

sung and played under the deft direction of Leonard Bernstein, and the staging, which was ultimately shaped by Eric Crozier who did the London performances, was exciting and certainly definitive.

The characters and action of *Peter Grimes* were developed out of a poem by George Crabbe, parts of which appear in the text of the libretto. The story deals with a real problem, that of a man who cannot get along with the people around him. Perhaps a flaw in the libretto is that it never gives the cause for Grimes's original isolation from the community. But beyond that the piece has the quality of a Greek tragedy, wherein misfortune comes not from direct malfeasance on the part of the protagonist, but as a result of some failing in his character, in this case the arrogance which brings about his destruction. Most of the story is presented realistically, but there are also tableaux-like scenes in which the action almost stops and a mood is set and extended.

The vocal music matches the dramatic flow by being faithful to the outlines of speech in the realistic scenes and by becoming more stylized in the tableaux. This technique is consciously controlled by Britten and implemented by the distinction he makes between informative text, which must be understood, and non-informative text, whose meaning he is willing to subordinate to its function as a vehicle for the melodic line. Examples of this latter usage are several of the loveliest parts of the opera: Ellen's first aria, the female quartet in the first act and Ellen's embroidery aria.

Britten's scoring is brilliant and imaginative, if occasionally a little heavy. The orchestral interludes, whose function is to bridge the changes of scenery, are long and of slight musical interest. The vocal parts are not easy, and the title role especially has a very high tessitura, which may limit the currency of the work. But *Peter Grimes* is certainly exciting theatre and proves that opera in English can sound natural.

Some new music had more intimate hearings at the weekly composers' gatherings under Copland's direction. Those studying at Tanglewood, as well as visitors, met each Sunday evening for informal programs of works recently written. Occasionally there was discussion: one afternoon meeting with Britten was devoted to an exchange of ideas on opera. The final Sunday evening provided a program of music by several of the many South American composers attending the summer session.

Jacob Avshalamoff

FIRST MIDDLEBURY CONFERENCE

THE modern musician as a functioning unit of modern society was the general theme of the first annual Composers' Conference and Chamber Music Center held at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Ver-

mont, during the last two weeks of August. The composers had chamber ensembles and audiences on which to try out their ideas. The performers had extensive practise in the problems of contemporary music. Representatives of music publishing firms and the daily press were present to discuss ways of getting new music before the public as well as the public reaction to it.

Each day Otto Luening of Columbia and Richard Donovan of Yale met with composers, whose scores were subjected to general and detailed analysis. There were songs, chamber music, symphonies and operas. Those works which could be, were tried out with the forces available; some were given public performance.

The advisers made no effort to impose a preconceived esthetic or personal point of view. They tried merely to show what seemed essential for a complete expression of the individual composer's ideas in the light of his own potentialities and tastes. Several were guided in matters of effectiveness, clarity and practicability; every composer knows that his music sometimes contains dead spots or confused passages which another eye or ear may detect. Some at Middlebury had never heard their works in a fully rehearsed presentation.

Those whose music was performed came from every part of the United States and from South America, and their outlooks differed as much as their geographical origins. They agreed only on one negative fact: they all avoided atonality and the twelve-tone technique. The sport and game of making music was exemplified with great gusto and high spirits in a set of variations for two violins by Harold Chapman. A high lyric gift and remarkable command of color was apparent in the *Rhapsody* for violin and piano by Lorraine Henderson, but the song and quartet movement by Hector Tosar of Uruguay exhibited a still more poignant and urgent expressionism and a masterly control of a very extensive palette.

The *Quintet* for flute, piano and strings by Halsey Stevens underlined, with its exquisite refinement of texture, its subtleties of form and its vivid melodiousness, the high estimate of that composer's gifts which this writer had made in a report from San Francisco published in *MODERN MUSIC* some months ago. The *Trio* for violin, viola and piano by Mathilde McKinney is an interesting and spirited example of *Gebrauchsmusik*. It was written for a doctor who plays the viola in an amateur way. Another doctor I know once loudly demanded of his composer friends a string quartet with a strictly amateur second violin part; apparently the fiddling medico market is quite as good today as the fiddling royalty market was in Mozart's time.

In addition to the work of the composers and their interpreters, there

were sessions on publication, performing rights and allied matters, under the chairmanship of Alexander Broude; discussions of musical criticism led by the undersigned; a lecture on the present state of the arts in general by Rockwell Kent; and demonstrations of folk music by Pete Seeger and by Marguerite Olney, curator of the Flanders Collection of Vermont balladry which is housed at Middlebury College. Broude announced that each year his firm would publish a work submitted for the conference and selected by the composition faculty; Rockwell Kent then volunteered to design the format for this series. The work chosen for this year is the *Sonatina* for flute and piano by Halsey Stevens.

One of the finest performances of the whole session was turned in by Alan Carter of the Middlebury music faculty in the unenviable position of general director.

Alfred Frankenstein

MODERN MUSIC AT CHAUTAUQUA

A fascinatingly complex work by Milhaud, his *Two Piano Concerto*, brought to an end the season of concerts at Chautauqua, with the orchestra conducted by Franco Autori; Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale the soloists. Milhaud has always had a fondness for such rich fabrics, but in his recent pieces the separate lines attain great independence. At times the intent is a fulness that exists primarily to create a noisy excitement. The thematic elements of the work sketch a careless inventory of all Milhaud's latest attachments: the quick and brief end movements evoke the shrill flourishes of Provençal folk music, familiar South Americanisms and, in the finale, some distinctly blue melodic formulas. Here the two pianos romp gaily but with a motory insistence. But in the extended middle movement another Milhaud appears – the composer of somber, portentous funeral marches. The intricate writing for the pianos, with elaborate use of grace notes, is most original. The beautiful close has a quiet mystery in its sonorities. Throughout the *Concerto* I was aware of the unflagging quality of Milhaud's melodic invention. Even the rapid little extensions of his themes are always expressively shaped.

Another work with as yet infrequent performances was Norman Dello Joio's *Concert Music*. Though in one movement, this piece has several complete sections which give it the cast of a very concise short symphony. The motto theme is fortunately not overdone, for Dello Joio's unrestrained flow of full-bodied material is impressive. Some beautifully-spaced large sonorities near the slow beginning are very telling, though the fast passages also attract one by their brilliance and energy. In the moderate middle section, though it is overlong, the expansiveness of the lines shows us the