

Stage: June, 1938

STAGE awards the palm



MUSIC

A decision that makes itself is a gratification. Thus there is no doubt or weighing of factors in deciding this year's music Award. It goes automatically to Arturo Toscanini. The new cycle of the master's work, inaugurated with his broadcast of Christmas night, has been as deep and complete a musical satisfaction, for probably as universal an audience, in numbers and tastes, as the world has yet known. For any conductor to turn to radio as the instrument of his widest expression is only natural. For Arturo Toscanini, in his seventy-first year, to do so, and for him to make the transition to a strange new world with as much eager interest and lavish energy as he has poured into it, is epochal.

Curiously, these Toscanini broadcasts have proved certain points which argument used to hold open—and often open to confusion, if not to fulmination. There were many belligerent music-listeners who, not only declining to acclaim Toscanini but actually resenting his supremacy, used to charge the rest of us with fanatical idolatry, and say scornfully that the magic of the Toscanini personality, not the quality of music he made, was what held us spellbound. If we could not see him, they jeered, many of us would not know what conductor we were hearing in a blindfold test. These people have their answer now: the mass opinion of obscure millions to whom these broadcasts have been a revelation and for whom great music has suddenly taken on the excitement of emotional and spiritual discovery. There are even people in our most supercilious metropolitan communities who have "discovered" symphonic music this year; people who never troubled to go to it in concert halls, but who are acquiescent when it is brought to them in their homes. Such people know all too well that the beguiling sight of the Maestro is not what lends terrific excitement and beatific joy to the experience of hearing his music.

Maestro Toscanini would be the first to point out that this award is valid only when it cites, next to him, the magnificent new orchestra that was created for him to lead, and also the men who worked arduously to bring this whole artistic miracle about. The groundwork laid by Artur Rodzinski was indispensably valuable. The meticulous drill at the hands

of Pierre Monteux was very important. The enthusiastic—almost passionate—devotion with which the men of the orchestra have worked, and particularly the leaders of the five string choirs—Mischa-koff of the first violins, Bachmann of the seconds, Cooley and Primrose of the violas, Mazzucchi of the cellos, and Torke of the basses—have earned this orchestra in one season the reputation of possessing the finest string choirs in the world. The National Broadcasting Company has pursued its course in this symphonic venture with a high-minded devotion to the cause of music that is startling in any orchestral experience and incredible, coming from a business organization.

It is not necessary to cite any single performance to recall the superb accomplishment of Maestro Toscanini and his orchestra. It is enough to remember that the incomparable perfection, brilliance, purity, and utter musical sincerity of everything they did was heard by an army of grateful music-lovers; and that in this one season they have established themselves and the art of American music not only on a new, but on a higher plane of beauty and universality.

Honorable Mention, in a year that was satisfying, but not productive of anything historical, goes, with much appreciation, to: The New Friends of Music, for their season of chamber-music and Lieder of Mozart, Schubert, and Schumann, and for their steady adherence to the finest principles of music-making; to Gian-Carlo Menotti, for his opera, *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, which the Metropolitan produced in March, this being the first example of a really distinguished contemporary opera; to Rosalyn Tureck, for her series of recitals of all the piano-music of Bach, a remarkable achievement; to Kerstin Thorborg for outstanding all-round excellence in voice and versatility as the Metropolitan's finest mezzo-soprano in years; to Marian Anderson as a great artist and the possessor of genuine enchantment and the true art of the interpretation of song. Also—to the wonderful Boston Symphony Orchestra, and finally—to the musical score of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

MARCIA DAVENPORT