

FORECAST AND REVIEW

YOUNG BRITONS

THE space allotted to me here does not permit an examination of the causes responsible for the strange reluctance shown by post-war Britain, and for that matter post-war Europe, to draw a strong reserve force of creative musicians from the ranks of those whose most impressionable years coincided with the world cataclysm of the past decade. I can only advance the view that in Britain, at any rate, we seem to be confronted with a temporary *reculer pour mieux sauter* rather than with a period of exhaustion, and proceed to single out a few of the younger composers who have had a hand during the last year or so in the developments of the British school.

The fact that those who were dashing young bloods a few years ago have grown out of their adolescent escapades without turning staid and dull, is one of the many signs that creative vitality, though latent, is not declining. The two composers I have particularly in mind in this connection are Lord Berners and Arthur Bliss, who have recently gained immensely in artistic power of a purely musical order. Both of them began with the youthful ostentation that delights in attractive or sensational externals; both were anxious to set new fashions by making themselves and their novel ideas talked about; but they have cast off their loud socks and flamboyant ties without becoming shabby. On the contrary, there is now a persuasive dignity about them which they lacked in their salad days.

The work by Lord Berners which especially shows a settling down without any suggestion of retirement, is the new *Fugue for Orchestra*. The strength expended by the composer on this piece is wholly intellectual whereas in his earlier music his exuberance was largely physical; the difference is that of listen-

ing to a quietly eloquent discourse after a splutter of forcible expletives. This *Fugue*, for the first time, but quite decisively, puts Lord Berners among the composers whom one takes seriously, not because it contains more solid science than anything he did before—that in itself would be valueless—but because it is a piece of fine thinking.

After this, one might have been disappointed in the new ballet written by him for Diaghilev, *The Triumph of Neptune*, had one not remembered that for a stage display which in no way pretends to gravity, this rather flippant score is just what might have been expected of a composer who can be in earnest when he chooses, but sees no reason why he should take a joke seriously. *The Triumph of Neptune* has a very amusing scenario by Sacheverell Sitwell in the manner of the old-fashioned English pantomime, and perhaps the most attractive feature of this production is the scenery, a faithful copy of some of the old “penny plain, two pence colored” toy theatres which used to be the joy of an unsophisticated childhood and inspired Stevenson to a rhapsody of sentimental retrospect. Much of Berners’ music catches the spirit of this naive pasteboard and tinsel fairy-world admirably by deliberately and insipidly pretty tunes which he mixes with polkas, hornpipes and other pieces that smack deliciously of the period. But he cannot forbear to turn ironically upon himself and upon the audience now and again, and the sudden grimaces which his music pulls at unexpected moments are rather more disconcerting than amusing. For all that, this ballet is in every respect much the best thing Diaghilev has produced for quite a long time.

Arthur Bliss’s new *Hymn to Apollo*, performed in Amsterdam and London, was really written for an American orchestra and is dedicated to an American conductor. It impresses us as the strongest and most purposeful work Bliss has yet done, more impressive by its stark downrightness and close workmanship than even the admirable *Introduction and Allegro* introduced by Sir Henry Wood at the Promenade Concerts last summer.

The youthful indiscretions abandoned by Berners and Bliss are now being committed by two younger men, Constant Lambert and William Turner Walton, with no less gusto, which

is as good as saying that although one may not take them very seriously at present, it will be as well to give them the benefit of one's experience with their immediate forerunners.

Lambert's music to the ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, produced by Diaghilev in the style of a theatrical rehearsal that gave him every opportunity to display his recent predilection for scenic bareness and ugliness, owes a great deal to the Franco-Russian influences which have watered down the productions of the Russian Ballet so deplorably of late. But he, at any rate, beats men like Auric and Dukelsky hollow at their own game. With the exception of Poulenc's pallidly charming *Les Biches*, Lambert's ballet is by far the best work in what may be called Diaghilev's decadent manner. Can it be that this astonishingly versatile producer has now entered upon an English period?

Of W. T. Walton a good deal has been heard at the festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music, but his most arresting work has been performed so far in London only. This is the music to Edith Sitwell's *Façade*, a series of short, epigrammatic and often enigmatic poems regarded by the intelligentsia of Chelsea as the work of a divinity and by the man in the street as that of a lunatic, while the average perceptive lover of art sees in it the product of a cunning artificer, the fascination of which he frankly confesses to sensing rather than understanding. Walton's music, composed for a small chamber orchestra, is neatly pointed, witty, incisive and daring, but suffers in performance from the fact that recitation and music can never attract attention simultaneously and that in this case the former happens to strike the listener more forcibly.

There are several young composers in England to-day who make their way in a direction exactly opposite to that taken by Lambert and Walton. Instead of kicking over the traces in order to settle down respectably later on, they learn what they can from the past, only to free their individualities through the knowledge gained. The school of composition created by men like Vaughan Williams, John B. McEwen, Gustav Holst and that learned modern-Elizabethan contrapuntist, O. R. Morris, has at last established a tradition that is based not on the precedent of the German classics but on that of English folk-song and of the

great period of English art-music from Dunstable to Purcell. Among the young composers nurtured in that school whose future will be worth watching are Alan Bush and Gerald Finzi.

Some young women composers are also coming to the fore. The most significant of them are Rebecca Clarke, whose recent piano *Trio*, a work of unusual passion and power, made a great impression, and Freda Swain, who, in the larger forms of the instrumental sonata and the symphonic poem, writes imaginative and highly individual music.

Eric Blom

VLADIMIR DUKELSKY

THE time seems to have arrived when geniuses are given an immediate chance, and no gifted composer can escape early recognition. Only in fiction do we encounter the wistful figure of a talented musician living in obscurity, his single reward a posthumous one. But it still seems necessary to pass through a certain definite procedure before entering the hall of fame. One of the initial stages is apparently a more or less prolonged sojourn in Paris. Parisian honors, and the recognition of Parisian musical magnificos throw open the gates of the world of music to the individual who bears the passport of talent—and often to one who doesn't.

Vladimir Dukelsky tried to skip Paris; he made a non-stop flight directly from Constantinople to New York. A boy of nineteen, in 1923 he offered his overture, *Gondla*, to a sophisticated audience in Carnegie Hall. "A farrago of atrocious noises" was the verdict. Dukelsky, submitting to the inevitable, sailed for Paris in 1924. In his portfolio he bore the manuscript of a newly-completed piano concerto to offer the Parisian Witenagemot.

This concerto was written in Prokofiev's favorite key, C-major, a key of irresistible dash and absorbing power. It was unquestionably portentous. The music, full of unstinted energy and invention, disclosed a genuine talent with an abundance of fertile ideas upon which to draw. Serge Diaghilev's discerning ear recognized a "find" and he commissioned Dukelsky to write a ballet.