

The New Recordings

COMPOSITION, PERFORMER, ALBUM NUMBER, NUMBER OF RECORDS	ENGINEERING <i>Recording Technique, Surface</i>	PERFORMANCE AND CONTENT
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MUSIC FOR FILMS. (Excerpts by Gray, Rosza, Vaughan Williams, Spoliansky.) Queen's Hall Light Orch. Williams; Philharmonia Orch. Irving. Columbia MM 794 (3)

Philharmonia makes a good, solid, symphonic sound. Queen's Hall is sharper, clearer, lighter. Probably more accentuation. Both have good tonal range, fine acoustics.

(See below.) Selected material, evidently considered outstanding; as pure music it meanders, softsoaps—highly second rate. But you'll find you can't avoid "seeing" movies in the mind's eye, from beginning to end!

HAMLET. Laurence Olivier in excerpts from the film. Music by Wm. Walton. Philharmonia Orch. Mathieson. RCA Victor DM 1273 (3)

Direct from film sound track. Not top quality: a bit tinny, tonal range limited. But perfectly intelligible.

A most interesting comparison: utterly different styles explained in part by fact that Olivier speaks for visual close-up, using facial expression, gestures, as well as voice. Evans reads wholly for the ear, is far more emotional and emphatic in the speaking. Minus screen, Olivier is a bit colorless in tone, as he was over-dramatic in "Henry V" album, same circumstance.

Comparison:

HAMLET: SIX EXCERPTS. Maurice Evans. Incidental music by Roger Adams. Columbia MM 651 (3)

Very high quality, wide-range speech recording, perhaps best example to date. Rather close to mike; sibilants strong.

MUSIC FOR BACKGROUND

FILM music (see above) is a strange, hedged-in art form, for the most part confined to a small stylistic geography whose compass points are standardized moods and "scenes," which to be effective must be instantly recognizable—hence musically familiar; and this is a legitimate demand, after all, for moodless, nonsuggestive music, music devoted to musical ends, would defeat its purpose. So conventionalized are the film formulae—and so efficient—that, listening to the above film music sans film one cannot fight down the presence of the movie palace itself; it is no more possible to listen to this objectively as music than to a football band! Not that this, or any music is intrinsically suggestive of film stuff; this is no more than the enormous power of constant association which, working both ways, not only insures the undoubted and streamlined effectiveness of film music *en milieu* but binds the film composer in chrome-plated chains of convention, beyond which he will not go, without risk of intrusion of extraneous and irrelevant matter obscuring the simplicity and efficiency of the musico-dramatic relation.

It is a delicate balance. Music and speech do not naturally mix on equal terms. Only when one predominates wholly is the mixture good. Walton's early "Façade"

suite is a fine artistic monstrosity, for example, the music far too good, too demanding, insistent, for background, the Sitwell words too clever to miss (as in opera). Listen to the music, and the spoken words are an ugly, tuneless percussion, annoyingly in the way; listen to the text and the music will not keep its place but intrudes and confuses. A battle to the draw! Film music has long since bowed in this struggle and has found its role in a kind of feminine strength, aiding, abetting, suggesting, seldom to venture into the foreground and gaining force in its very position, chief aid and council to the drama itself. A vital spot no doubt. No film could be produced musicless. But what this has cost the music in masculinity, of dominance in its own right, what turns and twists of formlessness it has required, can scarcely be measured. Music, to mouth an axiom, has its own logic. The shape of music is like other shapes of art merely by coincidence. Perhaps the only reason we have film music today is the laxness with which in the last hundred years the sense of pure music has decayed in favor of extra-musical suggestion.

You may bet your bottom dollar Beethoven could not have written film music. Beethoven—in the background? Absurd. Try it.

—EDWARD TATNALL CANBY.

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Seeing Things

TWO COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

IT may seem odd to approach such an agreeable, if machine-made, comedy as Fay Kanin's "Goodbye, My Fancy"¹ with a copy in hand of James Bryant Conant's "Education in a Divided World"² [SRL Nov. 6]. To write about the magpie or the hummingbird in terms of the eagle or the owl might appear no less farfetched. The connection between the play and the book is nonetheless there. The differences in attack, depth, range, medium, and manner do not remove it. It persists if for no other reason than that Mrs. Kanin's serviceable Broadway concoction and President Conant's profound and important volume touch upon what in essence is the same subject. This is academic freedom, one of the many freedoms threatened in the present-day world.

To be sure, if Dr. Conant were the college president in "Goodbye, My Fancy," Mrs. Kanin would have no play. The point of her comedy, and the keystone of its plot, is that it deals with an educator who has so lost the courage he once possessed that Mrs. Kanin's heroine, a famous female war correspondent turned Congresswoman, decides she cannot become his wife though she has been in love with him since her undergraduate days. Instead, when she has returned to her Alma Mater to get an honorary degree, she marries a hard-boiled and eccentric *Life* photographer, with whom she has had an affair during the war. She chooses him because he is a liberal whose liberalism has not faded.

There are college presidents—no doubt too many of them—who have become intimidated by their reactionary trustees. In order to hold their jobs, they have surrendered their beliefs. They have made compromises which have unmade them as men worthy of respect. President Conant is not one of them. His liberalism, like

his courage, is beyond question. No college president in this country has a more realistic knowledge of the world as it is than he has gained by his membership on the National Defense Research Commission and his other invaluable Governmental services. None has a more positive faith in what is beckoning and abiding in the principles of democracy. None has met more unflinchingly the intellectual challenges of Communism, or written more eloquently about the dangers which everywhere imperil that enlightened and untrammelled inquiry necessary for teaching which is to be true, honest, and in the great tradition.

President Conant remains unfused in the confusions of the present. He is full of confidence where others have become the prey of easy and tempting negations. He is a leader, not a follower. Analytical though his mind is, his spirit is constructive. He does not believe in running from the ugly facts. His signal contribution is his awareness that the uglier they are, the more unblinkingly they must be faced.

In "Goodbye, My Fancy" the college president has ossified into a benevolent mouther of platitudes. As acted, and very well acted, by Conrad Nagel, he can claim all those façade qualities which create an impression of pleasing dignity. He has, however, shriveled into a mere locust



"If James Bryant Conant were the college president in 'Goodbye, My Fancy,' Fay Kanin would have no play."

shell of what he formerly was. His courage has gone. He is the tool of his trustees. Even on his own campus he solves issues by sidestepping them. Education in a free world has for him apparently dwindled into a matter of safeguarding fat endowments.

If the Congresswoman, who had hoped to marry him, is compelled to acknowledge his weakness, after forcing this college president into a tardy show of strength, his daughter is no less aware of his shortcomings. To her shame and heartbreak, she has seen through her father. Indeed, she has seen through him as completely as Mrs. Kanin has allowed audiences to do. His spinelessness is revealed in two ways; first, by his failure to back up a member of his faculty accused of being a "radical"; then, by his refusal to let his students see a documentary film making clear the full horrors of war. The film in question had been assembled by the Congresswoman in her days as a combat correspondent. The president has favored its showing until a conservative trustee objected to it on the ground that, when he saw it at a private preview, he felt like asking his wife to turn her head away at certain moments.

THE theatre being the theatre, and Broadway being Broadway, the issues in "Goodbye, My Fancy" have no other choice than to be somewhat diluted and to take the form of entertainment, amusing if synthetic, and cannily contrived with an eye on the box office. Plot; romancing, probable as well as improbable; comedy; scenes, big and little; campus atmosphere skilfully captured both by the players and in Donald Oenslager's interior with its "Dormitory Gothic"; and good, sharp wisecracks delivered by Shirley Booth as the Congresswoman's secretary with the devastating accuracy at which Miss Booth excels—all these combine to jostle the play into liveliness as an acceptable comedy, even when Mrs. Kanin has serious things to say.

In getting these said she is aided not only by the punch and drive of Sam Wanamaker's direction but by the general competence of her actors. Most particularly, she is aided by Mr. Wanamaker's own drily sardonic performance of the *Life* photographer and by Madeleine Carroll's radiant playing of the Congresswoman. Miss Carroll's is no easy assignment. She must be beautiful, good, courageous, capable, liberal, successful, and all-conquering. Not many actresses could meet these difficult demands without being smug, coy, conceited, and generally intolerable. Miss

¹ *GOODBYE, MY FANCY*, a new play by Fay Kanin. Directed by Sam Wanamaker. Setting by Donald Oenslager. Costumes by Emeline Roche. Presented by Michael Kanin in association with Richard Aldrich and Richard Myers. With a cast including Madeleine Carroll, Conrad Nagel, Shirley Booth, Sam Wanamaker, Lillian Foster, George Mitchell, Bethel Leslie, Sally Hester, Gerriane Raphael, Eda Heine-mann, Joseph Boland, Lulu Mae Hubbard, Mary Malone, etc. At the Morosco. Opened Nov. 17.

² *EDUCATION IN A DIVIDED WORLD*. By James Bryant Conant. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948. 235 pp. \$3.