

FORECAST AND REVIEW

ORCHESTRAS AND AUDIENCES; WINTER, 1938

THERE are two ways of listening to music. The most popular is for the listener to give himself up to an evening of reminiscence or revery after having checked his conscious, critical self at the door with his hat. The small spot he has in his heart for music awakens and he evokes personal images and feelings which only remotely correspond with what is striking his ear. Scenes of childhood and adolescence are evoked by the Debussy or Chopin number, heroic justification of acts he could not make up his mind about is found to the tune of Brahms, Beethoven, Sibelius or Wagner. If he has any room for modern music he thinks over the sad condition of his bank balance or love life to the agitations of Strauss or the hysterical post-war Germans, and finds anxiety for his own future aroused by the proletarian theatre composers. Though by constant repetition he may discover something to hook on to the most diverse styles and thus find a way of not paying attention to them, he generally rejects any music which jars him out of himself and threatens to afford a new experience, giving way to anger as a protection.

There is a more objective though just as enthusiastic kind of listener. He is eager for new ideas and new feelings. When hearing familiar works he always re-evaluates his previous impressions. The style, no matter how difficult or unusual, does not prevent him from trying to find what the music is all about. He follows it attentively for he knows that it is a living message to him from another living man, a serious thought or experience worth considering, one that will help him to understand the people about him. To him, dead, worn-out formulas or non-communicative styles are anathema. Serious composers and mu-

sicians have always aimed at this listener and he in turn has shown that he could take his listener's share of responsibility by keeping his mind actively fixed on the music he was hearing.

Of all the symphonic organizations in this part of the country Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony have catered most to the part of the public that listens "actively." This excellent society has done a great deal to stimulate the attentive attitude by treating composers as if they were living, worthy men and not as if they were shadowy, unreal figures hovering uncertainly above the real, printed page. A long list of achievements in this direction can be listed. Commissions for the leading contemporary composers on the occasion of the orchestra's fiftieth anniversary, having composers perform or conduct their own works, and giving memorial concerts when the important figures died. Koussevitzky is the only important conductor to have made this a consistent policy with his orchestra. Most of the outstanding composers have had numerous performances of their works in Boston. That part of the public which is "passive" has not always been sympathetic, but it is noticeable now that, as a result of these efforts, Boston audiences are more liberal than others toward what is new.

The Ravel memorial concerts, received enthusiastically in Boston and coldly here, are a good example. The fact that no New York conductor dared to play such a program is quite a reflection on our taste. Hindemith also scored a great success in Boston as violist in his best viola concerto, *Kammermusik No. 5*, and as composer of the *Concert Music for Strings and Brass*, the work commissioned by the Boston Symphony several years ago. At that time the public was quite cool, but now they greet it warmly. Boston audiences have heard enough music by pupils of Nadia Boulanger to have a great respect for her and so when Koussevitzky asked her to conduct, the public was eager to really discover what this great person would do. She performed the Fauré *Requiem* with the sincerity and simplicity and musicianship that at one time only her pupils could judge and which now are appreciated by a large audience, who as a result of this performance have a greater respect for her teachings, her pupils, and especially for the beauty of the music which she played.

Out of town orchestras are more awake than the New York Philharmonic, for we owe the first concert performance of Stravinsky's *Suite* from *Jeu de cartes* to the Philadelphians. Ormandy showed himself courageous in this regard for the work was not popular among the music critics when given here as a ballet last year. He could not, however, resist trying to liven up a score that was condemned as dull by taking tempi which misrepresented the work completely. Andantes were played prestissimo and ritar-dandos were made which greatly disturbed the flow. The work improves greatly on second hearing. It is certainly not sterile as the daily newspaper critics insist, though it does not contain the blood and thunder that have made them run to their offices to write raves this year. Quiet, and of small proportions, treating the orchestra as if it were a chamber group, Stravinsky keeps the work a delicate restrained miniature. The *Suite* differs from the ballet only in the matter of a few short cuts, not altogether good ones either, for they break up the line, especially in the vivacious last movement. For this reason as well as because the music always follows its own interesting logic regardless of what happens on the stage, *Jeu de cartes*, the ballet, deserves to be played in entirety in concert. It is a piece of fine drawn *drôlerie*, clever, sharp wit and mysterious charm the like of which has never been heard before.

New York Philharmonic audiences have had scarcely anything to complain about as far as "modern music" goes for Enesco has played them six well-stereotyped, contemporary impressionistic Roumanian composers of no interest and two revivals of American works, MacDowell's *Launcelot and Elaine* and Piston's *Suite*. The only really new work was Germaine Tailleferre's *Violin Concerto*, a good choice, for it was delightful, gay and unpretentious, with a very fine slow movement.

In this day of complete stylistic disintegration when Krenek, who once wrote simple, at times Schubertian, music has gone completely over to the extreme Schönberg camp, and when Prokofiev has left his strident period altogether and is practically entirely consonant, the public that likes dissonance by profession rather than as an expressive necessity, is finding itself outmoded. This public (whose very existence I doubt) has little to

feed on now, though at one time it was important in the development of music. Today it has either won or lost its point and dwindled into insignificance, even in the universities. The League of Composers which certainly does not insist that its members use large numbers of sevenths and ninths gave two chamber concerts, one of Prokofieff's music and one of Krenek's. Prokofieff's *Sonata for Two Violins* and Krenek's song cycle, *O Lacrimosa*, though the best of what was played, were not representative of these two excellent composers of ballet and opera who have been somewhat slighted recently.

For several years Hugh Ross has performed one new choral work each season at the Schola Cantorum. This year he did two: Delius' *Mass of Life* and Dukelsky's *End of St. Petersburg*. As I find Delius uninteresting I will confine my remarks to the latter work. Dukelsky is a dual personality in music. His standardized popular songs (the "active" listener will remember them) written under the less frightening name of Vernon Duke, have absolutely no connection with his original and imaginative serious music in either style or content. In this he is linear and dissonant and frequently violently rhythmic, fond of a dry unresonant orchestration somewhat like that of the *Symphonie des psaumes*. *The End of St. Petersburg* contains some of the best music by this composer since he wrote his exquisite *Zéphyre et Flore* for Diaghilev, especially the two movements describing the city during the exciting revolutionary days and during a strange apprehensive fog. The rest, though original, is confused in intention.

Dukelsky has recently founded the *High-Low Concerts*, an organization like the Parisian *Sérénade*, to interest socialites in the more amusing sides of modern music scorned at serious concerts. Meant to be reviewed only by society editors, I mention these private soirées to point out that the first program had an almost exact counterpart in the New Masses Benefit Concert. Music by Aaron Copland, Marc Blitzstein, and Paul Bowles made up the main portion of both and both ended with swing bands, the Duke and Count, Ellington and Basie. It seems that these composers want to have their music played more than they want to show their political affiliations. This is only natural, for they are writing for the "active" listener who will follow them

up to the Saint Regis Roof and, if he has the price, crash a High-Low Concert; or go down on Broadway to a radical meeting. The distinctions of upper-class public from academic modern music public or proletarian public are only valid for the listener not primarily interested in music, who wants corroboration of his private beliefs. They make little sense to the person out to discover what is happening in the musical world regardless of his own position in the class struggle.

Elliott Carter

ELECTRIC MARVELS IN PITTSBURGH

AT the recent Pittsburgh convention of the National Association of Music Teachers, which this writer was invited to address, he found a number of sessions surprising both for their advanced and profoundly inquiring nature. Under the direction of its leaders, Drs. Howard Hanson and Earl Moore, the convention added to the general proceedings a seance of the American Musicological Society on "Music in the Changing World." There was also a demonstration of primeval and medieval music—early Greek Byzantine, ancient Hebrew and Roman—which engages so much of the attention of our radical composers today.

But to my mind by far the most striking event, and one that evoked the strongest response from the creative musicians present, was the demonstration of unusual electronic instruments by Dr. Benjamin Miessner, young inventor from Milburn, New Jersey. Listening to his remarkable address and presentation, I made an effort to keep from losing myself in the purely scientific, acoustical vistas opened by these experiments, and to cling to the indicated esthetic possibilities. That is, I tried to grasp and define which of these new dynamics and sonorities a composer of our day might best utilize to convey his ideas with more precision and emphasis.

What, after all, do we composers want from the new instruments? Would new sonorities and a grandiose increase in intensity of sound alone answer our needs?

Indeed not! The musical world-at-large might be satisfied with this achievement, especially if it is accompanied with maxi-