

FORECAST AND REVIEW

MID-WINTER IN NEW YORK, 1944

MANY new orchestral works were heard in New York this winter. Some older modern music also received excellent repetitions and this is important. Contemporary works need to be heard as *repertory* for the musical health of conductors and orchestra as well as of the public.

Of the two new Hindemith pieces, the *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber* was introduced by Rodzinski with the Philharmonic. Here Hindemith has incorporated his own distortions of what he feels are fairly poor examples of the earlier composer's work. This is an interesting adventure in the use of extra-personal, thematic material, and from my point of view quite sound. After all a really good idea is likely to be best employed by its inventor; his more commonplace material may be regarded as belonging to the general stream of music, into which all may freely dip. This attitude was not unknown to the eighteenth century. At any rate, Hindemith has proceeded to raise a great fugue over these themes in his own manner. The result is brilliant and entertaining in the first movement, absolutely embarrassing in the second, pleasant and serious in the third, and vigorous in the fourth.

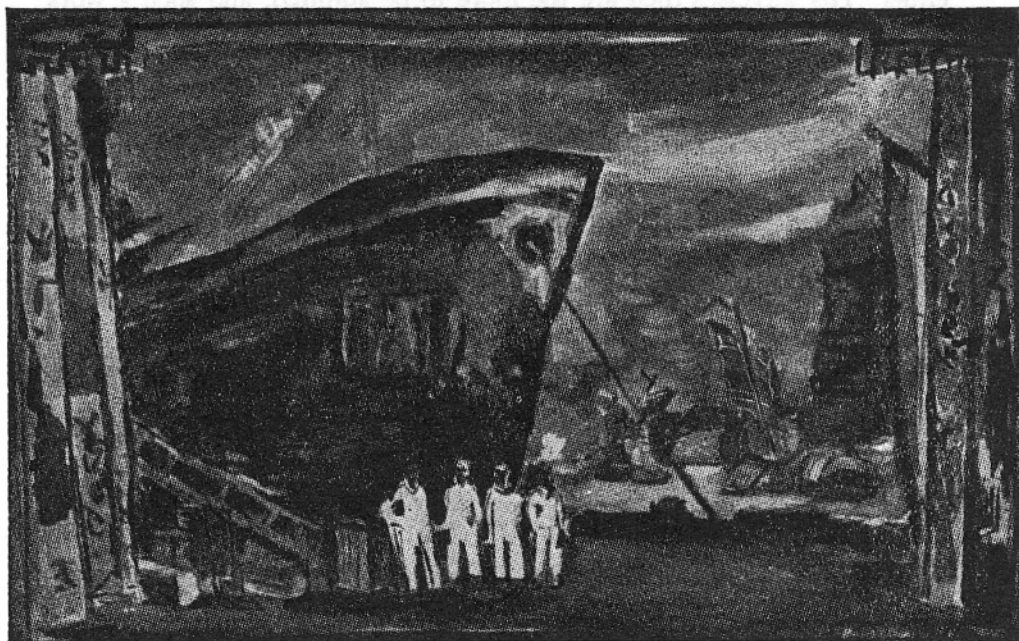
More to my taste was his *Ballet Overture, Cupid and Psyche*. This was distinctly fresh. The woodwinds blew in a steady breeze across the orchestra and the instruments consorted tenderly and rapidly. Delicate and brilliant scoring was heard everywhere. The form is clear and without too much Hindemith motor-power. This overture was heard on the same program on which the Philadelphia Orchestra presented its superb performance of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Radiant and ecstatic, the famous work still has much to give. It reminded us too that further hearing of *Oedipus Rex* and *Les Noces* would be gratifying.

Three new American works were introduced by the Philharmonic. William Grant Still's *In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for*



FANCY FREE

Oliver Smith's design for Leonard Bernstein's new ballet which will be introduced at the Metropolitan Opera House on April 18th by the Ballet Theatre. The young composer will conduct the premiere.



THE RED POPPY

Décor by Boris Aronson for Reinhold Glière's ballet which will be introduced to New York at the Civic Center on April 9th by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. This work, first seen at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in 1927, is perhaps the best-known ballet in the repertory of Soviet Russia. It has been revised for this production.

Democracy (of the League of Composers' war-commission series) had a fine opening with muted trumpets and a lovely second section with a very Southern tune. This was the best part, full of swamps and alligators in the Delius fashion. From there on the score bogged down and came to a rather unconvincing conclusion. Still represents a commendable desire on the part of Negro Americans to learn and use the technics of the culture of which they form a part. Much of the superb inventiveness displayed in their popular art seems to get lost on the way to serious music. Still seems to suffer from a certain self-consciousness, except when he is writing a frankly amusing piece. But to tell the truth, very few of the rest of us ever really "go through the bottom" of our long and difficult background either. His successes then are the more to be admired, and such a work as this memorial piece is an important thing to have done.

Vladimir Dukelsky's *Violin Concerto in G minor* meant very little to me — much sound and fury over nothing, an impression created chiefly by the almost constant, rapid running up and down of the violin. However, several variations in the finale were more interesting and beautifully scored. Also quite noisy and superficial was William Schuman's *William Billings' Overture*. Written on many of Billings' tunes, the piece employed the typical brassy blusters and excesses of the fourths and seconds style. The slow section for strings, more moving and interesting, was another proof that probably the best way to pay tribute to an old composer is simply to arrange his music for some contemporary ensemble, so that he may be played more often.

Rodzinski also presented Miaskovsky's beautiful *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra Number 2*, Opus 32. The scoring is imaginative and the form of the piece simple and clear. Without indulgence in excessive "romance," the style is post-romantic but always under control. The themes are well defined, the development easy to follow and, in all, the piece is very satisfying to hear. It certainly overshadowed the Shostakovich *First Symphony* which followed but of course it is the product of a mature composer, while the symphony was the work of a young man just out of the conservatory.

Mention must also be made of the performance of Richard Strauss's early transcription of pieces by Couperin for chamber orchestra. The transcriptions, to each of which Strauss has written his signature in the form of some Straussian modulation in the coda, were enchanting. The miniature orchestra is wiry and alive all the way through and unless you are very touchy and feel sacrosanct about this sort of thing, the music is

a joy to hear and a relief from the ponderous full orchestra playing opuses of the nineteenth century.

An unpretentious, well written *Polonaise Symphonique* by Karol Rathaus, (also Philharmonic) is not a first-rate work in point of ideas but it shows all the evidence of sound and thorough training found in the works of most well brought up European composers. A certain sullenness however clouded the music for me.

The National Orchestral Association under Leon Barzin performed, for the first time, Wallingford Riegger's *Canon and Fugue*. The canon, which both opens and closes the piece, is in the idiom of seventeenth century Italy, pure and simple, and successfully preserves the beautiful cantabile style. A more modern sounding fugue makes up the greater section of the work. It is large and manages during its interesting course, to exploit many skillful orchestral combinations and thoughtful uses of the subject. One was pleased that a piece advertised as a canon and fugue really was just that. The fugal subject is derived from the traditional "wedge" motif and survives multiple alterations according to the traditional plan, while sounding slightly more elaborate. The whole piece was very satisfying except for its unnecessary coda, which closed in a somewhat forced way.

III

The Lerner Quartet played Stanley Bate's *String Quartet Number 2*. This rather large work suffered from too great an adherence to one or two phrase formulae and the constant repetition of them gave me a sense of monotony. Seldom did an idea proceed into a continuous development and so the result was choppy and abrupt. The slow movement made the best effect and the antiphonies between the cello and the other three instruments were moving and appropriate, though the section was quite long.

The same concert opened with a performance of Aaron Copland's *Two Pieces for Strings*, written in 1928. To my mind they are much more interesting than many of his recent works. They are indeed very repetitious, which was his way then, but he achieved thereby a tensivity of building forms instead of laxness. The slow movement features a strongly chordal texture, with wide downward skips in the melodic lines. The rondino didn't interest me as much, it seemed too fussy. I was glad to hear this music of his earlier period which is in a style considerably freer than he now uses.

A vigorous and yet lyrical *Sonata in E* by Nikolai Lopatnikoff was

played by Felix Borovsky. While facile and continuous, like Hindemith, Lopatnikoff has much more of a lyric gift. The fast movements raced along in many voices with great rhythmic drive. The work is long but solid and though it is no masterpiece it is still a genuine and fresh piece.

III

Romolo De Spirito's excellent concert included many modern songs, all in the French tradition. Paul Bowles was represented by nine, a large and interesting collection. My own preference was for the *Four Spanish Songs* on texts by Lorca. These pieces carry forward the impressionist traditions and are sensitively written. In quality they are close to Debussy, though the texture is more firm and at times a little more distorted. The music has, in several places, a pleasant floating sound. *The Green Songs* were not to my taste, but I found *April Fool Baby* on a text of Gertrude Stein, charming. It makes a pleasant addition to the small repertory of serious nonsense which is gradually collecting.

I Rise When You Enter by Theodore Chanler is in a deliberately refined-vulgar style. It uses a kind of honky-tonk accompaniment and a flexible melodic line. David Diamond's *As Life What Is So Sweet* is a lyrical solemn song, set in much the same way as modern English composers are accustomed to set such poems. Virgil Thomson's *Mon Amour* was gaily amorous and maintained a little twirling figure in the accompaniment that gave it bouyancy. The melody was pleasant and natural and the whole effect ingratiating. A satirical song by Rudolph Ganz, *La Dent*, accompanied by a single painful tone, completed the large modern group on this program.

Lou Harrison

STYLE IN RECENT CHAMBER MUSIC

THE patriotic and hands-across-the-sea sentiments which have colored our more ambitious musical projects now penetrate the intimacy of the chamber music hall. Boosey and Hawks set the tone at their concert series of contemporary American and English music, with the Coolidge Quartet and the Saidenberg Little Symphony. The League of Composers continues its emphasis on native sons, graduating some of the younger, however, from the New York Public Library to the more chic New York Times Hall.

In much of this music — most of it first-time — my attention has been riveted by the disaffecting emphasis on that old modern bug-bear, style.