

Ross Lee Finney's *Bleheris* for voice and orchestra and Norman Lockwood's *Piano Quintet* were both disappointing. The former was entirely too obvious, especially the orchestral coloring. The cartoon-technic scoring, which made the entire music functional, weakened and destroyed the scattered good points. The Lockwood I found very dry and entirely too long, with a considerable dosage of tempi adagio. Thematically romantic to the hilt, it fails to use the special and expressive means of the piano quintet combination, being entirely static in its instrumentation.

Other works included a competent *Solo Viola Suite* by John Duke, some *Piano Inventions* by Otto Luening, which could well be used by the teaching profession, a *Fourth String Quartet* by this reviewer, as well as pieces by Robert Palmer and Paul Creston previously reviewed here. These music periods should be continued at Yaddo; there are so few places left in the world for the examination and performance of new music.

Arthur Cohn

BENNINGTON'S FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

IT would gratify professional pride to be able to say that modern music came, saw and conquered at the first summer festival of the Bennington School of the Arts. Actually it betrayed the tentative uncertainty of a debutante, for the contemporary program—one of four devoted to the dance, drama, old and new music—under the direction of Otto Luening, suffered from an apparent feeling of obligation to include too many different items. Fifteen composers were represented but no central work of stable dimensions. A spotty total effect was inevitable.

The first movement of Quincy Porter's *Third String Quartet* is full of his usual grace and distinction, but it seemed on the whole a little disappointing, remembering the strong effect of its first performance in Paris ten years ago. Either its hues aren't fade-proof or the performance was underdone. Still the whole quartet should have been played. Szymanowski's violin piece, *Dryades et Pan*, seemed very far away, in a late-romantic decadence of voluptuary harmony and luminous trills and arpeggi, yet by virtue of the performance its magic worked.

Three groups of songs followed. Ives' *Thoreau* was an unusually beautiful demonstration of this richly paradoxical composer as the impressionist he so fundamentally is. His *At the River*, a scherzo impression of Robert Lowry's hymn, demonstrated more the paradox. Less rewarding were

three songs by Ernst Bacon, competent but of mediocre inspiration, Mary Howe's pretty *Old English Lullaby* and Emerson Whithorne's decorous *The Love Tree*. Samuel Barber's *Dover Beach* has real character. It didn't quite succeed in sustaining an unvarying interest throughout its length, but it did achieve something positive and beautiful. The next two, Chanler's lovely *These My Ophelia* and Ives's stirring *Charlie Rutledge*, might have been the high point of the concert but for the static execution given them. A song of Charles Naginski, performed in his memory, sported an intentional triviality with considerable distinction and charm, and disclosed the same kind of wayward and enigmatic complexity as the *Sinfonietta* played at Yaddo. Paul Frederic Bowles's *Letter to Freddie*, a setting in waltz style of a kind, sincere letter from Gertrude Stein, seemed an inconsiderate breach of confidence, lack of reverence where one would most expect it, which was perhaps due to an unfortunately funnified performance. "Works by composers in residence at the Bennington School of the Arts" included a facile suite for flute and piano by Lionel Nowak.

The final group was devoted to two members of the Bennington faculty. Otto Luening's *Three Inventions for Piano* puzzle one. The first and third are a kind of *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum* full of scale figures busily "modern." The second varies a simple little melody with overt apologies to Bach and the folksongists, and with an obvious love for the tune and for the well tried harmonies, and the result is a deeply touching little piece, as if a child, between two pranks, turned a wistful eye toward Mama's understanding smile. Some answer was eagerly sought in the next pieces, *Evening Song* and *Morning Song*, for voice and flute, but oddly enough, the performance, by the composer and Mrs. Luening, was so haphazard that it only added a gently melodious confusion. Robert McBride's *Wise-Apple Five* for clarinet and string quartet furnished an agreeably festive closing piece.

The old music program, under the expert direction of that inspired antiquarian, Ralph Kirkpatrick, exhibited, by contrast, a beautifully symmetrical balance and consistently fine substance, with a sonata for strings and harpsichord by Johannes Rosenmüller (a mid-seventeenth Leipziger), two psalms of Mondonville, a sonata of Händel for flute, oboe and continuo, seven numbers from Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* and Bach's F-minor harpsichord concerto.

The drama offering, *The King and the Duke*, an adaptation by Francis Fergusson of an episode from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, combined

the original dialogue with dance and music – a good idea – though the proportions and timing were weak; the net result wasn't nearly as bad as has been painted, and Gregory Tucker's music had just the right simple tunefulness and Mississippi River nostalgia.

In every way the most valuable contribution was the dance program by Martha Graham's company, which included two premieres, *El Penitente* and *Letter to the World*, and the already well known *Every Soul is a Circus*. The latter had a very brilliant and witty performance in spite of the limitations of the small stage. The music, by Paul Nordoff, fulfills its function well, matching the stage satire with some hilarious burlesque, and aptly reflecting the underlying mood of "tragic, addled confusion." *El Penitente*, a little morality play as if done by three itinerant minstrels of a sect of Mexican flagellants, has been reviewed before, and it only remains to reaffirm its perfect beauty. The accompanying score, by Louis Horst, provides an abundance of melody in primitive style, agile, credulous and utterly charming. *Letter to the World*, the eagerly awaited dramatization of Emily Dickinson's dual personality, is a magnificent brainstorm. It poses nearly insuperable problems of realization; but Miss Graham has succeeded so far that, however one may react to its as yet unfinished aspects, her great positive achievement is overwhelming. In a way, one might question her choice, for this score, of Hunter Johnson, a Southern gentleman whose music is full of the rich sadness and potential emotional explosiveness of the South, and who could hardly be counted on to "think New Englandly." But who that does can write such good music? And is there not, in these poems, a condoning universality, transcending even New England? On the whole the music was a joy, – a bright polka for the garden party, a saucy scherzo, a lovely fluid waltz, eloquent commentaries on Lowell Mason's *Fountain* hymn. In many places the pervading atmosphere of eternity and infinity in the poems was worthily tallied. There were in general too many adjustable repetitions, so convenient for first rehearsals; when the timing is all settled perhaps these dovetailing passages will be "composed." The high quality of the music deserves it.

John Kirkpatrick