

Metropolitan Opera

Reviewed Monday (21), 7:45 to 10:30 p.m., E.S.T. Sponsored by the Metropolitan Opera Company, thru the Kudner Agency, American Broadcasting Company (ABC). Originating point, Metropolitan Opera House. One telecast only. Opening opera, "Der Rosenkavalier," by Richard Strauss. Video director, Burke Crotty; assistant, Frank Vagnoni; producers, Henry Vaine and William Templeton; narrator, Milton Cross; interviewers, John Pauline Frederick, Deems Taylor; transmission guests, Edward Johnson; Metropolitan members and technical crew chiefs, Fritz Melchior, Freida Hempel, Anna Earle R. Lewis, Dorothy Kirsten, Bjoerling, Gladys Swarthout, George Cloan, Mrs. August Belmont, Giovanni Martinelli, Giuseppe De Luca; music directed by Fritz Reiner; cast principals, Stevens, Eleanor Steber, Erna Ber-Emanuel List.

All hands at ABC television rate a high on the superlative video coverage opening night at the Met. Last year's initial telecast obviously gave the web's staffers a healthy slug of confidence and experience, and the results this week were gratifying improved over even that top-notch job. Rough edges were smoothed out with but few exceptions. Considering the enormity of the task, requiring eight cameras and TV people, little more could have been desired or secured.

The excitement of opera's first telecast was fully conveyed to the viewers in six cities, and probably made the greatest impression of opera in the public's collective mind since Puccini's Rose offered to bring his own and of garish razzle-dazzle to the plastered walls of the Met. Major negative factor was the opera itself, but a work particularly likely to strike the lowbrow's fancy. It's too good that with an opportunity to impress a tremendous number of new tele viewers, the work could not have been something a little more lyrical and colorful.

Good Camera Work

Camera work, generally, was top-notch, with the varied locations and angles used permitting the director a generous selection of shots from which to choose, and Burke Crotty made the most of them from the control room set up in the Met's executive office. The shots from ork level at stage left were particularly effective, bringing the viewer right onto the stage with the performers. Crotty wisely eschewed the long full-stage shots which a year ago were scattered thru the pick-up and which had little value, since details were nearly invisible.

Pre-performance lobby doings, backstage shots after the first act and other interview portions were correspondingly improved over a year ago. With the exception of some dull and stumbling commentary by Pauline Frederick, all concerned did a brisk job of the bankroller, with the latter's plugs limited to brief credit between acts with the aid of a slide. The principals, a year ago, were brought to the cameras backstage after the initial act, with Met potentate Edward Johnson doing a standout job. When he concludes that affiliation after this season, he might well earn his attention to TV, being telecast as well as self-assured.

Milton Cross's Intros

Milton Cross made the rambling lot as clear as possible in brief intros to each act. Deems Taylor did a



Radio and Television Program Reviews

Designates Radio Review



Designates Television Review

Mr. Feathers

Reviewed Wednesday (16), 10 to 10:30 p.m. Sustaining over Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS). Producer, Herbert C. Rice; director, Rocco Tito; writer, Gerald Holland; music, Ben Ludlow; announcer, Bob Emmerich. Cast, Parker Fennelly, Don Briggs, Bob Dryden, Eleanor Phelps, Mert Koplun, Ralph Locke.

Parker Fennelly, late of the Fred Allen show, has come into a program of his own, a situation comedy airing over the Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS). Cast as a small-town pharmacist with a roseate attitude toward life and its problems, Fennelly is convincing and slyly humorous. The comedy in the show is of the grin and titter sort, rather than the belly-laugh variety more common to the airwaves, but it's a pleasant enough airer.

On the show caught, Fennelly, as the Mr. Feathers of the title, had been tagged for jury duty. Altho most folks consider this a nuisance, not so Mr. Feathers, who considers it an opportunity to answer his country's call. Despite his nasty boss, who wanted him to duck the assignment, Fennelly gratefully accepted and in due course became foreman, virtually the biggest thrill in his life.

Emulating Bogart

Succeeding events in the case, which was a damage suit over a dog bite, had Mr. Feathers attempting to emulate a Humphrey Bogart film by getting evidence himself, thru the medium of breaking into the plaintiff's home to seek the trousers worn at the time of the bite. Altho he had a brief spell in the jug, everything worked out fine when the judge found he was cured of a bad chest cold via Feathers' All-Purpose Ointment, equally good for the itch or for greasing roller skates. High point was Fennelly's description of the varied attractions of Atlantic City, which had the judge, attorneys and other participants forgetting the trial and asking for amplification.

This show gives promise of turning into a good bit of unassuming fun. Its outstanding need is for a stronger character to supplement the easy-going, gentle folk who inhabit Pike City and make up the cast of the show.

Sam Chase.

brisk job of cornering celebrities in Sherry's between acts. John Daly's mike work likewise was laudable. This year's interview sked understandably skipped the static and unproductive questions tossed at "average" opera fans a year ago.

The performers, altho obviously not playing to the cameras, were as effective as if working in a TV studio. Rise Stevens was especially good, acting as proficiently as she sang. Emanuel List seems to have the makings of another hambone Lauritz Melchior, and likely will land a Hollywood contract if broadcasters don't land him first. The other principals, Eleanor Steber and the debuting Erna Berger, also were solid, Miss Steber, of course, having considerable previous TV experience.

One other feature which might have been soft-pedalled, however, was the white-tie-and-tails aspect of the big show. While the glitter of extravagant jewelry and the prevalence of mink and ermine unquestionably are inherent in Met openings now, stressing them is hardly likely to make converts for opera among average viewers. But emphasizing the negative aspects is quibbling; ABC's teamwork made for a memorable evening of television which augurs well for pick-ups of this kind.

Sam Chase.

American Forum of the Air

Reviewed Sunday (13), 4:30-5 p.m. Sustaining simulcast over AM and TV facilities of National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Producer-moderator, Theodore Granik; director, Van Halleck. Announcer, Charles Halleck. Guests, this program, George Sokolsky, Rep. Emanuel Celler.

The veteran radio debate show, American Forum of the Air, now is broadcasting on a simulcast AM-TV basis. The show remains one of the solid airers of its type, and as it enters its 21st season, indicates that as long as politics are around, ready and willing to sound off on either side of any question, it should continue. The TV treatment adds some interest to the show, particularly when the principals work up a good hate for each other and are skilled muggers.

This was the case on the show caught, with columnist George Sokolsky arguing with Rep. Emanuel Celler on whether the government should crack down further on big business. Cameras showed Sokolsky sneering at Celler's remarks, and the congressman either abstractedly or contemptuously poring over his notes as Sokolsky spoke, in some good superimposition shots. The same format as of old still obtains on the show, with each speaker airing his views, arguing with the other, then answering questions from the audience. Ted Granik's work as moderator was, as usual, efficient.

Sam Chase.

All-Star Thanksgiving Show

Reviewed Thursday (24), 8:30-10 p.m. EST. Presented by Elgin-American products thru Weiss & Geller via the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) TV network. Produced by Max Liebman, Director, Joe Cavalier; script, Mel Tolkin and Lucille Kalen; sets, Fred Fox; costumes, Paul DuPont; choreographer, Esther Junger; ork direction, Charles Sanford; vocal and choral arrangements, Clay Warnick; emcee, George Jessel. Talent—Milton Berle, Ritz Brothers, Frances Langford, Phil Regan, Charioteers, Mati Hari, Avon Long, Los Gatos, Rod Alexander, Robert Jonay, Florence Hin Lowe, Donald Liberto, Virginia Gorski and Jordan Bentley.

Elgin-American will have a whole year to mull over mistakes committed on its hour-and-a-half long Thanksgiving TV extravaganza. Insufficient rehearsal, its major boney, led to most of the others. The result was a program in which George Jessel, the emcee, introduced one wrong act, the station break came in the middle of a production number, the commercials cut another number, the show ended before still another production number was finished and the program did not have any real pace or build to it.

The musical portion was most successful. The talents of Phil Regan, Frances Langford and the Charioteers proved sufficient to sock over one tune after another. Milton Berle made a brief appearance in a fire hat and coat, ribbed the audience, told some of his oldest gags, smiled continually as if he had already received his

Hotpoint Holiday

Reviewed Thursday (24), 4-5 p.m. EST. Sponsored by Hotpoint, Inc., via the Columbia Broadcasting Company. Producer, Barry Wood; director, Herbert Sussan; emcee, Rudy Vallee. Cast: Carol Bruce, Sam Levenson, Mary Raye and Naldi, the Upstarts, the Three Rockets. Music, Guy Lombardo and his orchestra; announcer, Ken Roberts.

Hotpoint Holiday wasn't quite in the "turkey" class, but it certainly wasn't the fast-paced potpourri of top talent it was cooked up to be for a Thanksgiving Day special.

Rudy Vallee performed his emcee chores in self-assured, albeit slightly dyspeptic, fashion, but he plays the stuffed shirt with such veracity that Berle-schooled TV variety fans may mistake his subtle satire on pedantic mike manners for the real thing. When the granddaddy of all crooners has the proper foil (a contrasting personality like Como, Crosby or Godfrey) he's a very funny guy, but such was not the case on this show.

Veteran band leader Guy Lombardo revealed a relaxed, telegenic personality in his video debut, and stepped up the pace musically with his "standard" arrangements of several standard tunes. However, with the exception of a lively Highland fling session on the Hop Scotch Polka and a selling vocal on Frankie and Johnnie, the band showed limited visual appeal as a television attraction.

In spite of shadowy, unflattering lensing and over-elaborate staging, beautiful canary Carol Bruce contributed an excellent warbling job on Don't Cry, Joe and Can't Help Lovin' That Man, while newcomer Sam Levenson scored audience-wise with two brief comedy spots.

Mary Raye and Naldi; the Three Rockets, precision terpers, and the Upstarts, vocal group, rounded out the holiday bill. Raye and Naldi are one of the outstanding "slow lift" dance teams in the business, but they played full stage to the studio audience instead of scaling down their routine to the smaller scope of the TV cameras, and the effectiveness of the act suffered accordingly.

The Hotpoint commercials were a real corn-fest. Two quaintly garbed characters, purporting to be Priscilla and John Alden, moseyed around a modern kitchen (fully equipped with Hotpoint appliances, natch) and covly wondered what was keeping Miles Standish. The final plug for Hotpoint's automatic dishwasher ended in a clinch and the historic decision to give old "Miles" the go by.

June Bundy.

check for performing, broke into the Charioteers act and left the audience with the impression they had caught him on the run between his Texaco show and his movie work.

The comedy of the Ritz Brothers was more successful. Their Continental Sentimental Gentleman of Song, interspersed with mimicry of Harry Richman, Chevalier and others, was good fun. However, their parody of Snow White was nonsensical and added up to nothing more than idiotic faces.

George Jessel's emcee work was in a homey vein. The various commercials were nothing more than photos of the large Elgin-American line with copy read by an announcer, aside from the employment of a few models to wear some of its jewelry. During the station break, strangely enough, the smoothly professional Lucky Strike commercial appeared with the consent, it's said, of Elgin-American. The comparisons were invidious.

Leon Morse.

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