

Quartet No. 4; and *Duo* for violin and viola (Schott—Associated Music Publishers). His music is best when it is simplest, as in the *Serenade*. The best pages of this work make one hope that with a more defined individuality and less of a tendency to lean upon the academic formulae of Hindemith, Beck will succeed in bringing to fruition his early promise.

Felix Petyrek has written *Six Concert Etudes* for two pianos (Universal-Associated Music Publishers). Any addition to the restricted literature of two-piano music is of some value, no doubt. But those of us who have looked upon Petyrek as one of the best of the lesser men, have reason to be disappointed in these much too usual Etudes.

New Music (Jan. 1937) continues doggedly to track down new American talent and to foster the experimental. The talent on this occasion is one William H. Bailey who has written a violin and piano piece called, mysteriously, *Idless*. Since the composer in his notes, frankly admits the Schönberg influence, we shall merely add that it is pleasantly musical in spite of that. The experimental contribution is a *Dirge* for two pianos tuned one-quarter tone apart, by Mildred Couper. This looks like pretty grim stuff on paper. On the other hand, it may be a masterpiece, but unless we can persuade our only acquaintance who owns two pianos to have them tuned a quarter-tone apart we'll never know.

IN THE THEATRE

—By VIRGIL THOMSON—

Garrick, by Robert Simon and Albert Stoessel, is another Juilliard opera.

The Juilliard productions have been going on at the rate of two a year (one new and local, one foreign classic) for some time now. The local ones within my memory have been

Jack and the Beanstalk by Erskine and Gruenberg

Helen Retires by Erskine and Antheil

Malibran by Simon and Bennett

Garrick by Simon and Stoessel.

The common characteristics of the Juilliard operas (because they do fall into a type) would seem to be about as follows.

1. The plays, always by Erskine or Simon, treat historical or legendary characters (the usual material of opera) in the manner of the early twentieth-century spoken comedy-drama. They are comedy-dramas in costume, derived in Erskine's case from Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, in Simon's from Edward Sheldon's *Romance*.

2. The language of the libretti is always conversational and prose. Erskine leans toward the wise crack, Simon toward the straight bromide.

3. The music of the last three (I have not heard Gruenberg's) is of late-German derivation. It is usually heavily orchestrated and quite loud. Bennett, being more experienced in theatrical work, uses a lighter orchestral texture than the other two.

Now the Juilliard operas, in spite of the natural kindness of a rich metropolitan press toward a rich musical foundation, have never been an artistic success. Gruenberg's was the nearest. The musical world has been on the whole tolerant but bored at the last three.

I think I can indicate the reasons for this. The Juilliard School is a first-rate assemblage of music-teachers. As such it knows its business and the students perform admirably. Their execution, both orchestral and vocal, is always vigorous and distinguished. The artistic failure of the Juilliard operas cannot be blamed on them. The fault is in the nature of the works themselves and in the directorial policy which has chosen three of them in a row all just like one another. The basic misconceptions involved are as follows:

1. The comedy-drama, although a possible operatic formula, is not a very good one. It falls too easily between the high seriousness of religious tragedy or sexual melodrama on the one hand and the bitter intensities of social or political satire on the other. It usually lands in a morass of pretty placid sentimentality. Such libretti seldom inspire composers to the higher flights of musical invention. They can only be put to music (like *Der Rosenkavalier*) in the charming or sentimental manner. Even then only about once in a generation do they ever come off. To attempt four of

them in four years is a mistaken policy of production.

2. The language of operatic libretti *may* be prose in structure but it *must* be poetic in its concentration of a great deal of passionate meaning into a small space. Otherwise it needs no music, is in fact a drag on the rapidity with which music can communicate passionate meaning. A conversational or diffuse prose style is a wrong style for libretto-writing.

3. The late-German composers (roughly Wagner through Hindemith) whether of chamber or theatre music, are not good models of musical style for here and now. They are the last flowers of a whole century's fantastic and luxuriant decadence. They are all right for their time and place. Anything is that. But their complex harmonic and orchestral texture, loud, busy, ponderous and very tricky, is hardly the best medium for depicting our simple U.S.A. motivations or our interpretations of legendary ones, not to speak of its cumbersomeness as an accompaniment to our rapid and racy speech. Purcell and Sullivan for English declamation, Glinka, Weber and Verdi for the expressive use of the human voice and the correct treatment of the accompanying orchestra, these are the sound models of operatic procedure. Nothing but confusion has ever resulted from imitating a deliquescent art. That German art in the past seventy-five years has been a progressively deliquescent art, is, I believe, a matter of common knowledge to the musical world, even the German.

You will notice that I have not said anything about the personal talents of Messrs. Simon and Stoessel. This is not Simon's first libretto, nor Stoessel's first work for voices and orchestra. If they made *Garrick* the way they did, it is because they wanted it that way. I doubt if they wanted it quite so lacking in style. The lack of style is due, I think, to the basic misconceptions I have pointed out.

What is style? Style is carrying power. How is it achieved? It is not achieved by musical talent or literary skill. Those are always extra, the cherry on the icing. Style is achieved by a correct understanding of the basic problems involved in any given piece of work and in the kind or class of works the given piece belongs to. I have pointed out here what I consider to be the basic

misconceptions about musical theatre current chez Juilliard. If I am wrong in my definition of them, let someone please correct me by defining them differently. That some such basic misconceptions exist, and gravely, must be evident to everyone. Otherwise it is not comprehensible that an organization disposing of their financial, artistic and intellectual resources should lay three such eggs in a row.

WITH THE DANCERS

DOLLAR AND BALANCHINE

“**C**CLASSIC BALLET,” the new work at the Metropolitan by Dollar and Balanchine (to the *Piano Concerto in F-Minor* of Chopin) is excellent. It is swift, pleasant, interesting, and very well danced. And its moving quality (which a first night is bound to flatten out) will increase the more often it is repeated.

Beyond this, it shows that the American Ballet has grown up to be the first class institution it was meant to be. George Balanchine has done more than anyone could have expected in so short a time. The company is at home on the huge stage. They are becoming brilliant in virtuoso passages. Without losing their freshness, they emerge as individually interesting; by which I mean that last most exciting and most dangerous phase in a dancer's development when he not only can do brilliantly what he is supposed to, but adds to that an illumination from individual feeling.

I admire Balanchine extremely for the way he fosters this personal quality in his dancers. It is real theatre personality, in distinction to the fictitious kind common on Broadway which consists of projecting yourself with a fanatic intensity regardless of anything else on the stage. There are moments when this is fine, and occasions besides when a performer has to do it to save a show, the way the boy stuck his arm in the dyke. But too many soloists appear only in this catastrophic role. And they never get