

BACK TO THE "LONG-HAIRS"

We should, I suppose, be grateful for the one step taken by radio in the direction of contemporary music during the last few months, so let's skip the two steps back. The presence of Stravinsky and Bartok in New York inspired several programs in their honor. Stravinsky was heard on a Philharmonic broadcast and in a lecture-recital on his music from WQXR; also from WQXR came a Bartok program. I don't understand why we must be restricted to hearing Bartok's first two string quartets and the *Rhapsody*; those quartets are already fairly well known here and his presence might be expected to stimulate performances of the other four.

The final regional broadcast of the League of Composers was from New York and consisted of newly commissioned works by Marion Bauer, Norman Cazden, William Schuman and Randall Thompson. As a whole the program showed a noticeable preoccupation with modal writing and offered nothing in the least problematical. Most of this music was specially written for air transmission; it would be interesting therefore to know whether the result was due to a deliberate attempt to "find" the radio audience, or whether it indicated a more general mass retreat into the past. The compositions were handled with varying degrees of skill, but only Schuman's

Quartet (commissioned for a Town Hall premiere) revealed an awareness of the contemporary scene.

Toscanini's NBC performance of Harris' *Third Symphony* was of course a notable event. One can only hope it will not remain an isolated phenomenon. What we need is less effort devoted to a new *Aida* overture, less loving care in the preparation of a *William Tell* and a more consistent program of worth-while contemporary music.

Notes at random: WQXR has recently given two recorded programs of Harris' music. On one of them, the composer in person presented his "rhythm-of-race" theory. I wonder if he feels that it "can't happen here" and that therefore, because of immunity, all this doesn't really matter; or that it can happen here and would be a fine thing. . . . Villa-Lobos was not heard at his best in a "Salute of the Americas" program from Brazil. The first performance of his *New York Skyline Melody* sounded an unhappy World-fair note. . . . Norman Dello Joio's refreshing *Sonata* for violin and piano was heard over WNYC's "Composers of Today and Tomorrow" series. This is completely uninhibited music; full of ideas, going its own merry way with no concern for tortured theorizing. . . . Wallenstein continues to give programs over WOR which at least avoid the hackneyed; little known music of the past and such scores as Honegger's music for the film *Harvest*.

ON THE FILM FRONT

By PAUL BOWLES

THERE's not much to talk about this time. Franz Waxman's score for *Re-*

becca is not even as good as Hitchcock's direction, which in this film is certainly

no great shakes, considering his past record. Of course there was a lot of music to be written for the film, the first part of which has an almost constant background of strings. These lush sounds are a good deal in evidence throughout, and the ear is soon satiated. The passage where the harp clears the way for some whole-tone business was evidently meant to be a tonal tour-de-force. Occasionally a spot of dramatic interest appears, but in general the musical ideas lack imagination, a fault very noticeable, for instance, in the fanciful introduction to the film. Here you have a delicate passage where the utmost care should have been taken to establish the right mood to fit the particular kind of unreality in the sequence. Instead, thick scoring bogged everything down. I suppose this is not Waxman's fault. However, knowing the weakness of Hollywood arrangers for that kind of instrumentation, he would have done better not to use his leitmotif at that point. The ubiquitous melody with its lingering chromatics has a certain decadent charm, and technically the fading in and out of sound and music are more than satisfactory. The best musical moment seemed to me Miss Fontaine's entrance into the morning room. (Waxman's next picture is *Boom Town*.)

For the strangely futile anti-war film *Lights Out in Europe*, Werner Janssen has contributed a long, full and varied score. If anything, it is too heterogeneous (and perhaps too long as well. Was it always necessary to continue with the music under the commentary?). The material is adequate but without distinction. The flow of sequences is often needlessly crude; the composer takes his film material too literally. Too often he wants a directly realistic accompaniment for each

scene. He uses the first, obvious thing for a given shot as though that shot existed independently of its cinematic context. In a documentary film of feature length this approach can be fatal. What the listener gets is, for instance, a fanfare for brass followed immediately by a long vamp of double-brass pizzicati, broken into by thirty or seconds so of drum-beating, then a very symphonic snatch that sounds like Scriabin leading into a pyramiding of flutter-tongue brasses, next a series of long agonizing dissonant chords without any relation to each other even in sonority, then some more drums (because the Nazis are marching), then some synchronized tympani banks for gunfire, then a few snarls on the trombones, and then back to the symphony, and so weiter. There is a truly offensive hay-pitching idyll, too. The final effect is somewhat disjointed and not really the best that could have been done, even for this peculiarly bland and aimless film. The music seems well played; it was directed by Janssen himself.

III

Milhaud has written a charming score for the French film *The Mayor's Dilemma*. There is nothing noteworthy about any part of the soundtrack except that the recording is better than usual. Yet it is all good because of Milhaud's presence. What one notices immediately is the high quality of the music itself, its simplicity, its impeccable taste, its rightness with regard to the scenes it assists. The orchestration is so à propos that one is sure Milhaud attended to every detail. There are a few typical Milhaud melodies, some good mock-military bits, a funeral march excellent in its restraint, and a convincing macabre passage. The love-music

somehow seems filtered through Debussy; it is less successful.

For a new low in film music hear what Kosma has done to *The Human Beast*. There is nothing here which doesn't come under the heading of cheap and dull. Often both the music and the reasons for its inclusion are completely incomprehensible. Perhaps it's due in part to censorship of the scenes which allegedly would stir criminal degenerates to action, but I doubt that the uncut music track had anything good in it. The charming rhythms that trains make running along the tracks and their hollow roaring as they pass through tunnels are the only excusable sounds in the film outside of the dialogue. Most of the music reminds me of the Indian stuff in old Westerns, only it's not quite so good. They used to play Grieg's *March of the Dwarfs*.

The Baker's Wife is so deservedly popular that I suppose I can mention it. What little music there is was written by one Vincent Scotto and is all right. There are gay rustic tunes, singing and some piccolos shrilling in chorus. Sometimes the recording sounds like what comes

out of an old 16 mm. sound projector, but that's the way French pictures are. For me the loveliest spot of sound was the realism of the village church-bell calling the population to morning mass: the slow preliminary tolls and then the quick clanging, while actually of the same ethnographical interest as the chime of a cafeteria's ticket-box in an American film, nevertheless give a great lift to the soundtrack.

III

We have a new horror to contend with. The worst film-music conceivable doesn't compare with what goes on during a television dramatic broadcast. Constant improvisation on the Novachord beneath the dialogue, so that all conversation sounds as if it were taking place on the Main Floor at Wanamaker's during the daily recital. Unbelievably bad. It seems that in September television may go commercial. It will be fun to see in what way the quality of the broadcasts can be lowered to suit the purposes of the companies advertising through the medium. Of course there's also the possibility that going commercial will help. We'll see.

WITH THE DANCERS

By PETER LINDAMOOD

KATHERINE DUNHAM is the first big news in the Negro dance. By virtue of taste, research and talent, she has produced a professional ballet which transmutes the scattered Negro rhythmic expression from its various regional idioms to formal theatre communication. Wherever he is—Africa, Haiti, Cuba, Southern United States or Harlem—the Negro retains a highly individual-

ized eroticism. Through pre-eminent muscularity he achieves acute atmosphere. Miss Dunham as a student realizes this basic capacity and as a dancer illustrates it. She simply puts her amazing body and sly, sensitive soul smack in the middle of things and then coaxes from her group every shred of writhe, shimmy, strut, stretch, yawn, somnolent enticement and clamorous viscera.