

I HATE to bring this up Mr John Q. Public, but you've been keeping radio executives awake nights. A short while ago they claimed they knew what you wanted in music. Now let me see, your average musical mentality was charted somewhere between the age of 10 and 12 and you were attracted only by Guy Lombardo, Bing Crosby and Kate Smith.

But you, John Q., ruined all this fine charting. Of a sudden, you changed your mind and turned from swing to string, which sent radio executives scrambling madly for honest-to-goodness serious music makers.

Maybe it didn't quite happen overnight, but serious music is certainly here in large quantities, and appears to be entrenched for a long siege. And I can remember a few years back when you almost twisted that good right arm silly trying to find a good symphony program. The facts with figures say it much better than this and I'll get to them, but soon.

Before I do I have a little complaint to dash off, and I hope it gets as far as Hollywood. Everyone criticizes the cinema, so why shouldn't I? Movies talk too much. Every few days a sun-drunk producer is quoted on that mythical opera to be written exclusively for celluloid. Then someone like George Antheil is hired to do the music for "The Plainsman," and the press releases start.

Radio, on the other hand, has been championing good music for years and supporting American composers. Unfortunately, until recently, you didn't hear much about it. That's because good music is a slow process with radio—but steady—and radio wants something near to perfection before it hits the air and your ears with it.

In 1932 NBC devoted but 5 per cent of its total time to serious music. Last year 1936 the percentage was estimated at 44 per cent of total broadcasting time for serious and educational music. Much of this is due to the grandfather of serious musical propaganda, Dr. Walter Damrosch. His Music Appreciation Hour has been running for nine seasons. Some 60,000 school children owe him a wonderful debt. As do almost the same number of older listeners. And nine continuous seasons are something to make even Rudy Vallee's hair curl with envy.

FRANK BLACK is another who has been batting out a large number of serious musical programs. Because of Mr. Black—and he didn't mind telling me this—the NBC Music Guild has held two contests for American composers. Has paid them plenty, and broadcast their works.

Mr. Black has some fine ideas about music, and he considers the American music public with much the same eye as a doctor does a patient. However, Black is an unusual sort of doctor. He believes in trying anything on the public as long as that has originality and will arouse comment. Black gets plenty of the latter, and also plenty of money for his ideas.

I went to the trouble of finding out just how many serious musical programs NBC had on the air as regular features. Before Frank Black caught me sitting in his files, I had the complete list. Ten city symphony orchestras, two opera companies (the Metropolitan and the Radio City Music Hall opera), four chamber music programs, three choral music programs, four studio symphony programs and five solo instrumentalists.

Now NBC says that it is just warming up. They have been rather irked by all this talk about Opera and the Film, and have gone to the trouble to hire a young man named Menotti to write a complete opera for radio. When last seen, Menotti was roaming about the hills of Italy digging for a second act curtain chorus. I know, because I interviewed a lot of foreign names to find him.

Then, too, as you have been told, Maestro Toscanini is going to storm into the studios one winter day to do a series of 10 concerts. I was amused to find out that Signor Toscanini will do his program from good old studio 8H. This studio seats 1,500 people, who have been gathering together to hear Maestro Fred Allen and genial Lanny Ross. Now and then the air is lightened by the crash-bang of a jazz band.

Nothing daunted, NBC plans to clean up the peanuts and popcorn and issue tickets to music-lovers in the local high schools and colleges (mental age as yet undecided). After Toscanini breaks them in, Rodzinski will carry on.

OVER at CBS the serious music fever runs even higher than at NBC. They have more programs of this nature on the air; however, in actual air time, NBC has them beat.

The minute I ambled into CBS, looking for all the world like a walking baton, I was deluged with plans, names and the statement that it was about time some writer got interested in serious music.

Howard Barlow



There Shall Be Music

Radio Leaves Films Behind in Original-Opera Feud

By Jack Sher

NBC, I discovered, is a bunch of foreigners when it comes to music. This is said in jest, of course, and means that NBC goes in for hiring names that end in "ini," "ski," "oro,"—gentlemen of international reputation.

Columbia is probably the most American-composer-minded network you could ever run into. The very first music that went out over the CBS network (then 16 stations strong) was new American music, written by an American composer.

It was Sept. 18, 1927, and CBS was about to make its debut. So was Deems Taylor, the composer of the brand new "King's Henchman," which he had just completed with the poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay. Howard Barlow and the CBS Symphony Orchestra played excerpts from "The King's Henchman" on the date of debut. Later, the Metropolitan put on the entire arrangement, and from that time on CBS was sold on American music from Americans.

Deems Taylor came to talk on that first program. He said that radio ought to be the best chance ever for a struggling American composer (they have been pretty struggling to date), and he has gone on saying it.

Then CBS got a commercial program, their very first one! The first commercial, the Kolster Hour of Oct. 18, 1927, presented the works of Charles Wakefield Cadman. Followed by music by Edward MacDowell, Ethelbert Nevin and the like.

That was pretty radical for those days, when the Beethoven Ninth was considered too heavy for the

Frank Black

Walter Damrosch

Alfred Wallenstein

ears of the radio audience—and Crosby was crooning from a bicycle.

IN 1937 CBS has come out even more strongly than at any point in its career in championing new and American music. It has created the Columbia Composers Commission. Now that sounds like a mighty imposing title. It is. For it is the first time that any radio network in America has commissioned musical compositions for radio by serious American composers (How proud CBS was when they told me this!)

CBS has invited six American composers to write music for radio. Aaron Copland, Louis Gruenberg, Walter Piston, Howard Hanson, Roy Harris and William Grant Still. The music can be anything that the young composers want to make it, except that it can't be less than eight or more than 40 minutes long.

Deems Taylor, who is a member of the Commission, and who I think is a pretty fine man, says that a composer ought to get a full opportunity to say all he wants to say in that time. Forty minutes isn't so short. A Mr. Mozart wrote symphonies that were very complete, and he spoke his piece generally in about 30 minutes.

The deadline is this summer—during the Sunday afternoon concerts of Everybody's Music, conducted by Howard Barlow. The composers were notified way back in August. Outside of that, the sky's the limit: instruments, types of composition, voices, anything they want has been at the command of the composers.

They have all been given an opportunity to observe the resources of radio. They have been shown around the studio, and CBS even put on a special broadcast for their benefit showing all the tricks the microphone is capable of.

EACH composer has his own special brand of music. Roy Harris, for instance, is thoroughly Midwestern and as American as a Nebraska farm. His people were Scotch-Irish by descent. They went West in a covered wagon during the Cimarron rush. His stuff has a pioneer flavor and has tasted good enough to be played by the New York Philharmonic. Like a farmer he rises at dawn and works until 11 a. m., and then drives recklessly through the countryside seeking inspiration. Tall, raw-boned, sandy-haired, with gray-blue eyes.

Aaron Copland represents the left wing of modern music. Highly influenced by composers like Stravinsky, he has written a great deal of exciting and highly controversial stuff. Last summer when his work was played in Mexico City by the National Orchestra, it almost created a fist fight right in the audience. Copland is a Brooklyn boy; originally the family name was Kaplan, but the immigration authorities got it mixed up.

Walter Piston hails from Maine, a typical New Englander and is stocky and quiet, a teacher at Harvard. His work is restrained, almost academic.

Howard Hanson is a college professor too—head of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. Tall, slender, with pink cheeks and bright blue eyes, he wears a goatee. Everything he does is full of a kind of Celtic quality, but Hanson is of Swedish descent; born in Wahoo, Neb.

Louis Gruenberg was born in Russia and brought to this country at the age of 2. A pianist, he toured with many leading symphony orchestras. Gruenberg is writing a complete opera for radio, "Green Mansions," based on that novel. He is responsible for talking Eugene O'Neill into setting "Emperor Jones" to music; it took him two years to do it.

William Grant Still writes not only for radio but motion pictures as well. His first radio music was performed by Howard Barlow on May 23. Stillman is a Negro, born in the deep south—Woodville, Miss. Never writes a note without "getting in touch with the cosmic forces of life." His "Lenox Avenue" was the most widely acclaimed musical composition of the year.

WHENEVER you think of MBS and serious music, you think of one man, Alfred Wallenstein. He is their musical director and a man of no little genius. I had a talk with him the other day. What he has given up to work with the microphone seems to be the best indication of the future of serious music on our air-waves.

Wallenstein resigned his post as first cellist of the New York Philharmonic and as a member of the board of directors to devote himself to conducting for radio.

"I was convinced," said the quiet little man, "that radio was becoming a more vital force in the world than the most powerful orchestral groups."

WHICH is, perhaps, the answer to Hollywood's monotonous opera talk.

