

NEWS FROM OVERSEAS

MUSICAL MISSION TO GERMANY

IN September 1945, four months after General Patton's Third Army had swept through Frankfurt-am-Main, an article on modern American music appeared in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the first important German newspaper licensed by the American authorities. Gershwin was the only composer mentioned. He was described as a possessor of fine orchestral technique, as the man who probably more than any other American composer had crystallized what might be called the authentic American idiom of composition. From this article one would have gained the impression that Gershwin was America's outstanding composer in the field of serious music. The *Rhapsody in Blue* and *An American in Paris* were cited as works representative of the contemporary school of music in the United States.

That article proved how inadequate was German knowledge of modern American music, even among professional musicians. In the months following I discovered that German conductors, critics and composers also know comparatively little about modern French music, even less about British and Russian. To the average young German music lover the terms music and German have become almost synonymous.

The first attempt to broadcast from the Continent to a German radio audience the music of Allied composers in addition to standard German masters began as early as September 1944, when Radio Luxembourg resumed operations under the control of a Psychological Warfare Detachment of the United States Twelfth Army Group and SHAEF. In May 1945, members of Radio Luxembourg's staff took over the formerly Nazi-dominated Radio Frankfurt and began broadcasting along lines acceptable to the Allied Military Government. This quick changeover was only possible through the ingenuity of American engineers and program personnel who used Army mobile equipment for the initial broadcasts. Within a short time operations expanded so that Radio Frankfurt became the key station of the American-controlled South-German network, with Munich, Stuttgart, Nuremberg, Bremen and Berlin as its affiliates. With the dissolution of the Twelfth Army Group, radio functions became part of Information Control Division, which undertook the difficult task of controlling German

press, radio and entertainment in the American Zone.

One of the objectives of this musical mission has been to acquaint the listening audience with works little known or proscribed in Germany during the past twelve years. Forbidden were an astonishing number of works by composers on the standard repertory in other countries. Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams, Shostakovich, Honegger, Hindemith, Bartok, Debussy, Moussorgsky, Franck and Berg are but a few of the men introduced to the Germans practically as newcomers. Among the American composers totally unknown to them were Harris, Hanson, Copland, Schuman, Piston, Cowell and Barber.

But the presentation of American music on European radio has been greatly handicapped by a lack of bibliography, of scores, parts and records. That lack was felt during the last stages of the war when the Psychological Warfare Branch was operating Radio Luxembourg as a propaganda station for the Allies, broadcasting to Germany and Axis-occupied European countries. Efforts to obtain a representative collection of records then met with little success. As a result of numerous requests for American orchestral material there were received during the entire year following Germany's defeat less than ten complete sets of parts and scores. The task of widening the musical horizons of the German listening public was dependent on material captured from former Nazi stations and a record library consisting of eighty per cent German music – either sent over from the United States or transferred to Allied archives from German stock.

The very small percentage of serious American music presented met with little enthusiasm. In some cases the professional critics thought that the compositions lacked maturity; in others the general feeling was that the message of the music was new. A few remarked intelligently that like all new music, American modern music should be given repeated performances in order to be fully appreciated.

At no time was an objective and competent selection made in the material sent overseas. In the limited number of orchestral performances, the interpretation of works unfamiliar to performers as well as to audience was not of a quality to stimulate sympathetic understanding. That was especially apparent when the Radio Frankfurt Symphony Orchestra presented Hanson's *Third Symphony*, the first major American work to be heard on last season's concert programs.

Employment of personnel which was professionally qualified and yet politically acceptable has been a great difficulty. For instance, after several months of preparation and auditioning only twenty-two members of the 75-piece symphony orchestra passed the CIC screening. And that decision came in the middle of the season with three weekly symphony concerts scheduled.

When capable conductors, not necessarily of international fame, wanted to practice their art, they conducted orchestras and opera under the Nazis. The same was true of soloists. Composers wrote for movies, concert and radio. In many cases they are judged as to musico-political stature through figures of their past income which they furnish on request. If that figure is impressive, it is usually assumed that such successful artists under the Nazis must have had party affiliations, and therefore are unacceptable for employment under present Military Government regulations.

There are certain notable exceptions, where famous musicians made so plain their approval of Nazi methods under which they grew wealthy that no question can exist as to their sympathies in the recent conflict. Among these are Strauss, now living in Switzerland, who had given his unquestionable support to the Nazi party, conducting and composing music for spectacular political gatherings; Giesecking, probably Germany's greatest living pianist, who had the same opportunity as many other European artists to leave Germany before the war without imperilling his professional career. Whether such guilt of collaboration is justifiable or not may well remain for individuals to determine. One incident plainly showed the attitude of Giesecking. He gave a recital last July in Bad Nauheim, to an audience of American enlisted men and officers, under the auspices of Army Special Services. He was introduced as one of Europe's greatest pianists and perhaps the greatest living exponent of Debussy. As I recall, his program consisted solely of German music, with the exception of two Chopin études. At the close of the recital, he asked for requests. Works of Debussy, Mendelssohn, Gershwin and Tchaikovsky were some of these. There was a brief hesitation. Giesecking shrugged his shoulders. "After all," he said, "one cannot remember everything which was ever written for the piano. I shall play instead *something else* for you. I hope you like it." With which he proceeded to play another German composition. The only modern work in his concert was an original piano arrangement of a song by Strauss.

The education in "foreign" music literature of professional German musicians has been somewhat sketchy. An applicant for a position on the music staff of Radio Frankfurt who had a doctorate in musicology, during a pre-employment interview could not name a single British composer, past or present; knew of no other works of Mendelssohn but "a few songs," and volunteered the guess that Hindemith was perhaps a Russian Jew. Another, music critic for over six years on one of Germany's leading newspapers, wrote about Franck's "little known and rarely played symphony . . ." and about Debussy and Ravel who "are usually mentioned together because their writing is almost identical . . ."

Because all musical training in the past twelve years has been strictly

Aryan and more specifically German, the problems of broadening the scope of the listeners and musicians alike is as difficult as it is important to the successful re-education of the German people. The Germans are quite satisfied with the music they know. And most of that music is indeed great.

During the intermission of one of the Radio Frankfurt Symphony Concerts, an American soldier was drawn into a discussion of music and war. The German woman with whom he was talking listened rather scornfully to his account of broad-minded musical America, where German music had been played throughout the war. Whereas, she would have to admit, no music by Allied composers was allowed to be played under Hitler.

At the end of the argument, the German woman laughed. "But, naturally," she explained with the air of a teacher speaking gently to a very stupid pupil, "you could not ban German music from even one concert program. If you did, there could be no concert."

Boris Kremenliev

UNDER THREE FLAGS

Berlin, August 1946

BERLIN has lost much of its international splendor as a city of music. Its best-known conductors, singers and virtuosi are gone and have as yet not been lured back. It is difficult to travel to Berlin today and even more difficult to leave. The two opera houses, Unter den Linden and the one in the Bismarkstrasse, once rebuilt at a cost of millions, are badly damaged; the home of the Philharmonic Orchestra in Bernburgerstrasse is completely destroyed. Hence opera and symphony have taken refuge in revue and movie theatres, but they play to sold-out houses. Despite hunger and cold, despite difficulties of obtaining housing or doing business, the Berliner's love of music remains unquenchable. Indeed the number of small concerts, of song and piano evenings, with programs frequently bolstered up by recitations of poetry, has grown to threatening proportions. Dilettantism and mediocrity abound. The various districts have been taking their musical activities under their own jurisdiction. In the western section, in Zehlendorf and Dahlen (both part of the American zone), the love of music seems focused on new works of merit; in others on treasured antiques and musical gold bricks.

In spite of this decentralization of musical life, there are naturally, as before, artistic events in which all Berlin is interested, such as the performances of the former Staatsoper (in the Russian sector), the Municipal Opera (British sector), the Philharmonic concerts (U. S. sector) and the concerts by the orchestras of the two above-mentioned opera houses.