

Television in Review

Color Lends a New Radiance to 'Amahl' on N. B. C.—Gain Made by C. B. S.

By JACK GOULD

THE beauty and loveliness of full color television was bestowed last night on Gian-Carlo Menotti's modern Christmas classic, "Amahl and the Night Visitors." The effect was striking in the home, like a succession of Yuletide cards come to life.

"Amahl and the Night Visitors" was the first commercially sponsored program to be presented in color since the Federal Communications Commission approved new standards on Thursday. The opera was televised by the National Broadcasting Company and could be seen on existing receivers in the usual black and white.

The addition of color to Mr. Menotti's sensitive and inspired work was much the same as adding another dimension. The haunting solo passages featuring Bill McIver, as Amahl, and Rosemary Kuhlmann, as the mother, acquired a new delicacy and feeling as the whole scene was projected in subdued pastels ideally suited to the opera's mood.

A foretaste of what color would mean to the art of "live" television was perhaps even more vividly shown with the entry of the Three Wise Men. On a black-and-white set the three figures made an impressive silhouette but it was the viewer's imagination that perforce had to provide the element of pageantry.

On the color receiver the viewer's eye saw for itself the regal costuming. There were the red turban and train of King Caspar, the ermine cape and robe of gold of King Balthazar and the leopard robe of King Melchior. In procession they constituted a moving picture of theatrical grandeur.

The flesh tones of those on stage, one of the acid tests for color television, were unusually good, particularly for Miss Kuhlmann and Master McIver, who often had the advantage of the best lighting. Once or twice there seemed to be a slight reddish overcast in the picture, but the excessive tint was easily

eliminated by minor adjustments of the home receiver.

The dance by Amahl's neighbors, who come to pay homage to the Wise Men, suggested strongly that color TV would be able to use a far wider panorama than often had been practical with black-and-white TV. On black and white the number was admittedly cramped in staging, but not too noticeably so. But on color, a viewer wished there had been much more movement, especially to the left and right. Even so, the dance in color was something to behold.

For those with color sets there was an added dividend after the opera—a selection by members of the Columbus Boys Choir. The youths were dressed in pale blue cottas, as an accommodation to the black-and-white TV, which reproduces blue as white, and big red bow-ties. The sheer simplicity of the scene and the limited number of hues made an exceptional picture. In black and white it was a routine image.

Over the week-end there was another significant development in color television—the almost phenomenal improvement in the quality of images projected by the Columbia Broadcasting System. In what was the first full-length, though sustaining color show after the F. C. C. action, C. B. S. presented "The New Revue" late Friday afternoon.

In song, dance and comedy, the C. B. S. colors, for perhaps the first time, had real stability and depth. Their texture still may not be up to N. B. C.'s tints, but in vividness they now may be ahead. The C. B. S. difficulty with red at last seems conquered.

The importance of the C. B. S. development is that it is employing a much simplified camera, actually a black-and-white device with a color filter wheel inserted in front of the single pick-up tube. N. B. C.'s color camera uses three tubes.

With the color TV race now in full swing, it begins to look as if many advance prognostications may have to be revised.