

This company gives short seventeenth and eighteenth century operas with a cast of three and an orchestra of string quartet and piano. As the sets are miniscule and the costumes very simple the whole has an amateurish air that would be misleading if the company sang less well and did less interesting music. But the music was both interesting and beautiful, especially Purcell's *Don Quixote* which was filled with the pathos and tenderness as well as high spirits that are so typical of him. The evening was worth while just for the chance of hearing this first-rate music.

The other three operas by Arne, Dibdin, and Carey were more trivial though still quite amusing. They gave us in brief a history of light music before Sullivan. Carey and Arne were of the healthy straightforward Handelian times and Dibdin with a Mozartian pathos prefigured the great comic-opera composer. This kind of troupe should be more common because it helps to take opera out of the opera-house and give it life, which apparently it cannot have there.

E. C.

## SEASON OF PREMIERES IN BOSTON

IN eleven concerts so far this season, Dr. Koussevitzky has given *nine* American premières, which is a proper reason for Boston to point with pride. For, as is well known, orchestras depend for subsistence largely on "conservative" audiences. The most important new work that has been brought out was the *Second Violin Concerto* in G-minor of Prokofieff (1935, Opus 63). This embodies the lyricism, the incredible technical display, and the satisfying solidity of the *First Violin Concerto*, yet does not come up to it. There is never any lag in interest, but that interest is its weakness. It is so varied that the unity of the composition is sacrificed, and the impression is one of many single creations bound up into a movement. This was true especially of the first which appeared to be running through a long corridor of doors, opening each one in turn until it reached its goal. This seems a laborious method; was it after all, worth the effort? The other outstanding point about the work is that Prokofieff seems to have gone Russian again, artistically and politically. We have only to com-

pare the rather Teutonically tender first theme of the *First Violin Concerto* (1913, Opus 19) :



with the Russian-folkish first theme of the new work :



We learn, besides, that Prokofieff is now completing "a large work for chorus and orchestra to authentic texts from articles and speeches by Lenin and Stalin.\*" This is important news.

Less significant Prokofieff was offered in the form of a *Russian Overture* and a suite adapted from his score to the Russian cinema *Lieutenant Kijé*. The first was noisy, not very interesting, and stimulating only in so far as an insistent chorus of battery instruments can be stimulating. The *Kijé* music showed Prokofieff's incomparable orchestral technic to no less a degree than does the *Classical Symphony*: it possesses all the charm and healthy humor of that work, with the added impetus of a necessarily detailed, because cinematic, program.

Also out of Russia came the next most important work, a concerto in three movements by the young pupil of Miaskovsky, Michael Starokadomsky. This was extremely well composed, with an eighteenth-century continuity that was pleasantly surprising. The first and third movements were incisive, solid, intensely rhythmic, and hard as nails. They were separated by an unusually beautiful slow passacaglia-movement, which argued a new kind of romanticism: a classical strictness charged with an undeniably nineteenth-century richness. We should like very much to hear more of him.

The only other new symphonies were the *Third Symphony* of Professor E. Burlingame Hill of Harvard, and the *Symphony* of the Belgian, Marcel Poot. The latter was announced as "jazzy," and turned out to be nothing of the sort, unless the Belgian notion of jazz is a perverted one. In fact, it was nothing of any sort, and

\*From the September, 1937, issue of *Sovietskaya Musica*, quoted in the Boston Symphony Orchestra program notes.

left one strangely unimpressed. Mr. Hill's symphony was conservative harmonically, and had more to say in the second movement than in either of the others, in fact, more than in almost anything else of his that we have heard. Its chief virtue lies in the beauty of the orchestration; this piece could easily supplant *Scheherezade* as a schoolroom model.

Most recently the Helsinki University chorus of Finland sang two choral works of Sibelius with the Boston Orchestra. These had been widely publicized, especially *The Origin of Fire*, Opus 32; the score had been lost in the crossing and was radioed here from its Heimat, page by page, shortly before the performance. The other work was *The Captive Queen*, a ballad for chorus and orchestra. Ardent anticipation apparently produced an anticlimax, especially when it turned out that both works were far from monumental (though one had patriotic fervor) and were at best consistently pleasant folk-song entertainment for about a half-hour. The pieces were simple in structure, emphasizing the ballad-stanza repetition; toward the end both rose to climactic proportions by dint of such devices as having the voices progress from unison to two-part to four-part singing. At any rate it was Sibelius, and everybody applauded.

But new music is not to be heard only at the concerts of the Boston Symphony. The State Symphony Orchestra, a splendid WPA unit conducted by Alexander Thiede, recently gave the first American performances of Sir Granville Bantock's *Overture to the Frogs of Aristophanes*, a *Sinfonietta* by Rudolf Forst, and an *Epic Poem* by the young Boston composer, Arthur Korb. More recently Mr. Thiede conducted the premiere of the *Fourth Symphony* by Dante Fiorillo, a work which shows tremendous promise (since, though he is now thirty-two, he wrote it when only seventeen.)

The most important chamber music event here was the performance of Walter Piston's second quartet at a concert of the Composers' Forum Laboratory. The work distinguished itself immediately as an important example of Piston's fine contrapuntal workmanship and sensitivity to particular instruments.

It seems almost necessary to say a few words about the new Stravinsky *Concerto for Two Pianos Soli*, a work which few

people seem to know. This was given publicly last spring at a concert of the Harvard Music Club, and again last month at a private hearing of the same group. It is a fine work, entirely in the "latest" Stravinsky style, "Greek" in its lines, "dry" in its temperament, "thin" in its harmony. The fugue at the end has a really smashing driving power.

*Leonard Bernstein*

## NEW WORKS FOR THE MID-WEST

**F**OR the sake of the record I will make a clean sweep here and now of all that has happened in Chicago in the name of modern music between the first of last July and Christmas.

The series of twenty-six summer concerts at Ravinia Park provided a more stimulating diet of new music than we have been accustomed to. Five of the summer's six guest conductors of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra presented novelties; only one, Vladimir Golschmann, limited his repertoire wholly to music already familiar.

Ernest Ansermet, a musician who ought to be persuaded to spend more time in the United States, made out a series of four programs packed with tempting new items. In the end however he removed all but four novelties from his list, finding the amount of rehearsal time allotted inadequate to the orchestra's needs. He did, however, conduct Kodaly's *Dances of Galanta*, a beautifully unified and well scored work constructed upon some of the less bromidic rhythmic and melodic idioms of Hungarian folk music. This proved to be one of the freshest and most agreeable scores any avowedly "nationalist" composer has turned out in recent years. Mr. Ansermet also revealed to us Casella's jolly little diatonic overture to his opera *La Donna Serpente*, some of Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagète* music (which had never been heard in Chicago) and his own attenuated orchestration of five of Debussy's feeble *Epigraphes Antiques*, originally written for piano duet.

Only a few of the twenty novelties of the Ravinia season seem important in retrospect. Hans Lange did both Quincy Porter and us a good turn in presenting that composer's sturdy and crafts-