

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

## THE YOUNG COMPOSERS' MOVEMENT

**M**ORE than the opinion of even the most intelligent friends and colleagues, more than the sincerely well-meant analyses of professional critics is public performance of inestimable value to the young composer who is not insulated from its benefits by conceit. Then, and only then, can he get a "line" on the rhythmic plasticity, structural continuity and general texture of his work. For this reason alone the Copland-Sessions concerts were amply justifiable.

Music by young composers is bound to be an unconscious record of study and assimilation. This they are keen enough to recognize in the case of older American composers; but do they realize that the younger generation has escaped no less. Debussy, Ravel and Strauss do not tempt the arriving composer of today. Schönberg and Stravinsky, though not present in the flesh, bestrode the stage of the Edyth Totten Theatre throughout the program of May 6. This is normal; but until individuality takes precedence over imitation, no lasting advance has been made, although the young composer of today is obviously better equipped technically than his predecessors of a generation ago. The fable remains true—King Log has been exchanged for King Stork. Stravinsky is as efficient a bar to American musical independence today as were ever Brahms, Strauss or Debussy. And Schönberg lags not far behind Stravinsky.

Mr. Robert Delaney's *Sonata for Piano and Violin* is an excellent instance. It is likeable music; it shows sensitiveness to fine points of technique; it has something to say. But Stravinsky might have signed the first movement without a blush. The second movement is far less derivative. In the third, strange hints of Brahms lurk about ideas of a different type. Mr.

Sessions' *Sonata*, (was it wise to play it incomplete?) also redolent of Stravinsky's procedures, was on the whole better music than Stravinsky has written of late. It had in the *Allegro* movement assertiveness, strength and interesting development of themes that were never wholly original. The *Andante* following, worked out with a sensitive feeling for line and climax ideas suggestive again of Stravinsky, but a Stravinsky who, in striving to get "back to Handel," stalled on reaching César Franck. Yet here was music not only wholly worth hearing, but which was a close second to the most significant of the evening. Mr. Porter's *Quintet*, not so obviously derivative as the other works, suffered consequently through not having had such distinguished models. This music was "interesting," at times vague; it seemed not sufficiently thought out in plan.

Mr. Richard Buhlig played three groups of piano pieces with apparent enthusiasm and evident brilliance. Miss Crawford's preludes were surely meritorious in workmanship and style, but presented a singular union of "influences"—a sort of esthetic mesalliance, Scriabin and Schönberg. Mr. Weiss, as a devoted pupil of Schönberg, reproduced his master's style in four preludes with such fidelity that only an expert could distinguish the copy from the original. Mr. Rudyhar's *Paeans* appeared to have ideas of little consequence which were manipulated unimpressively.

Mr. Copland's *Pieces for String Quartet* were easily the outstanding numbers on the program. While the influence of Stravinsky was plain to the most casual observer, Mr. Copland had better assimilated these procedures, made them his own and expressed them in terms of his own personality. At a single hearing, the *Lento Molto* seems to suffer from an undue repetition of the same phrase, producing an effect of rhythmic monotony and lack of resource. The *Rondino* on the other hand is engrossing and captivating, distinctive for the manner in which its somewhat radical idiom is made to conform to the inherent limitations of the string quartet.

It is to be hoped—for obvious reasons—that these concerts will be continued another season. It is also unfortunate that such programs cannot be given in cities even less indulgent

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-