

FORECAST AND REVIEW

PROKOFIEV AND MILHAUD, WINTER OF 1944

FALL and early winter have brought a run on two of our most lyrical and listenable contemporaries, Serge Prokofiev and Darius Milhaud. The Prokofiev series provided a miniature cross-section of nearly his whole development. The Philharmonic led off with a *Suite Diabolique*, consisting of early piano pieces arranged and orchestrated by Harold Byrns. Most of these are well-known bits and their treatment, if not authentically Prokofiev, is effective and does catch their spirit. Yet their selection points up Prokofiev's unfortunate fate, which is to be most recognized as a composer of satirical, ironic gifts. The melodic richness, the straight and full emotional drive are underestimated. Thus the Philadelphia Orchestra performed a suite from the ballet *Chout*, as delightful a piece in every way as Prokofiev has written. But on a program where there was ample room for the whole, only sections were done, and with one exception the beautiful, slow, singing parts of the score were disregarded. It is time to stop exhibiting Prokofiev for his cleverness, his fast, raucous emotion. Properly arranged, this suite could well supply relief from the more frequently heard *Firebird* or *Daphnis*, as entertainment of equal excitement and color. Or from his own *Lieutenant Kijé*, which Stokowski did with the New York City Symphony. (I regret that the middle period of Prokofiev, from which much could be revived, was passed over so easily in this group of performances.) In the later music lightness, delicacy, and ease relax the early rather continuous tension, and the melodic side shows more.

The new *Sonata in D Major* for violin, introduced by Szigeti, is the finest abstract Prokofiev since the *Second Violin Concerto*. The scherzo avoids the trite, *Danse Macabre*-like lilt of much of his recent three-quarter time movements. Throughout are fine tunes, and the fanciful and expressive figuration which the violin seems to inspire in him. The

form, natural and quietly growing, is never arbitrarily imposed. But the *Sonata Number 7* for piano, performed by Jakob Gimpel, has much that is first-rate too. Little piano writing today is as brilliant and apt as Prokofiev's. There are soft spots in the *Andante*, but its bell-like passages and the forceful opening theme of the first movement are good thoughts. The rapid finale is exciting. Such direct musical thinking, uncomplicated by stylistic and esthetic problems is a pleasure.

With Milhaud, the emphasis was on early music, which is unfortunate since so much of his later work remains unheard. Monteux brought the *Suite Symphonique, Number 2* from music for Claudel's play, *Protée*, to the Philharmonic repertory. The pastoral, nostalgic sections are best. But the weaving of several polytonal strands, even at fast moments, still provides a rich, gracious sonority and a clarity which no one else has been able to give to this somewhat intellectualized process. It creates a warm and delicious atmosphere. Milhaud's bitter and powerful side has been heard to better advantage than in this work. The *Catalogue de Fleurs*, sung by Herta Glaz, is a charming bouquet of quick, colorful sketches. Two of the *Mélodies Populaires Hébraïques* were more austere. The New Friends of Music offered a distinctly poor performance of the *String Quartet Number 4* by the Léners. Little sense could be made out of an easy, flowing, and direct miniature. The Friends announced with their Mozart this year French composers "from Rameau to Ravel." This, besides its alliterative value, provides a convenient stopping point to avoid the presentation of really contemporary music. But then if the Friends were to overstep this boundary, there can have been no excuse for not including a later, more sizable and representative quartet by Milhaud. Ravel music, composed more recently, is being performed, so a fixed date line can have been no object. And if we have the *Chansons Madécasses*, why not vocal music by at least Poulenc and Milhaud, certainly among our finest living song talents?

The premiere of the Vaughan Williams' *Fifth Symphony* was given by the Philharmonic, a reflective and serene work without the *Sturm und Drang* of its predecessor. For some it may be lacking in force, but to me its soft glow seems an achievement. The intention is clear and well-accomplished. Its frequent simplicity and conventionality of sound make it no less contemporary. There is a mere wraith of a scherzo, fanciful and lovely. The final *Passacaglia* is lilting rather than impressive. Maturity can hardly produce a more satisfying work than this, with its re-

signed, but not unhappy philosophy. On this all-British program were also played *A Solemn Hymn for Victory* by RAF Wing Commander John Wooldridge, more nostalgic than solemn, and the William Walton *Belshazzar's Feast*. Walton has filled out his broad lines so impressively, with such command and dramatic force, that one is surprised to discover later how little actual music one remembers, and how it lacks distinction. I think that the real feeling behind this super-competent music, with its carefully-conceived themes, must be too out of proportion with what it mechanically succeeds in expressing.

The *Piano Concerto* by Dmitri Kabalevsky, which Henrietta Schumann played with the New York City Symphony, fails to enlarge the Soviet musical horizon, but its light and lucid romanticism could well be discovered by other more pretentious Russians. They tend to appear at their worst in short recital pieces, which are unrelievedly banal. The songs presented by Tatiana Pobers on an all-Russian program are no exception. An aria from Stravinsky's *Mavra* and the familiar *Romance* from *Lieutenant Kijé* by Prokofiev stood out. Two songs by Miascovsky gave me more pleasure than any of his drab symphonies, and an aria from Yuri Shaporin's cantata, *Kulikovo Field*, is worth noting. Aleksandrov, Shebalin, A. Krein, and Shostakovitch with two Pushkin songs, maintained a low level. Koval's songs on poems by Langston Hughes were naturally incredible.

William Schuman's *Prayer in Time of War* (the *Prayer* 1943 made eternal) was repeated by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Ernest Bloch's early *Symphony*, "*Israel*" was revived by the Philharmonic, surely one of his least offensive pieces, quite moving when not too persecuted. The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra made a fine debut here, though its choice of Lionel Barrymore's *Preludium and Fugue* for a New York premiere was unfortunate. Hubert Tillery, who appeared with the New York Little Symphony, is one of those who write their own piano concertos and would do better by sticking entirely to Rachmaninov.

In a program of contemporary Polish chamber music at the Times Hall, elegance of expression seemed the most general characteristic. Antoni Szalowski's *Third String Quartet* is smooth and dextrous, almost slick, Tansman-like in its fast syncopations, less so in its singing moments. An equally smooth *Divertimento for Flute and Piano* by Felix Labunski, though lacking in force, was pleasing for its gentle, flowing romanticism,

its neo-classic patterns. Karol Rathaus offered a *Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Piano*, whose fast middle movement owed too much to the Bartok *Contrasts*. The slow end movements tended to the elegiac, diluted by vague indirection and need for more personal profile. The *Third String Quartet* by Jerzy Fitelberg made up for the rather even tenor of the evening with some fireworks, but rarely of a very striking sort. One would admire his technical invention more, if explored at less length. A strange aversion to anything mellifluous further mars the work. The Szymanowski piano pieces were most elegant of all, especially the fine *Mazurkas*, fiery, and with a wonderful harmonic color, odd but convincing.

More of these *Mazurkas* were performed by Jakob Gimpel, along with a poor *Second Sonatina* by Robert Russell Bennett. There were new ideas every few measures, none treated to development and none really worthy of it.

Szigeti's recital (besides the new Prokofiev) featured the Stravinsky *Duo Concertant*. Also short numbers by Khachaturian, Henry Cowell, and Ernst Bacon's *Buncomb County (N. C.)*, too gentle and tenderly atmospheric in its treatment of jolly folk themes. The "*Stempenyu*" *Suite* by Joseph Achron, performed in memoriam, reminds one of conventionalized, but still effective Bartok. *Three Pieces* by Lukas Foss appeared on Roman Totenberg's violin recital. Foss lets changing eighth notes do much of his fast, vigorous work, but his slow passages show deep lyrical feeling. There is a good cut to his lines.

An I.S.C.M. concert at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin presented a capella music by Ernst Krenek and Arnold Bax, performed by Shaw's Collegiate Chorale. Krenek's *The Season*, Opus 35 is gracious and flowing, from a more musical period of his work. The Bax *Mater Ora Filium* is ornate and finely fashioned. Organ music by Olivier Messiaen, excerpts from *La Nativité du Seigneur*, was also presented. It has an exotic, tortured beauty, strangely at home in this religious setting.

Janet Fairbank's annual recital of American songs included some firsts by Hindemith, now admitted to the circle by virtue of his citizenship. As usual, he refuses to adjust his style to the medium, with dreary and not very song-like results. I liked best the pellucid and very singable songs by John Edmunds. Those by Paul Bowles did not reveal the composer at his best. Virgil Thomson's French number was light and airy, I suppose, but not much as music. An austere, but vigorous *Sanctus* by Lou Harrison exploited pentatonic effects. There were crude

and heavy songs by Normand Lockwood and Melville Smith, Douglas Moore's elegant Shakesperean settings, a simple and feeling tune by Ernst Bacon. Others were by David Van Vactor, Leo Sowerby, Quincy Porter, William T. Ames, Ben Quashen and Harry K. Lamont, none of whose efforts made a lasting impression on me. The parodies by Edward Ballantine, though amusing, are hardly to be considered as a contribution to song literature. All in all there was great variety, but not much net profit. I think if Miss Fairbank limited herself to several groups, each with only three or four songs by one composer, the contrast could be used to advantage. Here there were too many dribblets, all clashing against each other, so that even a good song had difficulty asserting itself. A proper setting would do wonders for even the lesser lights.

Donald Fuller

SCHÖNBERG'S BIRTHDAY; THOMSON'S BUGLES

THE second instalment of the New York season has been much more exciting than the first, both in the quality of new music presented and in the manner of its performance. Several beautiful new works decorated the period and though the time of the holidays was, as usual, weak, this year seems to be a good one for living music.

The celebrations surrounding the seventieth birthday of Arnold Schönberg provided a number of opportunities to hear his music in New York under excellent conditions. Artur Rodzinski did a superb job of the *Ode to Napoleon* with the strings of the Philharmonic, Edward Steuermann at the piano and Mack Harell reading the Byron poem. The performance was not only spirited and understanding but distinguished by its accuracy of intonation; Rodzinski trained each section alone until pitches and dynamics were solid and then worked the combination into really inspired delivery. It so frequently happens that an orchestra playing a dissonant chromatic work (twelve-tone or not) throws up its hands and aims only in the general direction of the correct pitches, that one can not be too grateful to Rodzinski for his brilliant insight and musicianship in insisting on care and justice towards this fine work.

Kurt List, analyzing the *Ode* in these pages, referred to the sound of the final section as an "exalted glow." This ending is a marvelous contrivance, balancing and shifting like a wave; at once tender and impersonal, it is a berceuse for a national hero. In fact the whole work is Schönberg in an utterly new and fascinating role, *Pierrot Lunaire* turned