

for which G. Vollmer has written interesting and gripping choruses. The German Workers' Singing Union cultivated this revolutionary music with the greatest diligence, publishing it in most part themselves.

The model of proletarian theatre productions was presented in Berlin by the "Troupe 1931" in the form of three pieces, the result of activity among a circle of workers. For these sketches which in a pure form represented the best theatre of recent years, Stefan Wolpe wrote songs, choruses and interludes which are in themselves a new form of theatre music.

All these beginnings, which pointed to such a bright future are now destroyed. Not only the new political music, but the works of modern leaders, Schönberg, Weill, Stravinsky may no longer be performed. Even if it is to be hoped that the people will not endure the boredom imposed on it by racial exclusion, it will be difficult again to build up what barbarism has destroyed.

X. T.

CONCERTS, OPERA, BALLET IN RUSSIA TODAY

THE musical life of Moscow and Leningrad during the past season was one of extraordinary activity. It has of course many features which mark it off from other countries. Over-refined and intimate music is avoided, while large scale, monumental works are favored. That is why the newest music is slower to appear here than in Western Europe. The large auditorium is the constant thought. Audiences are mostly organized, attending in groups.

This dependence on organized audiences to some extent shapes programs. There is an attempt at systematic development, an effort to assimilate "the heritage from the past," to quote Goethe, in an order determined by historical and sequential considerations. This year the plan centered about the observance of great memorial days; Wagner and Brahms were exhaustively commemorated. The fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution and the founding of the Red Army were also musically celebrated.

The formation of the Soviet Composers' League in 1932 accelerated productive activity, so that a number of great sym-

phonic works were prepared for the fifteenth October celebration. The most important, recently performed again, is the *Twelfth Symphony* of Miascowsky dedicated to the socialist construction of the republic. In the past Miascowsky has inclined to a rather harsh and severe melancholy, but in this symphony he reveals a brighter range of popular melodies and rhythms, a thematic conception which approaches Borodin's great heroic pathos. The symphony is full of life and light, a joyful chapter in Miascowsky's creation. Next to this in importance and symphonic grandeur stand Schebalin's symphony-cantata *Lenin* and Alexander Krein's *U.S.S.R.—A Shock-Brigade*, for speaker, chorus, symphony orchestra and soloists, on a text by Stalin. Krein's work ends with powerful emotional effect. It rests on a symphonic basis of a Wagnerian dramatic cast and has an imposing contrapuntal union of Russian, German, even Chinese, revolutionary melodies and march rhythms. Bielyi's *Hunger March* is a tragic and expressive work dedicated to the suffering unemployed of Western Europe. A great popular success was gained by the premiere of Lew Knipper's *Symphony for the Red Army*. With remarkable feeling for characteristic melodic touches and rhythms of the Army songs and Mongolian folk melodies, Knipper paints the life of the army of the Far East. A very successful entrance of the chorus at the end of the work heightens the dynamic effect. It is unusual that a music of such outspoken modernistic color should so rapidly gain the sympathy of the big audience.

A series of composers' evenings was recently dedicated to individual masters. The Wassilenko and Schostakowitch programs were organized by the Moscow Philharmonic with the cooperation of the brilliant Radio Orchestra. Sergei Wassilenko, who celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his activity, is a master of orchestration, one of the most diligent researchers in Eastern music. He gives symphonic expression, with uninterrupted energy, to an endless abundance of melodic and harmonic ideas, in pictures rich in color.

Young Dmitri Schostakowitch of the Leningrad circle, is at the moment the strongest power of the younger generation of Soviet composers. His wide popularity in the Soviet Union is

largely due to his sound-film compositions and his symphonies for the October and May festivals. For his "evening" Schostakowitch selected the first F-minor *Symphony* (written when he was eighteen), and a symphonic suite from his latest ballet, *The Screw*; also a piano piece which he played himself. The first symphony, a pattern of modern polyphony, and the ballet, which is an extensive experiment with the grotesque, are at opposite poles. In the one we have the lyrical Schostakowitch, in the other an artist of biting irony, an almost mechanical readiness for battle. In both he shows himself a master of the softest as well as the shrillest tonal mixtures, whose gift may perhaps be compared with Stravinsky's. The piano work sounded much flatter, without any individuality or freshness.



Production in the field of opera and ballet are shaped by the nature of the Russian theatre today, which in many ways recalls the theatre of the French revolution. Now, as then, the stage has suddenly broken a hundred-year-old tradition. The masses have become masters of the fate of the theatre. New forms, new possibilities of powerful expression have been feverishly sought. Musical creation must be accessible to the mass-audience. The treasures of the People's Theatre, the popular songs of the various nationalities of the U.S.S.R., have been ransacked. Races whose cultural expression had been suppressed by czarism have obtained national opera theatres and flowered into an active musical life. New opera schools have grown up in this fruitful soil.

The past ten years, during which the main development of Soviet opera took place was a decade of extremely tense class war. The theatre, indeed all art, was compelled to reflect the tremendous events which shook the world. Naturally the means of expression must differ from those formerly employed. The new emotional standards had nothing in common with the romantic-individualistic world which had been the foster-mother of opera. Thus there persists today in the U.S.S.R. a feeling against romantic lyricism, even though it is conceded that music is a language of the emotions.

The new principles for opera apply to the ballet. The Union expropriated the art of the ballet as a classical property. Only in pre-revolutionary Russia were this art and its technic cultivated. During the first period of the revolution, until about 1925, the classic ballet was taboo. Occasionally, on fête days, realistic, revolutionary subjects were expressed in ballet form. Today there are entire ballet performances, based not on classical lyric themes, but on historical events, such as those of the French revolution.

In the early years of the new Russian state the talk was all of a crisis in opera. The music stage could hardly keep pace with the surging tempo of events. A chasm between art and life arose, stamping the opera and ballet as outlived, out-of-date. Only the traditional remained; Tchaikowsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakow practically monopolized the stage. Their skill, the splendid effects, the stage grouping which drew their vital power from the Russian folksong, their monumental conception, held in bondage and still do cast their spell on most of the Soviet audience.

What then accounts for the birth of the Soviet opera, how did it win a place in the Soviet repertoire? Opera composition is admittedly one of the most controversial forms of musical activity. The young talents of the Soviet second generation entered the field only after long consideration. The progress of opera creation was considerably slowed down. After all, it was a question of competing with the masters of the art of world-opera.

The main preoccupation was to find themes of great social weight and significance. In the field of opera a good book carries the germ of success. The material might be worked up according to the principles of classic and post-classic Russian opera art. This would involve a rebirth of the great historic opera. Another procedure was to build a new dramatic-oratorio form. The second method was made easy by the wide use of music in the Soviet theatre.

The first important historic Soviet operas date from 1924-1925 and to some extent are still kept in the repertoire. They are *The Break* by Potozky, *The Eagle Uprising* by Paschchenko (Leningrad), *The Dekabrists* by Zolotarev (Ukraine), and

Stepan Raisin by Triodin (Moscow). These were deeply influenced by the heritage of the Russian past. *Stepan Raisin*, (which deals with a Cossack rising in the sixteenth century) owes so much to Korsakow, that one might call it a continuation of *Sadko*. In *The Dekabrists*, which is about the officers' rebellion in 1825, the lyric element has noticeable admixtures of Tschaikovsky. But this opera stands on a much higher plane. It is the work of a ripened master, who handles his material with great dramatic skill, permitting himself an indulgence in tragic pathos. Paschchenko's *The Eagle Uprising* offers an organic expansion of Kirghish, Russian and Tartar melodies, the songs of nationalities represented in the great Pugatschow revolt in the middle of the eighteenth century. There is a splendid dramatic interpretation of the court of Catherine II. This opera, as well as the *Dekabrists*, is still produced frequently in the Ukraine. *The Break* treats of quite recent events, the civil war, General Momontov's offensive toward the center, and its lamentable outcome. Potozky's writing has its source in Borodin's and Moussorgsky's, and is most characteristic in the handling of choral masses. There are scenes and monologs in which the revolutionary feeling of the peasants finds strong and convincing expression, and which have served to advance opera as a means of social expression.

The second group of operas, in whose development the best talents of the old as well as the new generations have participated, are works which propound broader problems. Not that they are buried in romanticism and lyricism—for the social theme is still outstanding. But their whole musico-dramatic style is conceived on the basis of greater artistic profundity and with a more symphonic style. They are the works of Krein, Wassilenko, Schischow and Schostakowitch. Krein's *Sagmuk* is a symphonic drama of great sweep, in which a profound knowledge of Eastern melodies is revealed against a modern orchestration influenced by Wagner, Strauss, and in part, Debussy. Wassilenko's skilled harmonizing in *Son of the Sun* utilizes Chinese-Mongolian themes as atmosphere for his opera. The composer is now at work on a large-scale opera with Christopher Columbus as the hero. *The Hair Artist* by Schischow

is a tragedy about serfdom. Irony distinguishes the handling of melodic material and the dance forms of the eighteenth century. The work lacks complete expressive force but many parts of the score reveal taste and a certain lyric flow.

The greatest shock to our conservative musicians so far has been Schostakowitch's *Nose*, on Gogol's famous novel. This work, a model of caustic wit, is the most strongly satirical opera staged so far. Schostakowitch has a remarkable sensitivity to social implications. It would be wrong however to limit his talent to irony and satire. His latest opera, *Lady Macbeth from Mzensk*, (on a novel by Leskow), a work of the greatest dramatic tension and tragic conflict, reveals a gift for dramatic pathos.

The ballet in Leningrad and Moscow has provided us with a much smaller number of scores. Leningrad so far is in the lead. The ballets of Schostakowitch, familiar even in foreign countries, are first produced here. His latest choreographic work, *The Screw*, reveals the conflict between two points of view, a hankering for enjoyment on the part of the uprooted generation which has been carried over to a new age and a new, creatively happy youth. The ballet suffers from a feeble libretto and has been withdrawn for re-working by the composer.

The Flame Out of Paris, a historical ballet by Asafiew, had a Leningrad premiere of the first order. It is no new musical creation however, but only a new re-working of songs, hymns and dances of the French Revolution. The composer, Boris Asafiew, a solid music scholar, tries through a not very skillful instrumental treatment to re-validate the music of Gossek, Katel, and others half forgotten today. The rhythmic vivacity, the sharp melodic outline of the mass songs and dances won for this work a lively welcome from the Soviet public.

Moscow still adheres to the ballet standards of around 1928. These were set by the great success of Glier's *Red Moon*. An example of sheer ballet romanticism and revolutionary pathos, it nevertheless seems to have the strongest hold on the sympathies of the masses. A second ballet by Glier, *The Comédiennes* (after Lope de Vega's *Fuenda Ovechuna*) did not pass the general test. In the last few weeks, the ballet repertoire has been

freshened up with a few small compositions, *Dionys* by Schenschin, and the Slavic Dances of Behr.

At the present moment the Moscow and Leningrad ballet and opera offer programs strongly colored by romanticism. The operas of Tschaikowsky, Rimsky-Korsakow, Borodin and Moussorgsky are still the greatest attractions. Leningrad however has more of a Western orientation. Here we have heard Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Krenek's *Jonny* and *Sprung über den Schatten*, Schilling's *Mona Lisa*, as well as Strauss' *Salome*, Wagner's *Ring* (with the exception of Siegfried). But in the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre the choice of works is made much more carefully, being confined principally to the nineteenth century standbys, splendidly staged. No venturing here into the uncertain waters of the twentieth century. The daring is furnished by Nemirowitsch-Dantchenko's progressively minded opera theatre known in America through its guest tour. The Moscow premiere of Schostakowitch's *Lady Macbeth* is to take place here. The Bolshoi Theatre's competition for a new opera promises a rich harvest, the results to be made known, however, only in November.

Eugen Braudo

BOSTON'S FIRST TIMES

FOR the sixty subscription concerts that the Boston Symphony Orchestra gives annually in its own city, Dr. Koussevitzky assembles twenty-four programs. With few exceptions, each of the twenty-four programs includes one piece new to Boston. It may be a long neglected work that the conductor believes worthy of revival, or a recent work of a living composer for which he has at last found room. Usually, however, it is music of the present hour for the first time anywhere; or for the first time, as the program-book has it, in the United States.

The outcome is an array of "novelties," season after season, that no other orchestra in America may equal. Some pass quickly under the process that business men name "trial and error."