

One should be grateful to Mr. Barbirolli for the string suite which he has arranged from music of Purcell. It is high time this composer became better known and appreciated in America. Purcell has a very individual style; the clarity of writing, the beautiful melodic line of his slow movements, the peculiar, personal way in which he achieves dissonance, all these elements unite in forming a music which is always a source of delight.

One of the novelties of the season was the Stokowski arrangement of music from *Boris Godunov*. It is hardly necessary to say that the orchestra glittered like a steel mirror in the sun, sending forth rays of light that would have completely blinded Moussorgsky. A noteworthy addition to the percussion group was the series of seven or eight Javanese gongs, of different sizes. These were used chiefly in the music calling for bells, although their sonority was often obscured by the elaborate superstructure of the orchestra. A gong cannot be struck loudly; the vibrations die at once. Strike it softly and, if it is a good one, the sound will continue as long as five minutes. Needless to say, they are at their best in the orchestra when their overtones are not "eaten into" by the orchestral sonority. Their presence in the Philadelphia Orchestra is one of the most stimulating additions to the percussion group in recent times; let composers take note!

The *Bunte Suite* for orchestra of Ernest Toch was heard recently at a Stassévitch concert. This is unimportant music, a sort of glib Hindemith of a period already dated. It is, however, beautifully scored, in a very special manner. The *Galante Passacaglia*, particularly, has a quite magical effect in its strange and mysterious sonorities.

The only other new work heard so far was the *Third Symphony* of Rachmaninov, performed by Stokowski. There is nothing to be said about this work from our point of view, except that admirers of Rachmaninov's music seemed definitely disappointed on hearing it.

Colin McPhee

PARADISE LOST and the FOURTEENTH of JULY

LAST June, Igor Markevitch's new work received its first Paris performance, under the young composer's direction, with the assistance of the Orchestre de la Société Philharmonique

de Paris and the Société Chorale de la Philharmonique de Bruxelles. In criticizing this music upon first hearing, I was faced with the problem of its extreme complexity; but from the published version of the score, it has been possible to draw certain conclusions.

Markevitch conceived his oratorio, *Le Paradis Perdu*, directly from the poem by Milton. Out of a series of mythical fables drawn from *Paradise Lost*, and from Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Goethe's *Faust*, he created his own text, a drama of humanity wherein the struggle between good and evil in our lives assumes special significance as a reflection of earthly existence.

The music which he has written is overladen with artificial complexities so that its few ideas are obscured by facile floridities. In a case where the text, devised by himself, demanded simple treatment, one would expect a sense of formal design to prevail. Instead, the composer has made, out of what should have been an interesting approach, a laborious problem.

Heretofore Markevitch's music has been the result of a careful balance of complete ideas, as in the beautiful and extraordinary *Psaume*, the delightful *Serenade* or the *Partita* for piano and orchestra. We now are confronted by music artificially complex, overdrawn, formless, and harmonically uninteresting. In his introduction to *Le Paradis Perdu* (in *La Revue Musicale*) Markevitch said. "La composition du *Paradis Perdu* a pris plusieurs années de ma vie, a bouleversé beaucoup de mes conceptions artistiques, m'a forcé à préciser quelques points sur l'essence de la musique et son rôle dans le monde." Markevitch may have succeeded with *Le Paradis Perdu*, as so many of his followers believe. I, for one, prefer his extremely young works where critical analysis played a far better role than the rather forced issues in his present music. The work is generally rhapsodic and is, moreover, diffuse, full of notes which tend to clutter such ideas as are apparent. The texture as a whole is boringly polyphonic, and it is a polyphony which seldom moves, but complicates the basic harmonic coherencies.

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In commemoration of the Fourteenth of July, La Maison de la Culture presented to the people of France Romain Rolland's

*Le Quatorze Juillet*, which brought together the finest creative contemporary French artists. Here I shall mention only the incidental music which earned the collaboration of Jacques Ibert, Georges Auric, Darius Milhaud, Albert Roussel, Charles Koechlin, Arthur Honegger and Daniel Lazarus.

Jacques Ibert's overture was typical of his best writing. A fine sense of the form he was utilizing plus brilliant orchestration made a superb introduction to the spirit of the play; Georges Auric's prelude to the first act was a brilliant and truly exciting curtain-raiser, while the finale by Darius Milhaud proved to be the most skillful piece of choral writing this composer has done, much in the spirit of the choruses in his Greek operas. The choral recitation, combined with a sonorous orchestral background and full stage action, brought the first act to a thrilling climax.

The most deeply felt and personal music was Albert Roussel's overture to the second act. Here was a passage truly prophetic of the eventual storming of the Bastille; there was an almost supernatural feeling in this subdued, tender music. Thematic material of a popular nature deftly orchestrated and skillfully constructed, made up the choral and orchestral music for the end of the second act, capably and successfully written by Charles Koechlin.

Typically the work of Arthur Honegger, was the overture to Act Three. The well known muted fanfares and contrapuntal devices added marvelously to the dramatic intensity of the whole spirit of the play, perhaps more successfully than did the other pieces. The finale, by Daniel Lazarus, seemed less fortunate. It was not good theatre music, especially for so stirring an end as Romain Rolland has written.

Roger Désormières conducted with deep respect for the music by these seven men as well as for the message the play made felt. And I cannot resist giving my word of praise to the magnificent curtain painted for the occasion by Picasso, its subject bearing a close affinity to some of Goya's war illustrations.

*David Diamond*

## FORUM PORTRAITS: SAMINSKY, JOSTEN, FINNEY

THE Composer's Forum Laboratory of the W.P.A. opened its second season with Lazare Saminsky as the invited guest