

have been inferred from the Philharmonic performance

Of all the new works in the Philharmonic's series, however (I exclude Stefan Wolpe's Symphony because only two movements were performed and because the work is straightforward enough so that one could tell it was badly misrepresented on this occasion), the most conventionally attractive sounds were unquestionably those produced by Morton Feldman's *Out of Last Pieces*. Although the ultimate interest must be limited in any piece whose principal qualities are those of individual sounds rather than the relations between them, the succession of quiet figurational curls in the winds, and gentle sustained sonorities of varying tone-color mixtures could be listened to for much longer without the fatigue of *non sequitur*

intervening than can most music of this kind, including Feldman's own

John Cage's *Atlas Ellipticalus*, on the other hand, cannot be described in such purely musical terms. Without imputing motives, it seems, like all of Cage's jokes, principally designed to see just how far patrons can be made to spend money, musicians be made to perform absurd and humiliating tasks, and audiences and critics be made to endure the necessity of choosing between the embarrassment of remaining to "listen" and of making a public exit in the middle of a performance—an alternative preferred by surprisingly many at Philharmonic Hall.

BENJAMIN BORETZ

(This is part two of a three-part discussion of new music heard in New York this season.)

THEATRE

THREE AT THE CHERRY LANE FUNNY GIRL

It is altogether likely that the folk who go down to the Cherry Lane Theatre to see the three one-act plays now being given there are witnesses to a signal event: the emergence of an outstanding dramatist—LeRoi Jones.

His is a turbulent talent. While turbulence is not always a sign of power or of valuable meaning, I have a hunch that LeRoi Jones's fire will burn ever higher and clearer if our theatre can furnish an adequate vessel to harbor his flame. We need it.

He is very angry. Anger alone may merely make a loud noise, confuse, sputter and die. For anger to burn to useful effect, it must be guided by an idea. With the "angry young men" of England one was not always certain of the source of dissatisfaction nor of its goal. With LeRoi Jones it is easy to say that the plight of the Negro ignited the initial rage—justification enough—and that the rage will not be appeased until there is no more black and white, no more color except as differences in hue and accent are part of the world's splendid spectacle. But there is more to his ferocity than a protest against the horrors of racism.

Dutchman, the first of Jones's plays to reach the professional stage, is a stylized account of a subway episode. A white girl picks up a young Negro who at first is rather embarrassed and later piqued by her advances. There

is a perversity in her approach which finally provokes him to a hymn of hate. With lyrical obscenity he declares that murder is in his and every Negro's heart and were it to reach the point of action there would be less "singin' of the blues," less of that delightful folk music and hot jazz which beguile the white man's fancy, more calm in the Negro soul. Meanwhile, it is the black man who is murdered.

What we must not overlook in seeing the play is that, while this explosion of fury is its rhetorical and emotional climax, the crux of its significance resides in the depiction of the white girl whose relevance to the play's situation does not lie in her whiteness but in her representative value as a token of our civilization. She is our neurosis. Not a neurosis in regard to the Negro, but the absolute neurosis of American society.

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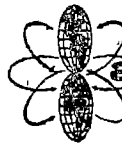
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tions. She is the most "informed" person in the world and the most ignorant (The information feeds the ignorance.) She is the bubbling, boiling garbage cauldron newly produced by our progress. She is a calculating machine gone berserk; she is the real killer. What she destroys is not men of a certain race but mankind. She is the compendium in little of the universal mess.

If *Dutchman* (a title I don't understand) has a fault, it is its completeness. Its ending is somewhat too pat, too pointed in its symbolism. If one has caught the drift of the play's meaning before its final moment, the ending is supererogatory, if one has failed to do so, it is probably useless.

Dutchman is very well played by Jennifer West and Robert Hooks.

The Jones piece is preceded by Beckett's *Play* (previously reviewed in *The Nation*, Jan. 27, 1964), a dramatic "poem" on the futile tragicomedy of adultery, perfect of its kind. There can be no doubt of Beckett's mastery or of his right to say what he does. One may wonder if one "needs" it.

Another item on this program—"Three at the Cherry Lane"—is *The Two Executioners* by Arrabal, a Spaniard whose home is Paris and language

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"The Baptism"

Anyone wishing to check further on LeRoi Jones's sudden and commanding intrusion upon the theatre, may be able to see his *The Baptism*, which is now being presented, on a week-to-week basis, Monday nights in off-Broadway houses that are otherwise dark, but for which backing is being raised for a regular production.

In this black mass version of a Passion play, Jones converts his rage to slapstick blasphemy. A homosexual satan and a cant-singing Negro preacher war for the soul of the young feckless Son of God. The real evil is hypocrisy, the sin of euphemism, and the devil drives it from the stage with a coruscating flow of obscene vernacular. This is not a finished or carefully thought-out play. It is rough work, in every sense, the purging outrageousness of a fine poet. It is also wildly

funny, both in its essential comment and from the shock of incongruity. Jones has the gift of vivid economy that sparks his scene into instant activity.

In *The Baptism*, he gets the invaluable cooperation of Taylor Mead as the campy Fallen Angel. Mead, who was one of the antic cast of the film, *Hallelujah the Hills*, has a mocking intelligence, superb timing and a face and body of undescribably mobile depravity.

On the night I was present, Mead also played the title role in Frank O'Hara's *The General*, a vaudeville in which an exceedingly great leader returns to his scenes of Pacific glory. There is not nearly enough substance to the series of loosely-integrated skits, and Mead holds it together by main force of ingratiating corruption.

ROBERT HATCH

French. I found this skit enervatingly banal. I have become sick and tired of matricidal dramaturgy. Won't someone write a truly bold play proclaiming the author's love for his mother and his equally cordial relations with his father? If you don't like the human race why don't you go back where you came from . . . ?

Broadway scuttlebutt has it that \$750,000 was spent on the new musical *Funny Girl* (Winter Garden). For all the value in the show the producers would have been well advised to permit its star, Barbra Streisand, to come out and sing some songs on the bare stage—but not the songs she now sings, none of which are any good.

Though Sydney Chaplin has greatly improved since he made his first appearance in New York, and Jean Stapleton and Kay Medford are funny in the few moments they are vouchsafed, there is really nothing to *Funny Girl* but Barbra Streisand. The book, if it exists, is phony; there is no dancing to speak of and the music is hogwash, though some of Bob Merrill's lyrics are not bad.

For those who remember Fanny Brice—the show is presumably her "story"—the connection between that great lady, a "funny girl" who at times came close to being a tragedienne, and the star of the present is a little unfortunate. I shall refrain from comparisons because I do not wish to take

this occasion to write an appreciation of Fanny Brice, but only to speak of Miss Streisand who is a young woman of unmistakable gifts.

She was brilliantly hilarious in *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*. She manifests new qualities in her present vehicle. She has rhythm—although the rhythm in her numbers now is forced because supplied by her rather than by the composer; she knows how to color the words and phrases of her songs so as to give each of them their specific emotional quality. She has a disarming directness and a simplicity. Very little is "put on," except where her playfulness is a comic comment, usually a mockery of pretension, plus an apology for having so little to be pretentious about. The nakedness, the flat plainness of the world about her, its fundamental lack of glamour, and her refusal or inability to rise above it—though because she is so talented she feels it more than she shows any consciousness of doing—constitute the essence of her appeal, her pathos. What her acting (even more her singing) says is: "I am a woman; I have imagination. I have spirit, humor, keen common sense, a desire to live a full, vivid life, but I dwell in a place and at a time which really deny and cheapen most of these attributes. Therefore I clown, and you who applaud me so rapturously do so because you sense what I am suppressing—our mutual bereavement from beauty."

HAROLD CLURMAN

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