a witty and often bitter comment on the follies and stupidities of the day. It is correctly referred to as "literary" because its strength lies in linguistic alacrity and verbal punch. Its chief glory in our day has been the type of actor known as a *chansonier*, the interpreter who is often also the author and composer of the satiric topical songs that make up the characteristic part of the program. *Aux deux ânes*, *Les Noctambules*, *Chez Fursy et Maurice*, and the *Théâtre de dix heures* are among the most famous of the ten or more theatres in Paris devoted to this form of entertainment. In such places and often exclusively in such places have functioned the modern masters of the lighter music-and-letters, from Yvette Guilbert to Jean Bastia, not forgetting Rip, Betove, and the late Vincent Hyspa, whose name now honors a public square, nor yet the great Satie himself, who played piano for eight years at *La Lune rousse*, who wrote there for Paulette Darty his unforgettable waltzes *Je te veux* and *Poudre d'Or*, and whose entire musical work is so informed with the spirit of satire and has so little to do with either clowning, masochism, or the luxury-trade that to this day it remains uncomprehended by all save those who find themselves a little bit at home in the unpretentious but definitely intellectual atmosphere of the *théâtre montmartrois*.

The present *Pepper-Mill* show is a good example of its species. There are three or four excellent performers. Therese Ghiese, Sybille Schloss, and Miss Mann herself are all first-class actresses and *diseuses*. John La Touche has a gift for bright words and sharp rhymes. John Beck rolls 'em off the seats with an Edna-Millay-on-the-radio burlesque. The highest spots, for me, were Miss Schloss's bitter and heartrending *Kinderlieder* and Mme. Ghiese's recitation of *Die Dumheit*, both in German, but not less affecting for that, even to one whose comprehension of spoken German is not always word for word.

Animating the whole show is a real anger and an irreducible bitterness about the state of Germany. I could have wished that bitterness to be less dragged-in-everywhere but rather concentrated in three or four knock-out numbers like the *Dumheit* poem. I think it would carry farther that way.

The music of the first program was not very good, mostly Europeanized jazz of the pseudo-elegant night club late-twenties school. Copland's *Demagog* song was weighted down by such banal words and such amateurish staging that it scarcely lifted the general music level. The most accurately adjusted accompaniment was a fake-Wagnerian tone-poem on two pianos to go with *Die Dumheit*.

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Transposing oneself from the genuinely comic to the supposedly sublime I have a few major complaints to register about *The Eternal Road* which turns out on presentation to be a sort of Jewish *Green Pastures*.

It is not such a good show, however, as the Negro *Green Pastures*. The play is too full of hokum. Also it is translated into stilted English. The decorative and spectacular aspects of the scene are banal and vulgar. The dancing is of an unbelievable ineptitude. From the visual as from the literary point of view, the show is just another boob-bumper, not even a very effective one, and one wouldn't bother about it in a serious magazine except maybe to deplore the situation that got so much Jewish money and so much Jewish talent spent on a show of such evident insincerity that certainly it can't do any good to anybody excepting to the people who have jobs in it.

Mr. Weill's music is a little bit better than all this. Not much, but a little bit. Let me give him his due. He seems to make just the right amount of music at just the right places and it sounds almost like just the right kind of music and it is skillfully composed and prettily orchestrated and the use of recorded instrumental accompaniments with real singing is so superbly carried out that practically everybody is fooled. Even granting Messrs. Reinhardt and Van Grove their due, the major credit for all this must certainly go to Mr. Weill. The man has a colossal *sens du théâtre*. His special mixture of recitando, par-

lando, and set-pieces, here as elsewhere, is nothing short of superb and is virtually unique today.

His special and far-from-unique mixture of musical styles is less happy. Now I am getting around to why I called the show a Jewish *Green Pastures* and why I say it isn't as good a show as the Negro *Green Pastures*. The subject-matter is that same Old-Testament story ending with the arrival at the Promised Land. The story-telling device, that is of the children's Sunday school in one case and of the reading of the scroll in the synagog in the other, is also the same. Yet one play had style, the other none. Perhaps the musical material of Negro life is easier to handle on account of its natural unity than the musical material of Jewish life. In any case, *Green Pastures* made musical sense and was convincing. It was also convincing historically, because the Bible story was told through the *locale* of the story-telling device, and also because that locale was a place and a time definitely existing in somebody's knowledge or memory and hence imaginable. It was also convincing linguistically for the same reason and equally and for the same reason convincing scenically, musically and humanly. The Bible-story parts of *The Eternal Road* are placed nowhere, not even in history-book times, that have any relation to the synagog-scenes, which are, I presume, nineteenth century Russian.

The visual model from which the ancient parts are drawn would seem to be Christian Sunday-school-card pictures, which are nineteenth-century art all right, but hardly associable in any obvious or convincing way with Russian ghettos. The language is the most stilted of translationese from nowhere. The musical material is everything a professional German musician has ever heard, operatic recitation, Protestant polyphony, Jewish cantorisms, American jazz, *Tristan and Isolde*, music-hall ballads, a bit of *chanson réaliste*, even Elizabethian madrigal-and-willow-song style (for David).

Now I have no complaint against Weill's well-known manner. On the contrary, that super-banal and super-sensitive debasement of late-German chromatic melody, so skillfully combined with an equally debased but sensitive chromaticism in harmony, a sort of consistent and determined cult of extreme weakness, is a very

strong thing. I admire it and I give myself to it with pleasure. When applied to a subject-matter suitable to its limitations, as in *Mahagonny*, it produces a work that has style and carrying power. So too in the *Dreigroschenoper*. Less in *Les Sept pechés capitaux*. Very little in *The Eternal Road*.

None the less, the music of *The Eternal Road* is the most interesting aspect of the show. I recommend it to composers' inspection. I cannot find, however, that *The Eternal Road* has much interest or existence beyond the professional realm. Such is the lack of any basic convention about time and place in the execution of the whole spectacle that it never gets out of the theatre. No convincing illusion is created, scenic, linguistic, musical, or human, excepting at moments that of a vaguely czarist persecution, and no consistent illusion is created at all. Hence my prediction of its ineffectiveness in creating that wave of sympathy for the Jewish people in their present world-plight that would be the only possible non-commercial justification for the deployment of so much Jewish money and talent.

Paul Bowles's music for *Dr. Faustus* is excellent. There isn't enough of it to interfere with the main business of the production, which is the recitation of Marlowe's "mighty" lines. What there is is of a rare musical richness and of a great precision. It is conceived, as is the whole production, in the "modernistic" manner and in the "functional" convention. The most excruciatingly musical should be able to listen to the orchestral interludes with pleasure, while the tone-deaf will not be dependent on them for a comprehension of the play. More nearly average people will probably find them expressive and pointed. They have also the historical interest of marking both by the professional workmanship of their texture and by their impeccable cut and placement Mr. Bowles's definite entry into musical big-time.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

—By GEORGE ANTHEIL—

THE musical man of the hour out here is Boris Morros, the small, genial, and Russian generalissimo of Paramount's