

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

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## SCHÖNBERG'S SUITE FOR STRING ORCHESTRA

IT is one thing to extend the boundaries of thought and language by sheer force of imagination. The immense life of a language is constantly nourished by the particular contributions of every really inventive individual or epoch. But for some one individual to set up a language or system of his own contrivance, rejecting materials and forms that are common to all, is to destroy every organic lien between his audience and himself.

That has been Schönberg's tragedy. His qualities of warmth, intensity and humor have been reduced, by the incommunicability of the system within which he chooses to work, to a very limbo of inexpressiveness. Like the old painter in Balzac's tale he has become so involved and concentrated in his own unique perspective that he has forgotten its inaccessibility to other men. The passage of years could only accentuate the remoteness of this system. And for a man of Schönberg's prominence and wealth of contact with the world this cannot have occurred without terrible strain and conflict. Schönberg's preoccupation in recent years with older music, his elaborate orchestral arrangements of Bach, his manipulations of eighteenth century works into complex patterns of his own, point to a growing need to find some closer contact with an audience than his uncompromisingly atonal music afforded him.

What makes the new *Suite* an event of extraordinary interest is the fact that Schönberg is now directly expressing himself within the system of classical tonality. Where his imagination deployed itself, aloof, in that baffling abstract style unique to him,

it now reveals itself in terms we readily grasp and assimilate. And Schönberg is none the less Schönberg for the familiarity he has made possible here. The rigorous logic, the contrapuntal mastery, the subtle variations of tone-color that characterize all his work are present. Amidst all the extraordinary polyphony of this suite, a polyphony refracted not only from voice to voice, but from one plane to another plane, the logical progress of the *grand ligne* is maintained with a masterly control. And with this weaving of planes a richness and subtlety of color is created that would be hard to match even in Schönberg's large orchestral works. The body of strings of the Philharmonic has rarely sounded more richly colored than it did on the occasion of Herr Klemperer's brilliant performance of this work. The sub-division of strings into small groups gives a very individual quality of depth to the music, depth in an almost spatial sense, for these subdivisions are not coloristic in origin, but rigorously polyphonic; and with each group developing its own plane, an effect of wonderful plasticity is created. Unlike Cézanne who arrives at the depth of his planes by way of color, Schönberg creates his contrasts of color by the apposition of planes. Only the precision and delicacy of our tonal system could have made such an effect possible for it is obvious that without a system of harmonic relations completely assimilable by the ear, these fusions and contrasts of planes would never have been plausible, or even perceptible.

It is not only Schönberg's technical dexterity that finds full play in this music. For all the neo-classical sounding forms, "Overture", "Minuet", "Gavotte", for all the archaisms that distract at first hearing, one feels continually the sombre weight of Schönberg's complex personality. With all its nostalgia for that brave clearness of the classical world, the present with its tortuous complexities and tenuous moods is the prime expression. Schönberg in the past has had the grandiose folly of wishing to re-create the whole matter and stuff of music. His effort to invent a new musical organum ended by destroying the whole expressiveness of his music. This unassuming work, with its grave and supple architecture, its clear assimilable harmonic

language and weaving melodic line has given us more of the essence of Schönberg than there is in all of his "Schönbergian" atonalities.

Israel Citkowitz

## COMPOSERS AS LECTURERS AND IN CONCERTS

I TAKE it composers are no longer viewed as ineffable angelic nitwits who populate a mythology invented by lady novelists. Persons who write music are not necessarily incapable of human speech. As a matter of fact, composers are fairly articulate. They can also perform and conduct music rather well, even some one else's music. It is still something of a gamble to take on faith what a composer has to say regarding his own work; barring that subject, there are a number of sound and stimulating ideas in circulation thanks to the composer-turned-lecturer and -critic. I cite Copland, Eisler, Sands.

Copland's lecturing, like his written criticism, is notable for a flat undecorated honesty. He is no felicitous phraser, he has little grace of speech, few quips; and sometimes one stops listening. Almost always something important is missed. Copland is that rare musician who believes his ears, which is to say his instinct; and his ears and his instinct tell him much that is penetrating and truthful. The survey he is making at the New School of music of the last ten years—presenting recordings, talk and piano-illustration—constitutes a large undertaking. It is too large if it is really necessary to lump Stravinsky, Shostakovitch and Prokofieff together in one evening's analysis (Oct.4). All of Stravinsky's important first period was missing; Prokofieff was represented by the piffling *Pas d'Acier*; one aspect of Shostakovitch's gift was caught. Copland put forth the tempting theory that the Russian revolution, to which Stravinsky was and is opposed, split his career into "Russian" and "non-Russian" periods, and that this is the large distinction between his early and his recent music. I think the first idea partly right, as it concerns the conscious Stravinsky; although Tiresias' aria, the whole *Symphonie des Psaumes* and pages of the *Baiser* are as Russian as borscht. But the "change" in Stravinsky—it is really a sloughing-off and