

"You Got to Get Out of the Way..."

EUGENE H. SAERCHINGER

VIRTUALLY every owner of a radio set anywhere in the United States or Canada can, and probably does, listen to transcribed music programs prefabricated in New York by one of the five major transcription houses of America. Four hundred and twenty-five stations subscribe to this company's disc library, and over three-quarters of them use the accompanying "continuity" scripts which arrange the music into twenty-one hours of regular weekly programs. Other services have similar scope.

"Continuity" is the word given to radio phrases like, "But first we invite you . . .," "Madame Hoheimer will now sing . . .," and other miscellaneous lines which pass through the ear unabsorbed. Like the literature found on soup cans, continuity is so taken for granted that most people regard it as a natural phenomenon. But after a year and a half of such work, I can testify that continuity is not natural. It is painstakingly created by hard-working, occasionally well-paid individuals dignified with the title "writer."

The continuity man's primary task is to make his words so unobtrusive that, in the well-known radio phrase, they will "get out of the way for the music." The pinnacle of success is reached only when his words slide so easily off the announcer's tongue and so smoothly through the listener's ear that no one is aware of their existence.

Complete self-effacement in composition is no easy goal, and to achieve it continuity often receives more detailed editing than a constitutional amendment. For instance, a writer creates a typical introduction:

And now, lovely Linda Carrol steps into the picture with a beautiful song. In romantic rhythm as bright as a brand-new dime, Linda sings "My Love Song."

The assistant script manager doesn't like the first two words. "And now" is found in every other introduction, he complains, and changes the words to "next" (which is used on every alternate occasion). The adjective

"lovely" should be reserved for "lovely Louise McDunna," so Linda Carrol must be described as "romantic." He doesn't like the cliché "steps into the picture" and replaces it with one he does—"takes the spotlight." Brand-new is proclaimed redundant, so he takes out "brand." Finally, he changes "bright as a new dime." He has no political objection to the Roosevelt dime, understand, but listeners may be wondering if you do mean it politically, when they should be listening to the music. "Dime" is changed to "penny." "You got to get out of the way for the music," he says.

The script manager himself sees the edited version and objects to "song" appearing twice. He changes one "song" to "melody." For rhythm, he replaces the "brand" in "brand-new." "Romantic" is now used twice, so "romantic Linda Carrol" becomes lovely again, and to hell with Louise McDunna. The revised version reads:

Next—lovely Linda Carrol takes the spotlight with a beautiful melody. In romantic rhythm as bright as a brand-new penny, Linda sings "My Love Song."

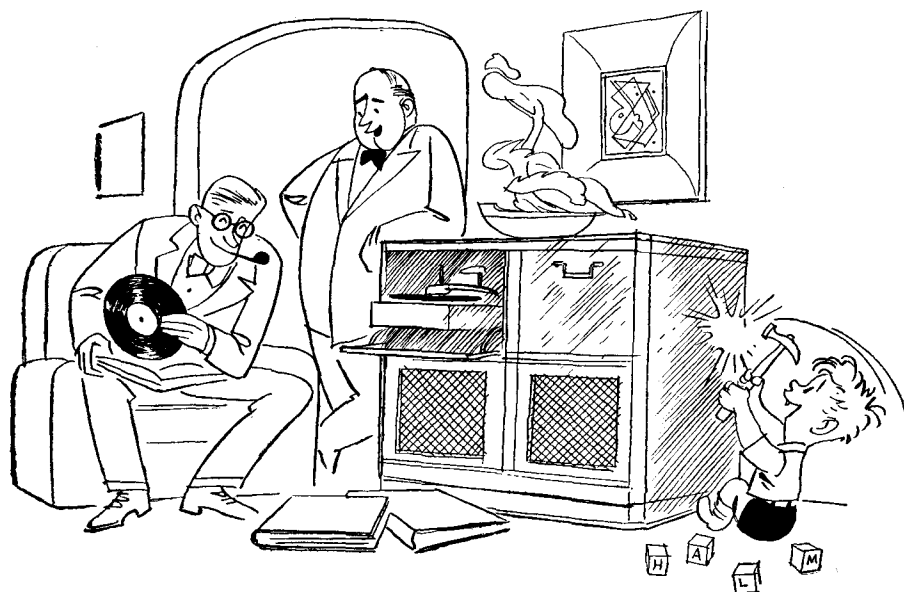
Of the original thirty-word introduction, ten words have now been

changed, two of them twice. To the hopelessly ignorant, the two versions might seem indistinguishable. But the experienced script manager knows how important it is to be sure the words step aside for the notes.

The continuity writers' hunt for unused adjectives is as devoted as the pearl diver's search for infected oysters. All writers know Roget's Thesaurus. Embittered cynics in the trade know other lexicons called "Adjective Finders." My colleagues and I at NBC constructed our own adjective finders, cross-referenced according to program-subject and meaning. Actually this is less impressive than it sounds, as we had need for only four meanings. For instance, six of the fifty-five scripts we wrote were hymn programs. For these shows we needed adjectives suggesting that the hymn was pretty good, and therefore a favorite; that the hymn was old, and therefore pretty good; that it was a stirring hymn, and therefore a favorite; and that it was a soothing hymn, and therefore pretty good. Under the first, or general praise, category, "inviting" and "beauteous" were popular. Under the "old" category, we used such words as "timeless," "everlasting," and "immortal." Under the heading of "stirring" hymns, we classified "inspirational," "radiant," and "glorifying." But the final, "soothing" category was my favorite, for here almost any degree of lugubrious unction was permissible. That's where we put "enrapturing," "blissful," and "care-drowning." Everyone in the office celebrated with bacchic delirium when someone added "soul-searing."

The word "familiar" is most widely used. The philosophy of radio is to give the audience what it likes best.

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"Listen to that strong primitive beat."

The Basic Record Library

Tchaikovsky

THE PIANO CONCERTOS

No. 1 in B flat minor. The recently released Rubinstein-Mitropoulos version (V-set 1159) restores to that pianist the preeminence he enjoyed prior to the overwrought collaboration of Horowitz and Toscanini. I am not enamored of the sound produced by the Minneapolis Orchestra, but surely the pianistic advantage is all with Rubinstein.

No. 2 in G. Shura Cherkassky's methodical work with this score as accompanied by Jacques Rachmilovich and the Santa Monica Symphony Orchestra (Concert Hall Society album AM) has revived an interest in it long overdue. The sound, however, is shallow, the plastic surfaces noisy.

THE VIOLIN CONCERTO

In D major. Taking recording into account as a weighty factor, the new Erica Morini-Desire Defauw accomplishment has more of the music rendered with justice than either the Heifetz-Barbirolli of the Milstein-Stock, the previous standards.

THE SYMPHONIES

No. 1 in G minor. Virtue has hardly had its reward for Rachmilovich, whose enterprise in recording this work with the Santa Monica Symphony has influenced Victor to issue a version by Sevitzyky and the Indianapolis Symphony which has been sitting on a shelf for many months. I don't hear much reason for choice between the interpretations of the two men, but the Sevitzyky orchestra is not only superior but much more creditably reproduced (V-set 1189).

No. 2 in C minor. A charming work, with much folk-song content, which ought to be better known than it is. Goossens and the Cincinnati Orchestra (V-set 790) are as good as one would want to hear in this music.

No. 3 in D. Another work by Tchaikovsky which has much fine musical content. The New Gregor Fitelberg for English Decca is a decided improvement on the previous Hans Kindler for Victor, and welcome since there was no other for many years. The London Philharmonic is reproduced with fine richness of sound (EDA 1479-83).

No. 4 in F minor. In domestic issues, nothing has appeared recently to surpass the Stokowski-NBC version in V-set 880, and it would take a considerable effort to do so in any

case. This is one of the best modern Stokowski performances, and still a sound job of reproduction.

No. 5 in F minor. Here is a work which can be done with plausible results in such a variety of ways that the consumer might well turn critic himself. My private inclination is to the Beecham-London Philharmonic (Columbia set 470), but there is much to be said for the playing of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Ormandy in V-set 828, and even more for the playing of the Boston Symphony under Koussevitzky in V-set 1057. Unquestionably the best available recording for sound alone, is the Paul Kletski-Philharmonia in C-set 701, a performance of fervent energy and



large effects. Good unsentimental tempi, too.

No. 6 in B minor. The final word on Furtwängler's "Pathetic" is, apparently, that it will no longer be pressed domestically by Victor. However, most shops dealing in imported records are able to supply it. Easier to come by, if a much different order of thing, is the Stokowski playing with the Hollywood Bowl Symphony. Big brassy doings, reproduced in impressive waves of sound. Calmer and less mannered, but also less well reproduced is a Rodzinski-Philharmonic-Symphony version in C-set 558. English Decca has an Adrian Boult-directed performance which I haven't had a chance to hear.

THE OVERTURES

Francesca da Rimini. For poetry and musical sense, I prefer the Beecham-London Philharmonic in C-set 447. Last month's issue of a Koussevitzky-Boston Symphony performance acquainted us with a forceful job, of standard character. Beecham's is more than that.

Hamlet. This is the lengthy form of opus 67a, rather than the abbreviated 67b, which is sometimes heard and has actually been recorded by Antal

Dorati and the London Philharmonic (Victor 13760). Constant Lambert is the director, with the Hallé Orchestra working well for him (C-set X243).

Marche Slave. Vital conducting by Artur Rodzinski makes his performance with the Cleveland Orchestra (C-11567) still recommendable, though the recording parade has passed it by as sound. Fiedler's Boston "Pops" (V-12006) is lacking the enlivening element noted above.

Romeo and Juliet. The recent Toscanini-NBC is easily the choice here, for it is strong, impassioned playing, and an excellent reproduction (V-set 1180). I have heard a Beecham-Royal Philharmonic which I greatly admire, but it is not yet available.

Solenelle-1812. Rodzinski's feeling for this order of Tchaikovsky is as evident here as in the "Marche Slave" noted above. It is summable in much the same terms (C-set X205).

MISCELLANEOUS ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Capriccio Italien. An odd neglect of this work by the domestic companies leaves the Stokowski of Philadelphia Orchestra days (V-6949-50) as the preferable among those at hand. It is grand music-making in the florid tradition represented by the score, though hardly as well-sounding as it would be by contemporary methods. Beecham's was a famous fiasco, the Fiedler of V-set 632 no such virtuoso in this manner as Stokowski.

From European sources, there should be mention of versions of the piano concertos by Benno Moisevitich for HMV, both conducted by George Weldon. No. 2 would seem of special interest, but I have not heard either. Among the symphonies, there is an excellent No. 4 by Constant Lambert and the Hallé Orchestra for Columbia (English Columbia DX 1096-1100). Nicolai Malko has done the "Pathetic" for HMV, with results unknown to me. A work I can recommend with enthusiasm as the best available is Adrian Boult's "Capriccio Italien" with the BBC Orchestra. It is not the latest-style English recording, but a prime example of previous style which had superb richness and sonority. Boult, moreover, is a considerable hand with this score (HMV DB 3956-57). Aside from Beecham's "Romeo and Juliet" already mentioned, there is a good but not Toscanini-superior one by Lambert, also a van Karajan on Columbia (see p. 59), a rousing "Marche Slave" by Boult for HMV and another by Anatol Fistoulari for Decca, and a Malko version of the "1812" for HMV. That is on its way here, but not yet at hand.

IRVING KOLODIN.