



TV AND RADIO

Culture, Blessed Word!

ONE thing we have all learned in the past few months: a good general education pays off. Accolades once reserved for pugilists and racehorses have cropped up around the triumphant egghead: champion, contender, record money-maker. As Charles Van Doren, who knocked off about \$130,000 in fourteen weeks, is a teacher as well as a student, we can foresee the image of the absent-minded professor vanishing with the image of the bespectacled "grind." It is a revolution.

If the public begins to hold education in high esteem, we can be sure that in due time networks and sponsors and packagers will discover the new commodity and the highbrow program will come into its own. The programs we lump together as cultural will then enjoy a prerogative now reserved to commercial programs: the right to make a few mistakes, the chance to recover from errors. At present, if a cultural program isn't at once perfect and successful it vanishes and drags with it half-a-dozen projected programs of the same kind. Failure is blamed on the nature of the program, is taken as proof that "the public" doesn't care for that sort of thing. (Dozens of programs produced by the hard-boiled merchants who know exactly what the public does want fail every year.)

Three series of programs, each with a different approach to educational-cultural material, can be considered as indicators of the possibilities and also the pitfalls of high-level production. Since the Radio TV-Workshop (established by the Ford Foundation) is not going to support "Omnibus" after this season, a certain anxiety about its future colors the critical attitude toward its present offerings. I think we feel that, in a

sense, the fate of superior programs is involved in "Omnibus," the argument running more-or-less like this: if all the Ford money (which "Omnibus" never had) couldn't put over a highbrow program, how can anyone else expect to succeed?

But this has not been a good year for "Omnibus," in spite of some exceptionally good programs. It has shown, at times, the psychological defect which seems to attack all programs not trying for big audiences, a sort of assumption that the audience it does attract will forgive all errors because the intention is so good. A few weeks ago it took forty-five minutes for an illustrated lecture on theatrical scenery by Walter Kerr, the dramatic critic. It was a development of Mr. Kerr's highly individual ideas about the theatre and it presumably dealt with the effect scenery has on the drama itself, but for all the elaborately dramatized scenes it remained a lecture with animated slides and, to top it off, it was followed by a lecture-demonstration on tennis. Contempt for elementary showmanship is precisely the sort of thing educational and cultural programs cannot get away with.

Opposite in every respect is the occasional series sponsored by Bell Labs. In all probability the second program, "Hemo the Magnificent," the story of the blood and its circulation, was made at the same time as "Our Mr. Sun." It had the same elaborate paraphernalia, easily rivalling the machinery of a quiz show, and was marked by the same nervous eagerness to assure us that the program would be at least as funny as "Sid Caesar's Hour." It used, in fact, one of Caesar's devices: a long sequence was delivered in the vaudeville-German accent of Caesar's comic pro-

fessor. In the first program St. Francis was quoted and quickly debased by a joke; in this one Goethe was followed by a bit of clowning. As in the first, the pictures were sensationally effective and every effort was nullified by the taste of the production. On Mr. Hemo's appearance he saluted us with "Sholom Aleichem," and if it was meant to be Biblical and grand it came out vaudeville Yiddish. We were told about "giddyap nerves" and "VIP" cells just before we heard Max Planck's austere call to faith.

I HAVE seen only the first of a new series of programs which NBC is creating, in collaboration with the Educational Television and Radio Center, for the use, primarily, of non-commercial stations. It was relatively elevated and simple—a discussion of Walter Edmonds's "Drums Along the Mohawk," with readings by Miss Julie Harris and others, a not specially effective variation of the technique of "Camera Three" a few years ago. I shall report on the series after seeing samples, at least, of its lessons in geography, mathematics, government, and history. The intent of NBC and the Center is clear and admirable. These are educational television programs, planning to use the legitimate techniques of the medium, planning not to let the techniques interfere with the basic values of the material.

This means that the series plans to interest its audience—and the producers know that entertainment is not the only way to interest. They intend to be simple, but not to oversimplify. (On the "Omnibus" program Mr. Kerr spoke of a microscope and reached over and handled one, to show us what a microscope was, I gather. In the NBC program, Dr. Albert Van Nostrand spoke of telescopes and microscopes and assumed we knew what he was talking about.)

In New York, and in some other cities I believe, these programs will also be visible on commercial stations. I hope they will be carefully looked at, because a critical public response, beyond that of students and educators, is what the program merits. It constitutes a recognition by the commercial broadcasters of a duty to the public which they cannot, through their own channels, fulfil, and as such is an act of statesmanship rare in the history of broadcasting.

—GILBERT SELDES.

POETRY CONTEST

(Closes May 1, 1957)

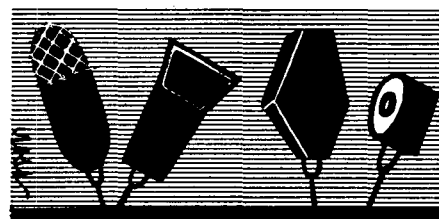
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To Be Awarded Publication, with \$100 Advanced Royalties

Judges: Robert Hillyer, E. Merrill Root, Vincent Godfrey Burns
Contest Manager: Henry Harrison

Exposition Press will publish the prize-winning MS. as a hard-bound book, under a standard contract guaranteeing the poet royalties of 10% of retail price on all sales. An advance of \$100 against royalties will be paid before publication. Send your MS. to Henry Harrison, Dept. SR, before May 1, enclosing stamped, self-addressed envelope. Or write to him for a copy of the contest rules.

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Rough Diamond, Solti, Jordan as "Queen"

DAVID DIAMOND has written enough worthwhile music to make the first performance of his Sixth Symphony by the Boston Symphony under the direction of Charles Munch in Carnegie Hall a matter for anticipation. It was also an occasion for rumination, if not the kind the composer might have intended. The subject was: Which Diamond are we to believe—the insistent, overbearing composer of the two fast movements, or the appealing, even reflective one of the adagio?

There is no need to say that the two attitudes cannot co-exist, assuming that the creator has conveyed, at some point, an emotional synthesis. That, to me, was the absent element. It would be too much, perhaps, to characterize the slow movement as soft-hearted but hard-headed, the fast ones vice versa. But there is little doubt that Diamond is more choosy of material when introspective than agitated, that the reflection accumulates in interest whereas the animation wears itself (and the audience-attention) out with needless resort to such noisemakers as percussion, slapstick, the piano-as-xylophone, etc.

Georg Solti's final pair of programs with the Philharmonic ventured no surprises, cast no unsuspected light on abilities previously revealed. His treatment of the Second Symphony of Beethoven and Mozart's No. 38 ("Prague") testified to his real capabilities as a draftsman of orchestral groundplans, but didn't add much to our esteem for his abilities as muralist or decorator (interior or exterior). His "Prague" is nothing if not pragmatic, his Beethoven D major an interesting evaluation of it as the last of the Haydn kind of symphony without showing it also as the revelation of a new personality.

According to Philharmonic practice, Solti was accompanied on each musical pilgrimage to popular favor (*a la* Tamino in "Magic Flute") by a tried guide—in the midweek pair by violinist Erica Morini, in the week-end sequence by Rudolf Serkin, as soloist in the D minor piano concerto of Brahms. Miss Morini played the A major concerto of Mozart with a firm muscularity, a potent musicality which shamed more delicate enterprises of some male contemporaries. Not all the energy was relevant however, and I sometimes felt the niceties related more to Miss Morini's expert com-

mand of the instrument than to the real needs of the music. The relaxed songfulness of the adolescent genius who wrote this work was a little persecuted in this treatment, the energy subjected to a forced enlargement. Save for a false entrance or two (from the horns particularly), Solti kept the work flowing in a pre-arranged direction.

The lengthy enterprise to convert Irene Jordan (a mezzo debutant at the Metropolitan in 1946 as Mallika to Lily Pons's *Lakme*) into a dramatic coloratura, came to an issue when she sang the Queen of the Night in a recent "Magic Flute." Miss Jordan has developed the middle register breadth to give the arias the dramatic character often absent, but at the expense of a dependable bottom or a really flaring top. Some staccato passages between F and C were impressively executed, but the basic sound of the voice is unnatural, lacking in real warmth or vibrance. Obviously she was not at her best in this taxing trial, but mentally multiplying the results by two or three still did not suggest a really pleasurable sound.

Otherwise of interest in the operatic week was Rosalind Elias's first Lola in "Cavalleria" (with its inevitable consequence, "Pagliacci"). Hers is a mezzo of vibrant, dark, vital sound, mated with a stage personality of much promise. If the two elements can mature with their present blend of projection and control, Miss Elias can grow to much larger responsibilities. While she was performing with the restraint of youth, Richard Tucker, Zinka Milanov, and Frank Valentino were exercising the prerogatives (and excesses) of maturity.

As much as I heard, on the same evening, of Sigismund Weissenberg's piano recital in Carnegie Hall made one reflect anew on the disadvantages of the instrumental virtuoso's career versus that of the opera singer. Gathering his forces, after a four years' absence, the young pianist threw them all into rather headlong, energy-laden performances of a Bach partita (D minor) and a Chopin sonata (B minor), preceded and followed by major works of Franck and Schumann. Handicapped by the use of the second best piano, Weissenberg was constantly overprojecting sound while underexpressing music. The pianistic discipline was mostly impressive, the musical results rather

negligible. Given the opportunity of the vocalist to perform twenty times in as many weeks, Weissenberg might level off to a recognition of his solid abilities; the one, all-out fling did not give by any means a sum of his musical parts.

The poised artistry and mature expressiveness of Elena Nikolaidi added much to the interests of Gluck's "Orfeo" as presented in a concert version by the Little Orchestra under the direction of Thomas Scherman. The Nikolaidi voice is not what it has been, leading to a rather bland whiteness of coloration, but she is a resourceful singer, with an affinity for the breadth and eloquence of Gluck's line. The cast otherwise provided Teresa Stich-Randall as Eurydice and Pierette Alarie as Amor, with results that tended more to finesse than to fervor.

LATER in the week Miss Stich-Randall made her first venture here as a recitalist, singing works of Schubert, Jensen, Pfitzner, Debussy, and Strauss in Town Hall. So far as the first half (up to Debussy) was evidence, Miss Stich-Randall has an uncanny talent for seeking out dull songs (including several by Schubert) on which to exercise her vocal wiles—a repetitious rise from half voice to full, an occasionally exploited top tone, a prevailing monotone of emotion, all in the name of "artistry." Now and again, as in Schubert's "Aufloesung" or Jensen's "Morgens am Brunnen" or Pfitzner's "Mailed," Miss Stich-Randall approached a condition of real animation. It is hardly an accident that each of these was the last song of a group, for the whole program was arranged with similar calculation. Arpad Sandor provided unsteady pianistic support.

A final venture of a venturesome week found Newell Jenkins conducting the National Orchestral Association in a program of which Berlioz's "King Lear" overture was the "familiar" work. Amid a miscellany of Hovhaness ("Easter Cantata") and Sammartini ("Magnificat") I found substantial interest in a "Sinfonia Cantata," by Riccardo Malipiero. This is a work of absorbing plan, designed to reflect his impressions of an American visit through verses about America in various languages, with our own Walt Whitman as peroration. A basic criticism of the result is that it is overdiffused, lacking in unified style. Perhaps the same thing could be said about us (or U.S.)—something Malipiero should have taken into consideration before writing his work. Paul Matthen sang the arduous solo part well, without disguising any degree of its difficulty.

—IRVING KOLODIN.