

Radio's Music

PHILIP KERBY

WHEN Henry Lee Higginson and his associates founded the Boston Symphony years ago they did so with the announced intention of establishing a permanent organization of musicians, picked from the finest orchestras in the world, whose performances of the works of great masters and contemporary composers would raise the standards of musical appreciation in this country. Although Boston was always considered the hub of this orchestra's activities, several trips to nearby cities were made throughout the season. Gradually Boston Symphony Hall took on the aspects of a shrine, not only in the eyes of the Boston Brahmins but also for all visitors.

Through the years the original purpose of the founders was being realized, though slowly, but on the day that radio cast off its swaddling clothes and openly announced that the performances of the Boston Symphony would be broadcast this original purpose was vastly accelerated. The first concert broadcast in 1927 over coast-to-coast networks was a success. Even Dr. Serge Koussevitzky, the taciturn conductor, was amazed at the overwhelming response. Any shouts of "sacrilege!" voiced by the inhabitants of Beacon Street and Louisburg Square were drowned out by the thump of mail sacks bringing praise.

Although other concerts by orchestras here and abroad had been previously broadcast, nevertheless the performance of Dr. Koussevitzky's men carried something over the air waves besides balanced symphony. That "something" was approval of the medium. Radio offered new kingdoms of musical riches for the multitude.

In the same year, 1927, the Radio Corporation of

America instituted a weekly broadcast of music appreciation, designed for a juvenile audience. Dr. Walter Damrosch, who had relinquished his baton after more than forty years as conductor of the New York Symphony, was persuaded to forego his retirement to direct this program. During the past eleven years its audience has increased seven times and today has a weekly enrollment of seven million pupils and is required curricula in over seventy thousand schools and colleges. According to recent surveys there are approximately another four million adults that tune in on these music appreciation hours.

First, simple melodies are played which later are interpolated as themes from some of the greatest symphonies. It suddenly becomes a game in the mind of the youthful listener, who acquires his three musical B's — Bach, Beethoven and Brahms — with much greater ease than the three R's. Desire to imitate sounds coming over the air accounts for the child's sudden interest in picking out the opening bars of the Chorale of Beethoven's Ninth on the family piano . . . when wild horses could not have dragged him to practise his five finger exercises.

The effectiveness of this and other similar programs has undoubtedly had a cumulative influence over the music appreciation habits of the nation during the past decade. For certainly the attitude of the public toward the standard classics has undergone a complete turnaround, and the blatant jazz of 1920 is laughable today. If you do not believe it, find some friend who collects old phonograph records and get him to play over some of the favorites of ten years ago. The listening public gradually tired of the monotony of the repetitive old jazz forms, and the present popular music style, as exemplified by the compositions of George Gershwin, Jerome Kern and Vincent Youmans, has educated the ear to increasingly so-

phisticated harmonic structures. Whatever you may think of swing, Benny Goodman has brought to popular music a virtuosity on the clarinet which many symphonic instrumentalists envy. Classical musicians will also tell you that Tommy Dorsey's tone on the trombone knows no peer either in symphony or jazz. Ross Gorman's clarinet glissando in the opening bars of a *Rhapsody in Blue* was a technical feat never heard in the realm of concert music.

In addition, it must be remembered, both radio transmission and reception have been made more exact during the past twelve years. Normal hearing of the average adult extends from about sixteen cycles to about seventeen thousand, although the acuity of some persons extends as high as twenty-one thousand cycles. In 1926-27 the majority of radio stations could only transmit from approximately one hundred to five thousand cycles, and commercial radio sets could receive approximately from one hundred and fifty to three thousand cycles. Today large broadcasting stations transmit from approximately thirty to eight thousand cycles and sets receive from approximately fifty to six thousand cycles. With middle C on the piano at one hundred and twenty-eight cycles it will be noted that broadcasting both upper and lower registers has been improved — transmission keeping ahead of reception, as it should.

Because of the radio grand opera is no longer the prerogative of the wealthy intelligentsia. It takes its place in strict competition for favor along with the latest "torch" song.

The broadcasting of opera was not insurmountable in spite of the mechanical difficulties of correlating actions across a vast stage and picking up the voice with the same clarity from many different locations. But if an operatic performance were to be broadcast from the War Memo-

rial Opera House in San Francisco, the Civic Opera in Chicago, or the Metropolitan in New York, how could it be done without distracting the attention of the audience, or more important still, the singers?

Back in 1930 a small group of engineers and sound technicians set about making experiments with the Civic Opera. First only the arias were attempted, later whole acts and finally the complete opera. These experiments were not heard on the air but were piped to the central control room where another group of broadcasting officials sat in solemn judgment. With each succeeding month the performances became better, but in the opinion of a jury of musicians they were by no means adequate to be broadcast over a network. In the end special equipment had to be invented.

The new microphones and faders were in advance of equipment that had been tried before, so in the fall of 1931, immediately after the opening of the opera season Mr. Gatti-Casazza, impresario of New York's Metropolitan, was approached for permission to broadcast. At first he turned a deaf ear to all pleas, feeling that the public would get a wrong impression if the transmission were faulty. The new inventions were explained at length. In the spirit of "having done with this nonsense once and for all," he agreed to listen to a test. He selected Puccini's *Butterfly* which was to be given three days hence, and turned over Box 44 of the Grand Tier for the installation of sound and control equipment.

For three days and nights the engineers and sound technicians worked with only brief snatches of sleep. Microphones were concealed in the footlights near the prompter's box, high up in the flies out of sight of the audience, or swung on cables from below the proscenium. A direct telephone wire connected the opera box with

the Board of Directors' room of the broadcasting company a mile and a half away. There sat Mr. Gatti and several conductors of the Metropolitan staff. Instead of a bell, a small light flashed on and off in the opera box to summon the program director, the control man or the commentator to the telephone.

The house lights dimmed as the first strains of Puccini's overture were taken up by the strings. With head-phones glued tightly to his ears the sound mixing engineer began his task of piping the opera to the jury. Three times during the course of the afternoon the little tell-tale light flashed. "More voice and less orchestra" was the command. Delicate needles on the control panel fluttered back and forth as dials were turned and adjusted, as the voices of the singers were picked first from one microphone and then from another, and finally during a choral ensemble from all microphones together. The house lights went up and the audience dispersed.

There was no word from the Board of Directors' room. The technicians and engineers in Box 44 believed they had failed. Only once during the long last act had the light flashed, and the request was for "still more voice, please." Off came the head-phones. Tired hands began slowly to pack up equipment. Suddenly the tell-tale light flashed. "Mr. Gatti is enthusiastic over test. Grants permission for regular weekly broadcasts. Congratulations to everybody!"

The first historic broadcast over a nationwide network occurred on Christmas Day 1931. Very appropriately the opera was *Haensel und Gretel*. It is one thing to describe the simple action of an old German folk tale over the air and something quite different to interpret grand opera to an audience of millions. Humperdinck's delightful fairy tale won many new friends judging from the thousands upon

thousands of letters received by the Metropolitan, the broadcasting company and the singers themselves.

Recent independent surveys have indicated that the Saturday matinee air audience may run as high as twelve million listeners, particularly for such old favorites as *Il Trovatore*, *Tosca*, *Manon*, *La Bohème*, and *Butterfly*. Seven hundred known listening groups have sprung up all over the country. Last year these opera broadcasts were transmitted for the first time by short wave to South America, Europe and Asia. The additional response was immediate. Radiograms poured in from the Antipodes and Australia while the opera was still in progress. From her home in Oslo, Mme. Flagstad's mother hears the distinguished Kirsten. A special commentator in Spanish was requested for the South American audience.

The Metropolitan Opera Guild took over the task of supplying additional information by mail to the many hundreds of inquiries that were received. They came from groups of miners in Wilkes-Barre, cowpunchers listening in the Buffalo Bill museum at Cody, Wyoming, trappers in the Canadian wilds and apple growers along the Columbia river. Before long the task became too large for any single agency to handle, so, on Thursdays, a supplementary program of fifteen minutes was broadcast. This included a brief biography of the composer, the story of the opera itself, and a few outstanding historical facts about previous performances and stars who had sung the roles before. A recent survey of listeners brought opera within the first ten popular radio programs.

The year of 1930 saw the beginning of another important series of broadcasts. Two years after the merger of the Philharmonic Orchestra with the Symphony Society the Columbia Broadcasting System announced that twenty-seven concerts conducted by Arturo Tos-

canini, Erich Kleiber and Bernardino Molinari would be broadcast throughout the United States over fifty-two stations, thus bringing Carnegie Hall into the living rooms of the nation. For several seasons the Philharmonic Symphony Society has been heard over the stations of the combined Columbia and Canadian networks. The listening audience has increased beyond estimate.

Since frequent hearing of music seems to create in each of us a desire to perform, it devolved upon the radio companies to instigate three other types of program. One, to encourage amateur musicians by their hearing other amateurs play favorite instruments over the air; two, actually to teach simple melodies in order that the listeners might be encouraged to pursue their studies further under private teachers; and three, to unite these musical neophytes in groups for the additional pleasure of ensemble playing.

How to teach instrument playing by means of the radio was a problem presented some three years ago to Dr. Joseph Maddy of the music department of the University of Michigan. Dr. Maddy had won an unusual reputation for music methodology. His crusade for more and better music in the public schools of America had brought him into the forefront of academic musical discussion, particularly in the deliberations of the National Music Educators Conference. He spent the greater part of a year working out a series of weekly radio programs at the National Music Camp which was established under his auspices at Interlochen, Michigan.

This program went on the air under the title of *Dr. Maddy's Band Lessons*. In it he advocated the formation of bands by all public schools, bands for villages and bands for towns. Books containing simple exercises and explaining the purpose of each particular instrument in ensemble

playing were prepared by Dr. Maddy and sold over the network at cost. Using the instruments in the radio broadcasting studio to indicate good tonal production and to sound the correct notes for simple themes, Dr. Maddy gave instruction to hundreds of individuals and student classes throughout the country. A letter from a salesman in the Midlands stated that the writer was frequently forced to travel long distances between towns in his car. When the program was announced on his radio he would pull up alongside the road, close the windows in his car, stick the instruction book on the steering wheel, unlimber his trombone from its case and "toot for dear life in tune with Dr. Maddy!" Recently more instruments have been included, simple voice exercises added and the program now goes under the title of *Fun in Music*.

The third step in musical education was called the *Home Symphony Programme*. Its purpose is to unite amateur musicians in ensemble playing. Under the able direction of Ernest La Prade, for many years a member of the string section of the New York Philharmonic, musically inclined neighbors gather and play with the radio orchestra. Sometimes the programs include movements of the best known symphonies; other times one of the shorter symphonies in its entirety; and again practise hours for the more difficult passages which are correctly played and explained by Mr. La Prade, who acts in the dual capacity of orchestra leader and teacher.

Youth and American Music is the title of a program which has presented some of the outstanding choruses, college glee clubs and choirs. It is directed primarily to the youth of the nation to encourage more vocal music in secondary schools and colleges. Frequent elimination contests are held between competing choral societies for the distinction and honor of broadcasting over a coast-to-coast

network. Among the best known professional choirs which have sung over the air are: The Westminster Choir; The Gothic Choristers; Choirs of the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes; the Amphion Male Chorus; Salt Lake City Tabernacle Choir; Wiener Saenger Knaben; St. Olaf's Choir; Schola Cantorum; the Russian Cathedral Choir; the Oratorio Society of New York.

During the past decade the picture has changed completely with regard to public concerts by individual artists and symphony orchestras, largely due to radio's influence in popularizing the finer art forms of music. Today the public wishes both to see and hear in person the artist heard on the air waves and will spend approximately twelve million dollars at the box office for the privilege. Of this amount New York's share is about two million dollars. These totals are computed from bookings made by local concert managers in all parts of the country. The increase in individual concerts and recitals by artists is partly due to subscription courses. This course system increases the number of artists engaged by the various cities during the season. There has been also an increase of ten per cent in the number of cities operating on the civic concert basis. These cities range in size from Long View, Texas, with 5,000 population to St. Louis with 821,000. The largest civic audience is boasted by Worcester, Massachusetts, which has a permanent audience of 3,900 and more than 2,000 on its waiting list. Twenty-five new cities have organized the civic concert courses this year, the largest number of additions since the Civic Concert Service was organized fifteen years ago.

Worcester's course which costs \$16,350 is the most ambitious, with St. Louis coming second with a \$10,500 course. Winston-Salem and Jamestown are spending sixty per cent more than last season. Wichita Falls is

increasing its talent by fifty per cent; Pawtucket by forty-seven per cent, and Memphis by forty per cent.

There has been a great demand for concert artists to supplement their regular recital engagements by added radio appearances. One concert singer's radio earnings have totalled \$44,350 in the past twelve months and five others have broadcasting fees running into five figures. Eighteen have more than doubled their income by appearing before the microphone.

Kirsten Flagstad made six appearances during the 1936-37 concert season; Gladys Swarthout, sixteen; Lauritz Melchior, nine; Marion Talley, forty-seven; Mischa Levitzki, five; Efrem Zimbalist, eight; Elisabeth Rethberg, four; Ezio Pinza, five; Mario Chamlee, four; with two or more appearances for Martinelli, Queena Mario, Marion Anderson, the Vienna Choir Boys, Marjorie Lawrence, Henri Deering and single appearances by a large number of others.

Ten years ago Edgar's *Salut d'Amour* and Chopin's E-Flat Nocturne meant classical music to the public. The story is different today. The radio has acquainted millions of listeners with the works of Beethoven and Bach. The concert audience is demanding whole programs devoted exclusively to the works of a single master — a step forward in the maturity of American music lovers, which concert managers can only explain by the fact that radio broadcasting has elevated public taste.

Today radio is offering tangible inspiration to the young composer, not only by playing his original work before a vast audience but also by substantial money awards in competitions and commissions. In 1931 NBC held a contest for original orchestral compositions. Ten thousand dollars in prizes were won by Philip James, Max Wald, Carl Eppert, Florence Galajikian and Nikolai

Berezowsky. In 1936 the Columbia Broadcasting System asked a non-partisan committee to pick six distinguished American composers to write original compositions for radio. Those selected were Aaron Copeland, Howard Hanson, Roy Harris, Walter Piston, William Grant Still and Louis Gruenberg, whose original radio opera, *Green Mansions*, was played over the air for the first time in October 1937. A second commission of six composers was picked by CBS in 1937 and included Quincy Porter, Robert Russell Bennett, Leo Sowerby, Jerome Moross, R. Nathaniel Dett and Vittorio Giannini. The first five have been placed at liberty to write any form they please, but Mr. Giannini is to write a practical radio opera to be produced within a half-hour broadcast. Likewise in 1937 NBC commissioned the young Gian Carlo Menotti to compose an opera of an hour's duration.

Judged solely by the initial outlay, radio advertising is the most expensive form there is. No manufacturer is going to sanction such an outlay, even though he reach the largest possible potential audience, unless he receives immediate tangible proof of its worth. The commercial advertiser, per se, is not in the business of educating public taste. He builds a program with the sole object of entertaining the type of person who should be interested in, and can afford to buy his product. If, for example, you were interested in selling more motor cars, cigarettes or paint, which would you use, the latest "blues" singer, or a symphony orchestra? In the main advertisers voted for "blues," until Henry Ford came along.

His quixotic nature has been widely publicized but there is no better example of his paradoxical generalship than the Ford Hour. At the height of the depression he purchased one hour of radio time on Sunday evening on a coast-to-coast network. Instead of using this expensive

time to reap immediate benefits, the hour was filled with excellent music played by an enlarged Detroit symphony. Each year Ford Hour has become increasingly popular. The Cooperative Association of Broadcasters gave it a rating of 12 this last season, which is the highest rating on the air today for classical and semi-classical music. The total cost of the Ford Hour is over one million per year. Mr. Ford must believe that good music pays in cash dividends of increased sales.

The General Motors Symphony was a close runner-up with a rating of 10.3. But not only motor cars are sold through the influence of good music, to the tune of over \$2,000,000. Chesterfield cigarettes employs an orchestra and guest stars from the Metropolitan. Sherwin-Williams Paint Company broadcasts weekly auditions for aspirants for the Metropolitan Opera company. A group of American banks sponsors a weekly series by the Philadelphia symphony orchestra. A cold cream manufacturer and a proprietary medicine have engaged opera stars to sing semi-classical arias over the air. In other words the taste of the American public has improved so during the last ten years that business men, looking for profit, seek the ally of great music.

Are symphony concerts as popular as jazz?

Not until the magazine *Fortune* included the name of Toscanini in the January quarterly survey was it possible to determine with any degree of accuracy what the listeners' opinions were. The following results are quoted with permission of the publishers of *Fortune* in answer to the question "What kind of music do you prefer?"

Popular	42.5%
Classical	21.5%
Both	31.3%
Neither	4.7%

Have you ever heard of Arturo Toscanini?

Yes 39.9

No 40.1

Of those who said that they had heard of Toscanini, seventy-one per cent identified him correctly as a symphony leader. Briefly these figures mean that more than one half of the people in the United States like to listen to classical music and more than one fourth can identify Toscanini. *Fortune* finds that 88.1 per cent of all United States homes including more than half the Negro homes have radios. It is safe to say that though half the United States likes classical music most people do not like it to the exclusion of the other kind. Its chief popularity is to be found among the well-to-do and on the eastern and western coast and in cities of over one million population. The finding was amply checked by a direct question, "Do you like to listen to classical music on the radio, such as the Ford Hour or the Metropolitan Opera?" The answer was "yes, 62.5 per cent. No, 37.5 per cent." No less than 42.7 per cent of the people would like to hear more music of any kind on the radio, 34 per cent think there is just enough, 13.7 per cent would like more of some kinds, less of others, and 3.2 per cent don't know.

When sufficient time has elapsed to obtain a proper perspective someone will write a comprehensive treatise on the difficulties attendant upon forming a new symphony orchestra. Negotiations leading up to Toscanini's change of heart to return to America after his "very final" farewell concert with the New York Philharmonic have been repeatedly told. Samuel Chotzinoff, celebrated music critic and an old friend of Toscanini, was sent to Italy by David Sarnoff, chairman of the board of NBC, to induce the Maestro to return to this country. At first Toscanini refused to consider such a proposal. The re-

markable opportunity, however, of playing for a world audience touched his sympathy and he finally consented to come for only ten concerts at the reputed figure of four thousand dollars a concert, with income tax paid by the company. After his arrival he was prevailed upon to give an eleventh concert.

Actual selection of the personnel was completed late in the summer from a list of over seven hundred applicants and the first rehearsals began. Artur Rodzinski, conductor of the Cleveland Symphony was selected by Maestro Toscanini as drillmaster for this new organization. Musicians agree that two factors are necessary to produce a truly great orchestra. First, individual musicians who are artists in their profession and second, complete coordination under fine conductors. In the formation of this newest symphony, both requisites were produced. After the men were rehearsed several times weekly for two months, preliminary concerts were played over the air, under Rodzinski's direction and also under the leadership of Pierre Monteux.

Toscanini arrived about two weeks before Christmas. Rehearsals were held behind locked doors, and daily the press was fed with little romantic details to whet the appetite for a Toscanini première. Iconoclasts prophesied a let-down. No conductor unless perhaps the immortal Franz Liszt himself could ever hope to equal the public's anticipation. The iconoclasts, however, were wrong.

Musical history was made on Christmas night 1937 when Toscanini stepped to the podium of the largest studio in Radio City and raised his white baton to conduct the first full-sized, permanent, radio symphony orchestra. Although larger symphony orchestras have broadcast from Radio City, notably the four-hundred-piece orchestra that played in 1933 under Arthur Bodan-

sky, Dr. Walter Damrosch, Bruno Walter and Fritz Reiner when NBC held open house in its new home, no orchestra ever played to a greater audience. In addition to being transmitted over both NBC combined networks it was also sent by short wave to Europe, South America, Asia and the Antipodes.

On that opening night Toscanini drew forth music from ninety-five virtuosi that made all other symphony playing pale by comparison. Under his inspired guidance every man played better than he knew how. It was an emotional experience seldom equaled in a lifetime. As the final crescendo of the Brahms finale throbbed and died it was followed by an instant of spellbound silence. The studio audience remained motionless, fearing that a breath might shatter the spell. Then pandemonium broke loose. A tired little white haired man turned and bowed, smiled, then bowed again several times. He turned back and motioned the orchestra to rise and accept the tribute with him. Mischa Mischakoff, the concert master, tucked his fifty thousand dollar "Strad" under his arm and said something to the Maestro. Both smiled. Toscanini stepped down from the podium and moved swiftly to the tuning room out of sight.

My Author's League with Mark Twain

DOROTHY QUICK

When Dorothy Quick was a child of eight long years, she met Samuel Clemens on a boat returning from England where the American writer had gone to receive a degree from Oxford University. Mark Twain's heart went out to her, partially because she had already read and remembered every story he had written. For a few years after this happy meeting, until he died, Mark Twain kept the little girl by his side as much as he could. She stayed with him twice in Tuxedo Park where he had rented a house to rest and write, in New York City, and in Redding, Connecticut. Now Miss Quick has written her memories of this charming companionship. We are publishing her description of the end of one visit to him at Tuxedo, and some of his letters to her after her return. The letters are printed for the first time with the permission of the Mark Twain Company, the estate of Samuel L. Clemens, and Harper and Brothers.

I THINK the most outstanding moments of my visit were those I spent, quiet as a mouse, listening to Mr. Clemens dictate. He didn't mind having an audience. In fact, he was so absorbed in what he was doing that half the time he did not know I was there.

I would tiptoe in and sit in the far corner of the room and watch and listen to him. The watching would be equally as fascinating as the listening; in fact more so as I didn't know the connected threads of the story he was weaving and though the patches were interesting and amusing, as any sentence of his was sure to be, the manner in which they were delivered was even more so.

Nothing interfered with the steady flow of his thought.

Mr. Clemens would walk up and down the room while he was dictating as though he were talking conversationally rather than creating a story. He would pace