

real dramatic conflict. It is theatric sense that enables the composer to deal with the rapid, ejaculatory chatter of most of the first act and which drives him to write that terrible glee club ensemble to bring down the curtain on something properly effervescent and noisy. But it was not skillful "theatre" that helped him fashion the second act—the episode of the knight's forest encounter with the lady of his mission—which drags itself heavily onward in music of a fatal chromatic sameness, void of characterization, monotonous in rhythm, strained in melody. At no performance has the public responded to this act as by all calculation it should. It hangs fire where it was most meant to blaze.

There were scenes and music of indisputable operatic quality and stage worth in Damrosch's *Cyrano*, in Cadman's *Shanewis*, in Herbert's *Natoma* and even in De Koven's paltry *Canterbury Pilgrims*. It is by no means a certainty in minds inclined to press the point that the total sum of theatrical skill and operatic intuition is appreciably greater in *The King's Henchman* than it was in *Natoma* or *Cyrano*. Revisited, those works of a bygone and more exigent day might assume a strange, unwonted lustre. The suspicion is in order that if *The King's Henchman* is really as great as claimed, they are far from being as bad as painted.

Herbert Peyser

COPLAND'S JAZZ CONCERTO IN BOSTON

ASSUREDLY Mr. Koussevitzky manifested courage and the sincerity of his convictions when he introduced Copland's *Piano Concerto* to the conservative audiences of the Boston Symphony concerts early this year. His courage is the result of an admirable perception that contemporary music, even of a radical type, has a right to figure on programs of an avowedly educational institution. Despite the preference of his public for pieces of established or even waning repute, Mr. Koussevitzky has continued to present new music which, in his opinion, was worthy to be made known. In Aaron Copland's case, the performances in 1924 of his *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* and in the

following season of his *Music for the Theatre* justified the acceptance of a new work.

The concerto delighted Mr. Copland's younger listeners. Those of an older generation were aghast at its audacities and, disregarding the right of the conductor to exercise a free hand in the selection of programs, would gladly have taken steps to secure immunity from such music in the future. Even professional musicians, too often vaguely aware of the actual drift of present-day musical thought, seemed to consider this work a unique example of musical depravity which should be suppressed, if necessary, by the District Attorney. In musical circles the concerto as a topic of conversation became taboo; the mere mention of it dulled sociability and even threatened to alienate friends. Yet when this redoubtable piece was performed in New York, Mr. Lawrence Gilman, whose perspicacity, sense of proportion and sympathy with innovative tendencies should be a source of pride to America, reviewed the work with a calm and just appraisal of its merits.

A knowledge of Copland's previous works enables one to diagnose his musical derivation. The pupil of an extremely distinguished teacher, Mlle. Nadia Boulanger, he seems to have found his normal musical diet in the works of contemporary composers who have suffered no constitutional inhibition towards radicalism. But this is not meant as an assertion that he has confined his analysis to the music of today. His technical skill bespeaks a far wider scope of research. He has been interested in Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Honegger, Hindemith and others, just as the youth of earlier generations were attracted by Debussy, Strauss, Brahms, and if we go far enough back, Wagner. Aaron Copland is no phenomenal exception, no pitiable aberration; he is psychologically normal and his music contains the average percentage of derivation. But the sources of these derivations are largely unknown to the reactionaries.

Even a brief study of the concerto discloses a sense of formal balance, fertility of resource and economy in development. The dignified introduction is constructed with a free but logical polyphony. Succeeding episodes for piano and for orchestra grow naturally out of preceding material. The main allegro, with its

subsidiary themes, is handled with firmness and flexibility. A longish cadenza for piano leads back to a re-statement of the opening mood and a vigorous close. From the standpoint of construction, there is no denying the thoroughness and the poise of Copland's workmanship.

To many the stumbling block lies in its uncompromising dissonant idiom. Most of these aspersions arise from a sweeping ignorance of Copland's models. Had the conservatives assimilated the latter, much light would thereby have been shed on the young composer's fell purposes. In his zeal to assert a kinship with the radical style, Mr. Copland may have overdone matters. The dissonance habit demands increased doses as do narcotics. But the listener is not always in the same predicament. In succeeding works Copland may discover that restraint is more convincing than over-emphasis; that even in music the "unspoken word" is the more eloquent. On the other hand it is equally possible that without abating one whit of his harmonic acidity, Copland may convert us to his viewpoint, that his individuality need not trifle with compromise to attain its expressive end.

A notable feature of this concerto and one which emphasizes its originality consists in the truly alchemic manner in which Copland has transmuted the dross of jazz into a fantastic and scintillant symphonic style. In this respect he has far transcended all previous similar essays known to the writer. As a whole, Copland's concerto, despite any possible reservations, re-affirms his talent and marks an advance over his earlier works.

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