

there is no such temptation. All of this seemed to me a great pity, since the *Ode* contains some of the most arresting music I have heard in a long time.

Contemporary music, chiefly Prokofiev, is beginning to appear with some regularity on recital programs in this city. Within the period of a few weeks, Horowitz played the *Piano Sonata Number 7*, Borovsky the *Piano Sonata Number 2*, and Szigeti introduced the new violin sonata. Of the trio, I only managed to hear Szigeti. The *Sonata in D Major*, Opus 94, is a pale neo-neo affair, cheerful enough, but very minor and almost amateurish when compared with Stravinsky's wonderfully mellow *Duo Concertant* which appeared on the same program.

The Czech pianist, Rudolf Firkusny, dazzled a pathetically small audience at Jordan Hall with, among other things, a first performance of a *Fantasy and Rondo* by Martinu. This piece should be gotten out as a text book on how to string together a series of introductions to introductions. It must be quite a feat to write several minutes of music without a consequent phrase.

Leonard Bernstein visited the folks at home on two different occasions recently. On his first visit he conducted the symphony orchestra in a hair-raising performance of Shostakovitch's *Fifth Symphony* and on the second he returned with his own *On the Town*. The music, excepting the brash but appropriate show tunes, is fine theatre music, but, for the most part, too serious and too good for the book.

Irving Gifford Fine

## A CONCERTO RE-INTRODUCES GRUENBERG

JASCHA HEIFETZ with Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra gave the world premiere of Louis Gruenberg's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*. It was a gala occasion and high time we heard another work by this composer. The concerto is alive with song, it incorporates folk themes and jazz-born rhythms. Fortunately these native elements were present at the work's conception and not tagged on episodically. The opening *Rhapsodie* has dignity and exquisite simplicity. Melodic technical passages replace the usual itchy fingerboard Olympics. Solo parts grow into tuttis that carry on with the line, never mimicking the soloist; and long violin passages are often saved by imaginative scoring. The so-called cadenza seems to be there because the violin happens to be playing alone; it is followed by a quiet and beautiful recapitulatory sec-

tion with the orchestra whispering. In the slow movement the violin croons spirituals surrounded by high strings and low bassoons moving faster than the solo voice. The motion accelerates until it bellies antiphonal laughs at the still slower violin. The effect is haunting. The revival-meeting and hill-billy-fiddler finale really has coherence. It is suggestive – not an orchestrally garbed copy of small town events. Fox-trot rhythms are webbed into the movement in a way that creates a drive and logical evolution. The work is a bit too long. In an effort to move forward Gruenberg interpolates repeated sections that are only slightly altered. When it is clear that a repetition is untimely, a slight ornamental variation will seldom get away from the repeat snag, so cut and go on. In the case of this concerto such cuts might take with them the occasional over-indulgence in one tonality.

Virgil Thomson conducted the same orchestra in the first concert performance of his *Suite for Orchestra* which consisted of musical portraits of five acquaintances. The style of the pieces varied, in their effort to catch the likeness of the sitters, so we had a broad picture of Thomson's writing. He can sing a personal melodic line, whip up healthy dissonances and entertaining rhythms, orchestrate with virtuosity and good diction, he can sound humorous yet vital, arrest immediate attention by fresh ideas, and use a constrictingly classic form yet appear tenaciously contemporary. There is one thing Thomson does not have, a dependable sense of timing. He is often concise but more often mechanically abrupt and gruff, and can be seduced easily by a mood that pleases him into holding it too long. Some beautiful pages of the score sound as though they were bound in numerically incorrect order by the book-binder, and others as though duplicate pages had gotten in the volume. This latter was the case in *Tango Lullaby* (Mademoiselle Flavie Alvarez de Toledo). Naturally, a tiring rhythmic figure will be helped by instrumentation. Thus the orchestral version is better than the original harpsichord piece heard at the League of Composers concert in 1942 with Ralph Kirkpatrick. Nevertheless, the use of ostinato strings under a rhythmically monotonous oboe melody is not effective even in the hands of the most expert orchestrator. The *Fugue* (Alexander Smallens) is capricious and fiery yet subtle and has better dramatic sense than the rest of the suite.

The orchestra continues with its promotion of Harl McDonald, the composer. They played his symphonic suite: *My Country at War* right

out in public. The opening movement is completely trite and ineffective with unfortunate memoirs for themes followed by carefully worked out padding. When bridge transitions are inserted for the sole purpose of avoiding a composition problem, music ceases to be written. The *Bataan* movement begins with an interesting and provocative melodic line, but the fascinating germ implications are ignored while the piece is occupied with cheap harmonic formulas. In the following *Elegy*, McDonald tries again to work up, this time by means of tremolos, and everybody shakes but nothing happens. The last piece, *Hymn of the People*, had its growth stunted early by a repeated rhythmic device which proved to be a trap.

The Twentieth Century Music Group's initial concert of its sixth season presented Jacques de Menasce, a composer with good taste and discretion. He was best in two compact and concise songs for soprano, *Tulip* and *The Grey Squirrel*. He is able to create a single and concentrated mood with no loose ends. His *Piano Sonatina Number Two* is written with a careful, neat hand and it resembles needlepoint. One misses a certain push and bite and a sense of reality in de Menasce. *Five New Songs* by Paul Hindemith are refreshing and reassuring for they are abundant in ideas and the kind of force so prevalent in his writing of a few years back. Vittorio Rieti's *Sonata in A ♭ for Piano* is too light and surfacey for serious intentions. Rieti's playful key shifts never fit the sterner moods. He *will* write a perpetual motion finale.

Vincent Persichetti

## BIG NAMES IN CHICAGO

THE autumn musical season in Chicago, while by no means neglectful of music by living composers, has been dominated chiefly by Big Names. Indeed, the fall looks in retrospect something like a Stravinsky-Hindemith-Prokofiev festival.

Stravinsky was dealt with in terms of chronological extremes. From the library shelf Désiré Defauw and the Orchestra retrieved *Fireworks*, the youthful composition which first recommended the composer to the attention of Diaghilev; at the University of Chicago Celius Dougherty and Vincent Ruzicka played the *Sonata for Two Pianos*, a work so new that it had been publicly presented only once before, at the Library of Congress festival in honor of Mrs. Coolidge. In addition, at the University of Chicago, the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* was played for the first time in