

FORECAST AND REVIEW

NEW YORK, SPRING, '42; MUSIC OF THE AMERICAS

THE premiere of William Schuman's *Fourth Symphony* by the Philadelphia orchestra revealed what appears to be a peculiar need in this composer for the strict forms whose use in the *Third Symphony* I deplored. The freer approach of the new work is no guard against diffuseness, and thus even the characteristic vigor seems diluted. Though this symphony is better managed than most of Schuman's previous formally-unconfined works, I suspect that as with Harris the arbitrary guiding lines are necessary not only to mark the channel, but to insure sharp contours of the themes. This material lacks the strong profile of the *Third Symphony*. The most striking spots are in the emotionally full introduction to the first movement and the finale's second theme. Schuman's personality is very positive. Influences are here in a hardly absorbed way, yet the whole feeling and open manner, if not the actual style, are individual.

Samuel Barber's *Second Essay* (a Philharmonic premiere) is the best of this composer's works to date. I think Barber has been reading his Copland and Harris scores and it has been good for him. The horizon has also broadened, and he now appears capable of real thematic invention, manifest mostly in melodic variety. In this finished piece with its quiet, persuasive personality, there is integrity in feeling, form, and style.

Earlier in the season there was an outburst of rare and generally unnecessary material at the Philharmonic. Eugene Goossens brought his own *Phantasy for Strings*, an early chamber music work amplified, typical in its warm, romantic feeling, with interest centered on rich harmonic progressions; excerpts from Pedro Sanjuan's *Cuban Dance Suite*, *Liturgia Negra*, unimportant sketches which seemed more like travel posters than an indigenous expression; and Bernard Rogers' *The Dance of Salome* colorful and sonorous, avoiding vulgarity without achieving any very

positive mood . . . Also the *First Symphony* by Richard Mohaupt. This had a direct, open quality, a freshness in formal conception, which showed that all German composers need not fall prey to their years of conservatory training. It was, however, too consistently marchy and not a little dictatorial in feeling.

The real mess of tripe was Barbirolli's responsibility. His premieres included Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Overture to King John*, seventh in the series, which offered no new evidence why the composer should have taken this Shakespearean task upon himself; a bad, amateurish *Ballet Suite* from "*Quest*" by Hugo Weisgall; and Anthony Collins' *Overture to "Sir Andrew and Sir Toby,"* only slightly more competent. The Gretchaninov *Fourth Symphony* is justifiable on the grounds of the composer's age. He has a right to the style, having taken it up some fifty or sixty years ago, but there seemed no reason for this utterly banal expression of Russian romanticism. And was there any real need to perform Arcady Dubensky's bad-taste *Variations and Finale on Stephen Foster Themes*, simply because the composer is a member of the orchestra? Vaughan Williams' *Five Variants on the Christmas Carol*, "*Dives and Lazarus*" and Delius' *A Song of Summer* were both good examples of their composers in relaxed moments. Barbirolli's own arrangement of some beautiful pieces from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book had a more distinguished charm, since these are echt-Elizabethan.

Re-hearings of Barber's *Violin Concerto* and Benjamin Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*, already reviewed in MODERN MUSIC, were given by the Boston Symphony. Britten's work stands out above his general run for its eloquence and invention. Prokofiev's rarely performed *Scythian Suite* was also presented. One may call this a minor *Sacre du Printemps*, yet it is extremely characteristic and has a power and originality of conception all its own. The primitivism is modern, even motorized, but without the sophisticated veneer of the Stravinsky work. Melodic appeal is rare, giving way to a swift, excited coursing of incessant ostinati, blazingly orchestrated. Prokofiev's night scene lacks the brooding evil of Stravinsky's, but the closing sunrise has splendor, and there is throughout an exultant healthiness not to be found in *Le Sacre*.

The final winners' series program of the National Orchestral Association was unrewarding. Paul Creston's *Three Chorales from Tagore* contain more harmonic invention than he usually provides, but these

texts are not apt for setting, nor is the uncontrapuntal, complex chordal style well-conceived for chorus. His *Pastorale and Tarantella* are faint and quasi-impressionistic. Charles Haubiel's dramatic cantata, *The Vision of St. Joan*, gave us the Wagnerian works. An evening program also offered slight Americana. Harl McDonald's *Chameleon Variations* are not very correct or penetrating imitations of other composers' styles. Though a premiere, Robert McBride's *Strawberry Jam (Home-made)* seemed put up several years ago. . . . The *Sinfonietta Giocosa* for piano and chamber orchestra by Bohuslav Martinu, also a premiere, was a good deal fresher, but one missed his general excellent balance. Fast tempi are employed almost exclusively, and since each movement appears to have several sections, the work ends by seeming an overlong series of attractive but unintegrated blocks. Stylistically and emotionally however it supplied all that we expect from Martinu. A new *Second 'Cello Sonata* performed on a program by the Chamber Music Guild Quartet needed badly this spontaneity and urgency. The gay *Duo for Violin and 'Cello* was given a re-hearing.

The *Sinfonia (Quasi Variazioni)* of Richard Arnell, performed by the New York City Symphony, showed him escaping from his Hindemithian bias. But he has substituted little of his own. This is a gray, monotonous work.

III

The League of Composers' program of works by South Americans and a recital of their piano music by Hugo Balzo presented earlier by the music division of the New York Public Library gave us an opportunity to acquaint ourselves with some of the unknown figures we have been hearing about recently. These demonstrations proved as convincing as any yet. Camargo Guarnieri's (Brazil) *Third Sonatina* for piano is an excellent integration of folk material with a simple, well-defined, personal style. The *Second Sonata* for violin and piano, however, did not achieve its intensity without some unfortunate post-romantic influences. The promised *Sonata de Primavera* by José Maria Castro (Argentina) could not be played, but the tender, individual romanticism of his *First Sonata*, inspired an interest to hear more recent, mature works. The young Hector Tosar (Uruguay) provided a zestful *Danza Criolla*, an elegant and brilliant concert piece. Neat neo-classicism distinguished the *Sonata a tres* for two flutes and viola by José Ardévol (Cuba), a charming feeling

for miniatures the *Music for Children* by Luis Gianneo (Argentina). Francisco Mignone (Brazil) was at home in his brightly-colored songs, but the *Piano Sonata* was heavy and undistinguished in material. The sensitive violin and piano pieces by Domingo Santa Cruz (Chile) were marred by the softness and the over-ripe texture which afflicts much of this music. Poor impressions were made by works of the Argentineans Julian Aguirre, Alberto Ginastera, and a few others.

The *Motivos de Son* by Amadeo Roldan, songs for voice and small orchestra given their first complete performance here by the Orchestrette of New York, I found to have a stronger individuality than any of the above. Roldan absorbed European influences without damaging his native self. These songs are sophisticated yet of the people. They have vitality and temperament, fine tunes, and varied, inventive accompaniments. On this same program were heard an ordinary *Toccata* by Rudolf Forst and Harvey Gaul's *Father Gallitzen Remembers Prince Dimitri*.

For the Schola Cantorum's concert memorial to Kurt Schindler composers were asked to make choral or small ensemble settings of Spanish folksong melodies from Schindler's collection. Copland, Wagenaar, Chavez, Cowell, Pittaluga, Juan José Castro, Pedro Sanjuan, Maganini, and Deems Taylor contributed. Most of the arrangement were tasteful and interesting, without renouncing hints of personal traits.

The League's final Young American's program was dominated by the *Clarinet Quintet* of Edward T. Cone. Though at times too conventionalized and Germanic, especially in its melodic lines and treatment, it has a rare, intense musicality which is absorbing. The careful approach seems more balanced, less slavish than in his earlier work. The natural, smooth opening of the first movement is one of the best spots. Charles Mills offered a precise, integrated work with his *Piano Sonata*. The strong neo-classic imprint makes for impersonal sections, but the *Cadenza Finale* is a fanciful movement of originality and it is aptly titled. Lionel Nowak's *String Trio* shows stylistic clashes between the movements which obscure a clear picture of the composer. The fresh simplicity of the fast sections appealed most, though the slow movement exploits a melodic line of widely-spaced intervals with distinction. Paul Schwartz's songs are well-conceived in a competent way, but the harmonies are derivative and need thinning out.

At a reception for Béla Bartók given by the International Society for

Contemporary Music the excellent *Contrasts* for violin, clarinet and piano, the *Second Rhapsody* for violin and piano, a superior potpourri like its predecessor, and some two-piano pieces were performed. The latter were essays in a salon-like manner unusual for Bartók, but their charm was destroyed by his irritating tendency to add new sections onto a piece until it grows to unbearable length. The *First Violin Sonata*, performed by Louis Krasner and Jacques de Menasce, suffers somewhat from this, though it is a definitely better work than the more frequently heard *Second Sonata*, which is over-expressionistic and harmonically *agaçant*. It has melodic and harmonic beauty, a finale that is one of his most exciting folk-inspired movements, but shuns conciseness. On this same program sonatas by de Menasce himself and by Hindemith were also performed.

The Musical Art Quartet disappointed me by substituting the familiar Tansman *Tryptique* for the rarely played Stravinsky *Concertino*. It was a pleasure however, to hear the Villa-Lobos *Third Quartet*, in which this frequently tangled composer realizes the delicate requirements of chamber music without becoming over-conventional. The work has a quiet, singing appeal. On this series rehearsals were given to the Shostakovich *Quartet* and *Piano Quintet*, already reviewed here. Piano trios included Casella's *Siciliana e Burlesca*, undistinguishable from his many other obvious and rather cheap treatments of dance forms, and S. L. M. Barlow's *Conversation with Chekhov* which, though its romantic style is solid, has too many vague reminiscences; and the atmosphere suffers from being over-exposed.

The *Third Quartet* by Leo Weiner was given its premiere by the Stuyvesant String Quartet, best in its pale, rather early-Milhaudesque *Pastorale*. Alan Schulman's *Four Moods* are a sort of embryonic music, with the most ordinary fragments for themes.

Violin and piano works specially written for the occasion were performed by Eudice Shapiro and Irene Jacobi. Norman Dello Joio's *Ite Missa Est* impressed by its improvisational but controlled treatment. Frederick Jacobi's *Ballade* was most imaginative in a passage based on an irregularly descending melodic line for the violin. Vittorio Rieti's *Capriccio* had an opening and closing slow section which had little to do with the rest of the piece, but its main body offered attractive popular materials over a rapid, gliding motion.

American premieres almost completely made up Louis Kaufman's violin recital. The Ernst Toch *Sonata* was written in Germany in 1927

and thus supplies its own commentary. Robert Russell Bennett's material seems to me best adapted to short pieces. Though he manipulated the form of his *Concerto* with dexterity and interest, the matter, refreshing as usual, missed filling the lines. William Grant Still's *Studies in the Vernacular* are genre pieces, which dangerously skirt matinée musicale radio program styles. The Darius Milhaud *Concertino de Printemps* is a lovely, transparent work, full of vernal feeling and melodically rich. It should be heard here with orchestra, though the tingling sound of its accompaniment comes through even on the piano.

III

Less than its usual quota of contemporary music was included in the Seventh Annual Three Choir Festival at Temple Emanu-el. Some fine old French and German music stood out, and there were apt stylistic imitations by Hindemith and Michael Gniessin. Theodore Chanler's skill at textual setting is well-known, and he did not disappoint in his *To Ann Gregory*. Besides a sensitive *Prelude* for organ by Frederick Jacobi, less rewarding works by Roy Harris, Arthur Benjamin, Harvey Gaul, and Seth Bingham were given. Also chorales on tunes of Lowell Mason, to celebrate his 150th birthday, by Miriam Gideon, Hugo Grimm, and Paul Dessau.

Elliott Carter's *The Defense of Corinth* was performed on the joint program of the Harvard Glee Club and the Sarah Lawrence College Chorus. This is a dramatic, well-organized setting of a long and difficult text, done with virility and breath. There were also a brief *Requiescat* by William Schuman, Aaron Copland's *An Immorality*, charming period music which still retains its appeal, and works by Randall Thompson that revealed his typical excellent feeling for the chorus.

In addition, re-hearings have been given of such fine, representative pieces as the Berg *Lyric Suite* (Galimir Quartet) and, on a program entitled *In Time of Battle* presented by the School for Democracy, Charles Ives' *Barn Dance*, Hindemith's *Flute Sonata*, and the Shostakovich *Piano Concerto*. This last remains for me the composer's most sympathetic work. Its humor is youthful and likable, its feeling for pastiche truly witty, and the slow movement deeply expressive without pretentiousness. The first movement of Bernard Wagenaar's *Triple Concerto* in an arrangement for chamber orchestra was presented on the recital of René le Roy. Frederick Jacobi's impressionistic, atmospheric *Night Piece* for flute and small or-

chestra, an arrangement of the slow movement of an early symphony, was given its premiere here by the American Symphony Orchestra.

NEW BALLET SCORES

The important new score of the Dance Players' opening season is that for *Prairie* by Norman Dello Joio. Though the work was originally a concert piece, and its excellent integration with the spirit and matter of the ballet is thus due largely to the choreographer, it reveals a theatrical bent and decided feeling for the dance. If the style is as yet without strong personal characteristics, it is nevertheless full and consistent, lacking in unabsorbed eclecticism. Deepest moods are struck in the slow music, which has tenderness, humanity, and frequently nobility. Faster passages at times tend to run away on the surface, but vigor and élan are always present.

Stefan Wolpe's score to *The Man from Midian* is a definite disappointment. It lacks style. The quieter and more consonant moments are soggy when not out-and-out banal. There was a great discrepancy between these and the sharper, dissonant quick passages, though here at least a certain level of dramatic intensity was attained, say that required by a none too demanding incidental music. I found quite enough hysteria on the stage. The less apparent noble strength could well have been brought to the fore by the music.

Jinx is done to Benjamin Britten's familiar *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*. It is a work of minor charm, which served as a most satisfactory point of departure for the ballet's form and development. Henry Brant's cheap hodgepodge for *City Portrait* is perhaps intended to mirror the (banal) musical tastes of the characters. More relationship with the events it certainly does not possess. I doubt if it could even point up the tragedy on the stage by contrast, though that would be one way of solving the problem of the score — with little credit to the composer. Aaron Copland's *Billy the Kid* remains its strong, simple self.

Donald Fuller

SOUTH WINDS IN CHICAGO

WE cannot complain about the Good Neighbor Policy and what it has done for spring programs in Chicago. The Illinois WPA Symphony offered two suites, Pedro Sanjuan's *Liturgia negra* and Amadeo