

toward music of today than New York. Audiences prefer to muse over the past. It is only through efforts similar to those of Messrs. Copland and Sessions that they have any chance of being enlightened as to the true musical drift of the present.

Edward Burlingame Hill

HIN UND ZURÜCK IN PHILADELPHIA

THE theatre performance of the Philadelphia Society for Contemporary Music on April 22 was remarkable chiefly for the production it gave of *Hin und Zurück*, a one-act *Sketch mit Musik* by Paul Hindemith. This composer seems never to write simply a concerto, a string quartet or an opera; what emerges is usually a model for succeeding compositions of like form. In *Hin und Zurück* Hindemith has once again done an excellent job; the score is compact, rich and witty, beautifully proportioned to the trivial nonsense of the libretto and yet so complete in itself that one could long for a concert performance.

The old sketch from *Charlot's Revue* which provides the text is flippant stuff, not without a trace of cynical philosophy. The play opens with a sneeze from an old deaf aunt who sits knitting. In the incredibly short time of four minutes the entire first section has taken place: Hélène has her morning coffee, greets Robert, her husband, who presents her with a birthday gift; a letter is brought in which is discovered to be from her lover; Robert draws a cap-pistol, shoots her on the spot; a doctor and attendant enter—too late—carry her off; Robert in despair throws himself out of the window. The pace is terrific yet the deft mood of burlesque renders this high-pitched material quite assimilable, and prevents any feeling of overloading. The lights go out; a wise man appears who pedantically explains the silliness of the situation and announces a reversal of the plot as proof that it makes as much sense backwards as forwards. The lights go on, Robert jumps back through the window, Hélène is carried on the stage, and the play unravels itself back to the starting point, the curtain lowering upon a final sneeze from the old aunt.

The technical mastery of Hindemith might have led one to expect the *tour de force* indicated by such a text. Thus, at the point where the play went into reverse, the music might have fol-

lowed suit and retraced its steps precisely and without deviation to the first chord of its introduction. Such a method evidently appeared too mechanical, too obvious to the composer; indeed, he has not even allowed his librettist so arbitrary a procedure. Thus the phrase, "Mir scheint man braucht mir hier nicht mehr," which the doctor utters upon seeing dead Hélène's body, is, in the "Zurück" section, not "Mehr nicht hier mir braucht man scheint mir," but given in exactly the same word order as before. The comedy is achieved through the situation: in "Hin" the doctor says it as a gesture of despair; in "Zurück" he steps out of his part, looks straight front at the audience and exits.

The trick involved in the play is amusing enough and remains good theatre; but the movies have practically exhausted its comic possibilities, and it is already somewhat old hat. Jean Cocteau has carried it even a point further in a recent movie in which he instructed his actors to play their scene backwards; then he reversed his film, the result being the ordinary time-sequence in any movie scene, made hilariously funny by a new deliberateness of tempo and a fascinating unreality of movement.

The music in *Hin und Zurück* is content to reverse simply the order of its themes and tempi; it performs no academic "crab canon" note-for-note beat. Even the restatement of themes is determined by no iron-bound dogma; its form might be diagrammed as: a-b-c-d-E-d-c-b. The score calls for seven wind instruments and two pianos (one for two players), the last used percussively almost throughout. There is not an inch of padding, no recitatives; as a matter of fact, it is not strictly theatre-music, as we know it, at all. Dramatic effects to enhance the action are very rare. They occur in the body of the music itself, they are integrated into the scheme. The approach here is exclusively musical; the literary element apparent in similar works, which makes of Kodaly's *Hary Janós*, for example, so offensive and tiresome a score, is absent. Satire and commentary are projected by what is the only valid musical method, implicit directness; the music is serious, purposeful and so cunningly adapted to the dimensions of the comic idea involved, as to expose its own inanity.

Harmonically the score presents the anomaly to be found in

almost any recent Hindemith work. It defies consistent analysis—being at various times atonal, polytonic, polytonal, even conventionally diatonic—yet it maintains a logic, however obscure, and always gives off the feeling of being completely realized. Rhythmically the music is less complicated than other works (*Klaviermusik*, opus 37, for instance), since there are voices to be accompanied; still, it would be a considerable exaggeration to say that the rhythms are simple or usual. The melody-line varies constantly; sometimes it is found in the voices, sometimes in the woodwinds (there is a charming *Ariette* for saxophone and Hélène's voice, elaborately florid on the words "froh und früh," accompanied by light staccato chords at the extreme treble and bass of the two pianos). Sometimes the brass comes in for the solo line, as in the glissando melody played by the trombone at the entrance of the doctor. Most striking in this little masterpiece is the economy of its means, the richness and variety of effect and the characteristic unity.

The Philadelphia Society also repeated the League of Composers' earlier performance of *L'Histoire du Soldat*, acrid and teeming music, whose texture is deliberately thin and fragmentary, achieving thereby an ultimate satisfaction undreamed of before the advent of Stravinsky. The same program included the ballet, *Vibrations*, by Isadore Freed, vague and reminiscent dance-music, well written, pleasantly danced, easily forgotten.

Marc Blitzstein

THE CASE FOR A MUSIC LABORATORY

JOHN Redfield's book, *Music: A Science and an Art*, just issued by Alfred A. Knopf, is, to say the least, provocative. Whether or not one agrees with his theses and speculations, they undeniably set many ideas in motion. Though it is not intended as a treatise on the science and art of music, and demands of the reader no specialized training, the volume contains information for the musician who should know more about the science of music, and perhaps for the physicist who could know more about the art.

Mr. Redfield was lecturer in the physics of music at Columbia University and this book is the result of his work there, plus many