

that plainly needs a stage and its trappings—that is to say, the opera house—for the best results. Steinberg's effort on behalf of Ernest Toch's Third Symphony (a Pulitzer prizewinner) was devotion itself, though the work lacks the substance to justify its length.

**P**AUL PARAY did himself and the New York musical public a service by bringing along for his first appearance as guest conductor with the New York Philharmonic - Symphony Orchestra the admirable pianist Clara Haskill, who hasn't played in this country since the Twenties. The years have grayed Mme. Haskill's hair and impeded her locomotion, but done nothing but good for her musicality, pianistic finesse and insight into such a work as the D minor concerto of Mozart. Withal that it is the most played of Mozart's works in this form, Mme. Haskill attacked it so sympathetically, with so much relevant vigor and appropriate expressiveness, as to make one rejoice in its beauties all over again. Certainly she should be heard in recital while in this country, and even, if one dares hope such a thing, in the two-piano literature of Mozart with Wanda Landowska.

For Paray this was a welcome opportunity to demonstrate how well the Philharmonic can sound when the leadership is like minded. His opening Haydn (D major, No. 96) symphony was full of verve and impulse, but also animated by a sense of the vibrance to be conveyed by warm string tone and throbbing tympani. He provided Mme. Haskill with a beautifully balanced background in the Mozart and then went on to a finely colored "La Mer," one among numerous Debussy scores he does with distinction. A not too consequential work of Henry Barraud ("Offrande a une Ombre") also had a first performance.

**T**HE Dutch pianist Cor de Groot made a first New York appearance in Town Hall after an American debut with the Cincinnati Orchestra earlier in November. De Groot demonstrated the wide-ranging, incisive technique that had been anticipated but less of poetic impulse or artistic flair than had been hoped for. In a sequence of Scarlatti (three sonatas), Beethoven ("Appassionata"), and Chopin ("Berceuse" and C sharp minor Scherzo), de Groot tended to a single manner of pianism that was drastically excessive for Scarlatti, a little out of balance for Beethoven, and truly adjusted only to Chopin. His fluency and clean articulation in the latter were good to hear, but there was little purpose in looking below the surface, for depths were non-existent. —IRVING KOLODIN.



## TV AND RADIO

### A Backward Giant-Step

**T**ELEVISION took a giant step backward recently with "Jack and the Beanstalk," a ninety-minute spectacular over NBC on the "Producers Showcase" program. It wasn't that this "original" musical-comedy version of the old nursery tale was a tasteless porridge of flatulent fantasy. It was simply that the whole presentation came off as a shocking hoax on trusting grownups.

This successor to NBC's earlier triumph, James M. Barrie's "Peter Pan," was given the full publicity build-up. More than a month before "Jack and the Beanstalk" was presented I read an interview in *The New York World-Telegram and Sun* in which Helen Deutsch, the author of NBC's "Jack and the Beanstalk," was reported as "hard at work bringing logic, psychological truth, comedy, and narrative excitement to that preposterous folk tale." Now fun is fun. But when you start plugging up the holes in Mother Goose it's time for audiences to watch out.

"In my version," the author said firmly, "I've invented a way for Jack to get the harp, the hen, and the bag of gold dramatically without stealing them. What mother would send a six-year-old out to sell a cow? My Jack is sixteen. I've given him some real social problems for that age. He's rejected by the town because the town thought his father was no good. And I've given him lots of obstacles to overcome. After all, the original story only runs three pages. Whenever he comes to a door I've made it just like the door on his mother's house. But don't worry, I'm not doing the psychiatric thing too big." Chill premonitions of "Oedipus Jack" plagued me, but NBC's saturation campaign—delivered with mounting excitement on the days immediately preceding the show—destroyed all doubts.

"Saturation" huckstering practically guarantees a rise in rating. Steve Allen gave "Jack and the Beanstalk" an extra pinpoint bombing on his Sunday program prior to the spectacular. My two young daughters were permitted to stay up past bedtime to watch Celeste Holm, Cyril Ritchard, and Joel Grey (Jack) run through a rehearsal of one of the songs in the show, merrily describing the twelve-foot giant. Again I felt a foreboding. Where was the terror? But a dwarf dances in the run-through (and

Cyril Ritchard can do no wrong in my kindergarten since he played Hook to Mary Martin's Pan), so the following evening the family was gathered at the RCA-Victor shrine.

The crash of our hopes was louder than the giant's fall. Three pages of crystallized legend distilled for centuries of storytelling are alive and magical. Ninety minutes of cardboard characters, mediocre imitations of the Rodgers and Hammerstein tunes, awkward camera tricks, belabored special effects, a brief earthbound climb for Jack up a section of a prop beanstalk (it was all a dream in a hay-wagon, anyway, in this version), a new husband for Jack's widowed mother at the happy end, and a girlfriend for teen-ager Jack—all this may well have been "logic, psychological truth, comedy, and narrative excitement" in NBC's book but any resemblance it bore to "that preposterous folk-tale" "Jack and the Beanstalk" was merely intentional.

**M**Y TWO children watched the spectacular with unlit eyes. "It's not like 'Peter Pan'," one commented rather sadly. The next morning my wife took our little girls to Westport's new library and borrowed an old illustrated version of the story so they could discover what "Jack and the Beanstalk" is really like. I weep for the experience that could have been theirs—the first three-dimensional realization of one of childhood's great tales. No saturation campaign will ever bring my brood to a TV folk-tale again. We've had it.

Television is within its rights to grind any literary bones it pleases for its spectacular pumpernickel, but the FCC ought to get after it for misrepresenting the real McCoy. Even Broadway, when it brings new theatrical excitement to Shaw's "Pygmalion," has the good grace to change the title to "My Fair Lady." When I tuned in "Jack and the Beanstalk" I traded a beautiful childhood memory for beans. It's not fair trade. I have but one sentiment for the peddlers who cleverly conned me and mine into "Jack and the Beanstalk." In the wise words of Dennis King, the narrator, speaking of Mad Meggie, the local Ophelia in Jack's town: "She may be mad. She knows this is nonsense—but she is giving the public what it wants in return for fresh laid eggs." —ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



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## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

### The Japanese Do It Again

IT IS now just about five years since most of us learned of the existence of a creative Japanese film industry—or of any Japanese films at all, for that matter—through Akira Kurosawa's bold, original "Rashomon." Kurosawa was quite properly praised at that time for his extraordinary ability to make a story of ancient Japan come alive on the screen, as well as for the physical beauty and intellectual stimulation of his picture. In the years that followed many of the films from Japan have reaffirmed this special facility of Japanese directors to deal persuasively with the past, and to tell the stories of *samurai*, priests, and hapless emperors with a delicacy of composition and refinement of gesture rare on the Western screen.

While we are still waiting for some more penetrating glimpse of the Japan of today, we have ample reason to be grateful to Columbia Pictures for importing another masterful work by Kurosawa, "The Magnificent Seven." Once again we are back in the fifteenth century, a time when bandits ravaged the land and *samurai*—a caste of warriors comparable to our feudal knights—put their swords and skills in the service of the highest bidder. In this film, however, it is idealism, not money, that brings together "the magnificent seven." A peasant village, learning that a bandit horde plans to carry off its crops immediately after the harvest, determines to make a fight for it. Without money, the villagers send their young men out to recruit "hungry *samurai*," men who will work for rice and the justice of their cause. They find them and test them; then the *samurai* return to the village, teach the peasants to defend themselves, and all stand together to drive off the invaders. That, in sum, is just about all the story there is to this picture that runs a fast two hours and forty minutes. It is in the wealth of detail, the richness of characterization, and the robust quality of its physical action—as well as in the sheer technical virtuosity with which Kurosawa has managed each sequence—that lies the ceaseless fascination of the film. For he has taken a theme as familiar and standardized to Japanese audiences as our own Westerns are to us and treated it with a freshness, a directness, a sensitivity to texture and tempo and psychological

truth that impart new excitement and meaning to the old form.

Some indication of this may be found in the diversity of personalities and motivations not only among the *samurai* but in the villagers as well. Some are resigned to their fate, believing that resistance is useless. Others fear the expense while the swordsmen are quartered among them. Only the young men are really anxious to fight. The same kind of personalization exists among the *samurai* who come to their defense—the wise and humane leader, the perfectionist who seizes every opportunity to improve his technique with the long sword, the youth who follows him to learn, the peasant who hides his humble origins for the free, adventuresome life of the warrior caste.

No less remarkable is Kurosawa's consummate skill in setting the spectator down in the very midst of these people. The young men come to town, and the director conveys the dizzying confusion of crowds and shops through a brilliant series of swinging shots that never seem quite completed before the camera is moving off in another direction for another impression. An early encounter between the false *samurai* and the swordsman is played with the camera so close to the two men that it seems in constant danger of being smashed by a blow. There is an incredible moment when the chief *samurai*, learning that a madman has kidnaped a child, rushes into the hut where the man is hiding. From within comes a terrible cry; the camera lingers at the open door until, after an agonizing wait, the madman runs out in nightmarish slow motion to die in the open. There are shots of churning intensity—an old woman dying of hunger in the rain, the searing close-up of a young wife, abducted by bandits and made their concubine, when she sees her husband again. The final hour, which whips by like a whirlwind, is devoted to the battle itself—a series of skirmishes in which courage, strategy, and cunning combine to produce some of the most exciting combat footage of the decade. Long before it is over we have forgotten that this is an isolated incident in a distant era. Kurosawa has made it part of the ceaseless struggle of the weak and humble against their predators in every age and every land.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.