

EUROPE AND AMERICA IN MUSIC TODAY

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AFTER ten years packed to suffocation with glittering discovery, packed even more with miscarriage and manifest rubbish—we find ourselves confronting two standard bearers of musical newness.

One is the spiritually thinned and tonally deadened new composer of Europe, a strange oldish youth. The other is the aggressively exuberant young American who claims his due more rightfully and forcefully than ever before, a youth in hilarious ascendance. The external picture of the past tonal decade is however much the same, here as overseas.

A number of "chapels," small groups and cliques have established themselves, not really in capitals-at-large but in cramped and fancy intellectual quarters. Theirs is a tonal debauch, combined with timid glancing at the leading musical dandy; business-like and concerted mutual admiration followed by intense importing of anemic demi-gods. But amidst creative smoke and ashes, amidst a host of false pretenders and their bedevilled flock, amidst battle of doctrines attached to tonal ghosts, there are some extraordinary creative phenomena that arrest our vision, change the very core of our tonal perception and even pierce through the brazen city-mind indifferent to anything not sanctioned by the Music-Appreciators' Guild.

The triumphant entry of Stravinsky's *Noces*, the fertile reverberation of Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, the delighted sense of grand entertainment evoked by Milhaud's *Colomb* and Carpenter's *Skyscrapers*, the mighty grip of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* and Louis Gruenberg's *Emperor Jones*, have more than comforted us, have more than redeemed the futile race through empty space that the modern music game has so often provided us with.

On the surface, the ten years of modern music in Europe and America present the same picture. But the inner aspects of creative progress on either side of the ocean are essentially opposed. The two currents are totally polar in nature and in direction as well.

Europe's fostering of its young creative forces has been of the same kind as its diplomacy. It is of a typical continental ramshackle and happy-go-lucky sort, an improvisation casual and full of intrigue, a musical politician's game of shameless give-and-take. The proud exhibition of their produce can scarcely conceal the "special interests" and the "deal" back of the racing, petty machinations of publishers and of the *quasi* national juries voicing a constituency that might be seated on one bench.

Europe's reorganization of our tonal world has been artificial and mechanical, clearly a postlude to a dying culture. Litterateurs, people without any tangible connection with music, sometimes without even a real interest in it, have usurped the tonal legislature. They have set up a "short trousers" cult in composition; they have catapulted into the liberal clans of Paris, Berlin and Vienna the current mottoes; they have issued letters-patent to temporary young genius. Let me recall the gleeful short-lived career of the *Six*, the *Ecole d'Arceuil* in Paris, of Donaueschingen and other tonal saturnalia. The artificial turmoil could not end but as it has, in yielding lean and morbid fruit which Europe itself now dismisses with impatience.

The inner aspect of the American decade is, as I have said, surprisingly different. It is first and foremost a picture of organic growth. We can clearly oppose the stilted, forgotten European corner-sheltering of the new composer to the remarkable public cognizance of new musical thought in this country—an awareness that has made Gruenberg's *Emperor Jones* possible. To perceive the variance, it is enough merely to compare the sure technical growth of the younger American and his steady approach to the defining of his esthetic will with the livid and confused European tableau.

The clear symptoms of America's youthful maturity, which is in such healthy ascendance, are first a new technical power,

individually colored and individually driven, and second, the death of blind importing of continental totems.

Europe, the mausoleum of cultural relics and of ossified patterns, Europe whose art-pulse is ominously slowing up, has ceased to be the center of art rotation.

America and reborn Russia are manifestly the countries slated to lead the colossal process of re-orientation in music.

The first rumblings of this process are already audible. Gruenberg's *Emperor Jones*, Charles Ives' *New England Corners*, Shostakovitch's *May Day Symphony*, Carpenter's *Skyscrapers*, Copland's *Jazz Concerto*, Prokofieff's *Seven, They are Seven*, are not fleeting phenomena.

They are well defined, well related and significant occurrences in a changing tonal universe.