

"melodrama," an appallingly dull sort of continuum composed largely of tidbits and refuse from Chaminade, which runs through a spoken scene. The production was fair; I find it difficult to go operettas of the "charming" school.

Nor can I with any pleasure witness so stupidly vulgar and inane a performance as Ziegfeld's *Hot-Cha!* proved to be. The sets and costumes were elaborate in the Christmas-tree tradition of Urban. The book is inconsequential and bawdy, lacking even ordinary continuity; each "gag" demands a special narrative paraphernalia which weights the whole down inexcusably and to no avail. The music has moments of brightness and verve (for this sort of show), but is in general only passable.

Marc Blitzstein

## SPRING CONCERTS IN NEW YORK

IF the essence of music is motion, a motion controlled and brought to definite issue, it is interesting to note each new work's version of this essential motion as its characteristic feature, its very physiognomy. This motion, this fundamental shape and direction corresponds in music to Blake's "bounding line." "How do we distinguish the oak from the beech but by the bounding outline?"

At the League of Composers concert (March 6th) one noted an interesting contrast from this standpoint between Koutzen's *Sonatine* for piano and Antheil's *Chamber Concert* for eight instruments. Koutzen's "bounding line" seemed to consist solely of an incessant motion of two or more contrapuntal parts. As such it no more constituted and guaranteed real continuity than the continuous movement of a churn or a ratchet-wheel does. There seemed to be nothing inherent in the stuff of the work that shaped its movement and brought it to a necessary conclusion. Antheil's work was more resourceful. The motion was free and varied. What was more characteristic was the flow from idea to idea. While the work is not at all abstruse it requires a closer knowledge than one hearing affords to judge as a concatenated whole. The working out of the cadence and codetta in A was one of the most successful bits of writing in the piece.

Randall Thompson's *Odes of Horace* (Schola Cantorum, March 9th) had something of the dignity of the Latin poet—and something of the poetry too. The austerity of the opening, the “dying fall” at the end of the last ode were wholly beautiful. The deliberateness of pace was quite in keeping with the *données* of Thompson's work. I mean the restrictions imposed by his “technique of expression,” that of (in Thompson's words) “the classic purity of the sixteenth century musical line,” and by the nature of the text. Though the style of the *Odes* made one at times conscious of a certain archaism, it is hard to imagine a more perfect handling of the chorus.

On the same program a *Quatuor* for harp, celesta, flute, saxophone with women's voices, by Hektor Villa-Lobos, left one at a loss to characterize unless one resorted to one's immediate impression; that here was music distinctly of accompaniment-to-a-travelog-film order, both in the nature of its content and in its way of progressing. Local color was plentiful. The meandering of the instrumental sections suited perfectly a scenic anthology by the camera. Even the placing of the entries of the women's voices, coming arbitrarily and too fragmentarily, considering the length of the work, suggested that the women of the village were singing at sundown and that the camera-man happened to be around.

Prokofieff's *Third Symphony* (Philadelphia Orchestra, Stokowski conducting, March 15th) has a kind of fluent, very fluent motion. One could call it the fluency of the born athlete—motion enjoyed for its own sake. There is tension in the music but it is the tension of a track event. The music takes one with it, but when it is over one is left with nothing but a sort of pleasurable sense of having gone around a race-track in good style. But that is saying a great deal. Especially when one considers how often a musical promenade (not to speak of musical flights which like Don Quixote's Pegasus have never left the ground) turns into a puffy asthmatic limping after a few brave steps.

One found quite the reverse of the musical athlete in Alban Berg's *Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano* (League of Composers, April 3rd). Here motion was at a standstill. Here a man was motionless, listening for the tremors of his own heart-beats,

watching the slow shifting of some inner anguish. Expressive—certainly—but incomplete, a diastole of the whole pulsing heart immobilized within itself, unable to send life-blood streaming onwards because the cyclic interplay and drama, the complete diastole and systole of the organism have been mutilated.

Nicolai Berezowsky's *String Quartet* (same program) had an appealing zig-zag deftness. It abounded in adroit sudden transitions that gave all the fast movements a personal color. One felt the adagio somewhat less *réussi* in character. But each of the allegro movements, particularly the finale, had an entrain that was wholly successful.

Randall Thompson's *Americana* for chorus with piano accompaniment is, at least in one respect, a tour de force. Mr. Thompson's prosodic sense is so keen that he has managed to give the blocks of prose extracted from the columns of the *Mercury* a rhythmic sense and continuity. In this respect *God's Bottles* and the death-chamber scene were quite extraordinary. But there is some anomaly in the effect of the work as a whole. Thompson's intentions are not quite clear. Following a grimly presented account of an execution comes a burlesque with its tremendously funny fugate on "Each Verse will lift you to the Heights of Consciousness." Each one is highly effective in itself. But the transition, not insofar as it is a transition of mood but insofar as it is a transition from one plane to another, is disturbing.

Ernst Toch's *Suite for Orchestra*, (Boston Symphony, April 7th) reminds one of those people of whom the Bible says "They have ears but they hear not, they have eyes but they see not." Of course I am not referring to Mr. Toch's eyes and ears. He has very good ears—witness the cleverness of his orchestration; and as for his eyes, he seems to have looked around well enough to buy his musical products cheaply and dress them up to sell at quite a profit. What I refer to is the nature of Toch's musical materials. Somehow they are gay without being gay, expressive without being expressive, lively without the least life. Mr. Toch seems to manipulate music from the tips of his finger-nails. One wishes it came from closer home.

Hans Jelinek's *Suite for String Orchestra* (prize composition of the New York Association of Music School Settlements,

April 13th) moved with a great deal of gusto. One wondered sometimes whether Jelinek wasn't standing on a tread-mill. It seemed the only possible solution for the fact that Jelinek, with all the marcate commotion of his allegro movements, wasn't getting anywheres. An adagio however had more quality.

Arnold Bax's *The Garden of Fand* (Philharmonic Orchestra, April 9th) was fat music. One longed desperately for leanness, for a contour, a sharp profile. One got nothing but an interminable merging fatness that left no well-delineated features anywhere except for the undistinguished tinkling of the opening and ending.

Schönberg's *Gurrelieder*, with the exception of the last part is the work of a twenty-six year old man. To comment on its Tristanesque qualities would be about as flat as a remark on the weather. On the other hand, before so obvious a fact, there is a temptation (though not in many quarters I must say) to look for some deeper quality behind the surface appearance. After all the work is that of a young man. One should let it go at that, attempting neither to prove that the genesis of atonality is highly suspect, nor that beneath the obvious faults of the work some esoteric *quelque chose* is there to maintain Schönberg's prestige. What one can say for the work is that it has a flow which does keep one's interest. If by some ingenuity of modern plumbing one could manage to have a warm bath flow over one, that would about be the equivalent of most of the *Gurrelieder*. Though not of all of it. The last part is sharper, more characteristic of the later Schönberg. As for the immense panoply involved in performance, nothing could be more typically young-mannish. And as a "vast monument to the romantic tradition," it is hardly more than a vast monument to an immature attempt to overwhelm by a multiplicity of exterior means. One thinks of Wagner's *Rienzi*.

One can find no better peroration for this season, or for any other season (aren't the ages alike, and if Mr. Eliot, for instance, belives that a great tradition, the lack of which this season has turned our geniuses into men of talent, would at some not impossible future season turn our men of talent into geniuses,—why we can afford to smile) than Blake's words again when he once for all defines the essence of a work of art: "The great and

golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art, and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling."

*Israel Citkowitz*

## YADDO—A MAY FESTIVAL

**I**T is to be hoped that the future may look back upon the First Festival of Contemporary American Music, held at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, New York, April 30 and May 1, as an event of the first water in the annals of music and that it may prove to be the first of a notable series which should take its deserved place along with the several famed and widely heralded European festivals.

To review in detail, item for item, all the eighteen works performed at its three concerts would be boring. Better hazard a classification to which they readily lend themselves: the successes and the near-successes; the experiments and misfits; the embryos. It is pleasant to be able to place twelve of the eighteen in the first group; in a way even more gratifying to recognize three out-and-out experimenters (obviously the misfits could belong in no other group, though of course experimenters are not necessarily misfits); most promising of all to find two so young that only the classification "embryonic" fits them, and of these one belongs in the first as in the last group, and is in a measure also an experimenter. Among the successes there are several indeed which could likewise be called experiments, but are placed in the first class because they so notably succeeded.

A criticism of these works as a whole would apply equally to most music now being written anywhere, would indeed be rather a pronouncement on the present status of music. For the festival is of a piece with any comparable group of new music the writer has heard in the last five years; American music need no longer step aside for Europe.

But this music of the present is apparently most concerned with texture. The experiments deal in the main with texture; the successes are successes in the management and manipulation