

any phase of emotion as promptly as he can turn out counterpoint. Thus he assigns to each song its proper ingredient of pathos or gayety, passion or pain. It may be sheer power of imagination that is at work here; an imagination so great that it transfers itself into whatever mood is necessary. However, it is more likely that the whole gamut of human emotions exists in Toch's mind as just so much purely *fictive* material which he acts out in the interests of composition. He exercises his intelligence on this material in an effort to make it plausible. And that is the furthest he reaches. So that everything is plausible—and nothing convincing.

Israel Citkowitz

THOMSON'S MASS AND OTHER CHORAL WORKS

THE Dessoiff Choirs, consisting of the Adesdi Chorus, (women's, sounding well) and the A Cappella Singers, (mixed, singing well) gave their final and not very enjoyable performance at Town Hall on April tenth, each chorus presenting works by two contemporary composers. The Adesdi gave the premiere of Virgil Thomson's *Mass*, commissioned by the League of Composers a year ago. The two vocal parts are simple and singable. The addition of percussion gave the music a real punch and clipped off as much as possible the tiny but annoying loose ends of sound left over between words by the singers, who obviously failed to get the idea of this matter-of-fact, hard boiled piece. (The critics were right on one score: it is no more devout than any group of nuns who have just finished tidying up the chapel and who are looking forward to some rolls and coffee.)

In the *Kyrie* the accompaniment of cymbal and the alto's ostinato figure established the straightforward mood. At times the snare-drum's punctuation of phrases in the *Credo* evoked the similar drum-remarks stuck in between strophes by the Saharan story-tellers. And it was used very much in the same way and for the same reason: to keep up the interest by helping to unify a long and repetitious text without much sense, by distributing landmarks in the form of various rhythmic designs spread along the large melodic design. The trim opening motif which recurs at "et resurrexit" and again at "Et unam sanctam"

is a perfect example of Thomson's unique prosodic gift. It has humor and it is an excellent tune. Both the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* were very pretty, but I believe that since they were almost foolproof even for the Adesdi Chorus, they would have been better without the cymbal which seemed to be playing just because it was there. *Agnus Dei* found us back with the ostinato, underlined by the bass drum and cymbal in slow regular beating, pianissimo at the outset and crescendo to the end. The *Mass* is serviceable and quasi-streamlined; it is better and more personal music than *Four Saints*. It is time for the musical public to lose its idea that Thomson strolls in the byways of music, or that he leans to the chichi or special.

Schönberg's *Friede Auf Erden*, sung by the A Cappella Singers, if not of chaotic conception, at least gave the impression of chaos with its unnecessarily complicated harmony and its wandering melodic line. The atonal idiom seems the least at home in the human larynx; there is a sense of strain apparent during the singing. The piece, while it sounded well at any given moment, was unconvincing and confused because it lacked harmonic contrast. There was nothing to tie it down, nor, if one cared to follow it, could one locate oneself at any point along the way. The tendency toward a tonic at the end may have been an extra-musical idea; it seemed to have no organic reason, but perhaps it had. (It is difficult to judge the music of the epoch immediately preceding one's own). The general effect was that of something disembodied and floating in space, which is quite apt for a peace-hymn.

Hugo Herrmann's *Chorvariationen über die Sonnengesänge des Franciskus von Assisi* (!) sung by the Adesdi Chorus, was a bad piece, full of silly caressing harmonies smuggled in from France. Herrmann had found a little piano figure that tickled him, and so he used it at the beginning of each "variation" with the result that they all sounded exactly alike. Much of the central portion seemed to have been suggested by good old Volksmelodien from East of the Rhine, but the composer had camouflaged them by changing all the thirds to fourths. The piece smelled pseudo, and it was quite in keeping that the theme as well as all the variations (including a gigue which was at least elegiac) should have

been marked with the indication: *Tempo di Gregoriano!*

The *Three Choruses* by Jacques Pillois were shamelessly cheap and stupid. There was an antique finish on the *Cantique Béarnais (Nouste Damo)*, but that was all. The other two were good radio music.

Paul Bowles

NATIVE OPERA—METROPOLITAN AND JUILLIARD

THIS season's American novelty at the Metropolitan proved disappointing; it was neither a contribution to American opera or to contemporary music. *In the Pasha's Garden* was produced at a January matinee with its composer, John Laurence Seymour, a shy man from California, present to accept the usual curtain call and the David Bispham medal, awarded annually, supposedly for the best American opera. Just why the work was accepted for performance at all is enigmatical. Perhaps on paper the role of the Pasha promised another triumph for Lawrence Tibbett. Perhaps the negligible cost of production influenced the decision. Or perhaps the fact that an unknown composer from across the continent had written his seventh opera seemed the stuff that press agents' dreams are made of. Be that as it may, the music was undistinguished and reminiscent, the orchestration amateurish and ineffectual, and the English none too well adapted to the vocal line. The libretto by H. C. Tracy (based on a story by H. G. Dwight) failed to carry its dramatic suspense. The one item of interest from a contemporary point of view was the original and modernistic stage setting designed by Frederick J. Kiesler. Exaggeratedly large foliage was thrown by lights on a white cyclorama. Most of the action took place on a raised circular dais (reached by a ramp) where was revealed the chest in which the Pasha's blond wife had hidden her French lover. The Pasha was in a conventional tuxedo, the wife was an effective figure in a white evening gown with green draperies; the Eunuch wore native costume and sang disturbing roulades purporting to be Turkish music.

The Juilliard School's presentation of *Maria Malibran* was another matter. Robert Russell Bennett and Robert A. Simon