FORECAST AND REVIEW

THE NEW YORK SEASON OPENS

SIBELIUS happens to be the right man in the right place (a far-away, neat little country that pays its war-debts) for a big success in this country. And people here are old friends of the symphonic style as our concerts now usually consist of a big piece written in that form, surrounded by several "shorts" of varying character. Sibelius, a much less important composer than the brilliant Richard Strauss, like him carries on this style, but with a greater underpinning of philosophy and less music. Unlike Strauss he has adopted all those forms which are now familiar to our audiences, and he has at least one piece for each kind of serious-music public; *Valse Triste* for the "Pops" audience, *Finlandia* for the lovers of the *1812 Overture,* the *First* and *Second Symphonies* for Tschaikovsky-Wagner-and-Brahms-ians, the *Third Symphony* for the "little folk in the hills" (Dvorak fans) and so on to the impressionists and the more advanced connoisseurs who can appreciate the stark and strained wisps of music in the *Fourth* and *Seventh Symphonies.* Probably the lovers of the *Second Symphony* predominate (this was the concluding number of the all-Sibelius evening given at Carnegie in October by the NBC Symphony under the direction of Schneevoigt); but any symphony concert is a place where all these audiences are present and where each group, educated at least to the point of respect by the piece it likes, will listen to all his works with reasonable attention. No other contemporary composer has written so many orchestral pieces of such an essentially related character, which nevertheless appeal to so many different kinds of people.

Few important contemporaries have been so easy on their audiences. Performances of contemporary ballets and operas, or frequent repetitions of the same work, which might help the public to understand the more varied output of other composers, have not occurred. One kind of new music does not always lead to comprehension of another; usually each is

a new attack on a new problem of expression. So, if a composer doesn't compose the same piece, over and over again under different titles, and thus train his audience to get the point, he will have a hard time being understood. He may feel that the Dvorak, Tschaikovsky, Wagner, and even Sibelius brand of romantic heroics sounds hollow, but if he has something new to say and insists on saying it, he will develop faster than his audience; he will leave his public and then his public will leave him. One contemporary composer after another has suffered that fate.

Although this is no place for an extended discussion of the Sibelius success story, I would like to register a reservation about his music. It is not that he is unoriginal, (at best he has some new color effects which are one of the minor originalities); not that he is unskillful although in his rather subconscious style of composing he often falls into the abuse of crude procedures; not that his nationalist point of view is a little belated; but that his whole attitude toward music is deeply reactionary. This inevitably prevents his being really fresh and new. A few pieces sum up his point of view artfully and well. The rest are generally flat. But since audiences well-trained in nineteenth century heroics will stand for a lot of tedium, his music has what it takes to be popular at this time.

III

The ASCAP Festival of American Music is another perfect illustration of my text–the magniloquent and grandiose symphonic style is the popular, prestige style of today. The week of free advertising which ASCAP gave the public at Carnegie Hall was sensibly planned to win the public over to the Society's side should a legal battle follow the expiration of ASCAP's radio contracts. There were box-seats, evening clothes, symphony orchestras and fancy programs with pictures of President Roosevelt and Victor Herbert on glossy paper. There was an article inside the program on the "Advancement of Culture," written as high-pressure sales promotion, which argued that the more emotion there is, the better the art; concluding that what we need is more and more emotion. To show how emotions operate, the first evening started (as did all of them) with a serious high-sounding speech expressing the pious hopes that in the future America would devote herself to the arts of peace and stay out of the war: the same evening ended in an orgy of gaiety as the audience joined in singing that old war-time favorite of George M. Cohan's, *Yankee Doodle Boy.*

Of course ASCAP is naturally immune to criticism from this column. It has not only been an excellent collecting agency for "light" music; its

festival also demonstrated a shrewd realism in going about the business of impressing the public. A little higher "artistic" (meaning more expensive) level would have been perhaps ludicrous; a little more care in providing a suitable frame for each event might have made for more entertainment; but, as ASCAP seems to divine, the public, in spite of everything, gets a big kick out of being in Carnegie, with a real symphony orchestra on the stage.

Arrangements were the order of the day. Victor Herbert, who conceived his music in terms of the pre-jazz theatre orchestra, sounded by far the best. All the other popular tunes were magnified beyond recognition into monstrous symphonic poems. Just when one soggy arrangement after another (not excluding the false serious orchestral works by Negro composers which opened the second night) was becoming increasingly tedious and repetitious, something happened. There was a revolt. Performers and audience just couldn't stand the cold, chill air of Carnegie any longer and the "Crescendo Club of Forty Composers Ranged in Minstrel Style" took matters in their own hands. The second half of the Negro evening, with the semi-circle of prancing men blotting out the background of symphony orchestra, was real fun. Whenever things began to drag, one of the forty rose and did a little impromptu dance number, the others encouraging. In the back of the stage there was a noisy argument between the leader of a swing band and the master of ceremonies as to who should accompany what number, which added to the gaiety of nations. On one side of the stage people fought over who was to play the piano next, while on the other, someone did a shining-eyed cake-walk, and everything ran a little wild. The humor of this scene, its utter lack of self-consciousness, must surely have run up some kind of high-water record in the history of Carnegie Hall.

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The two concerts of serious symphonic music exhibited pieces that were all, except for Frederick Jacobi's new *Violin Concerto,* familiar. Commissions might perhaps have added interest but as it was, the programs gave a fairly good idea of what had happened in the past. Hadley (*In Bohemia*) and MacDowell whose *Indian Suite* is a pretty piece in the exotic style once current among the lesser German composers, were the musicians representing the old. If Henry Gilbert only had been enough appreciated to be made an ASCAP member, his racy and crude music might have leavened these programs. Ernest Bloch's *Winter-Spring* was

the most effective impressionist work, while Harris's *Johnny Comes Marching Home* was the best "modern" work of those already known.

Jacobi's *Violin Concerto* played by Albert Spalding deserved the praise it received in the last issue of MODERN MUSIC. It is neat, beautifully written for the solo instrument and well-worked out formally. The style is that of Jacobi's *Second String Quartet,* light and tending toward neo-classic rhythmic and expressive structure. Here Jacobi appears to be hesitating between a whole-hearted return to classical models and a move toward a newer style. The work is well contrived though it does at times give off an air of uncertainty in musical intention. The delightful clarity of the whole and a tact in handling the combinations of violin and orchestra betoken great mastery. Throughout there was an engaging charm and lyricism. It is one of Jacobi's best works.

III

This week of ASCAP underscored other points of interest about American musical life. Mainly that a whole Carnegie Hall full of people can listen very attentively to swing and react very directly to its smallest details. It is also clear that the non-paying audience has as much appreciation of serious music, if not more, as the severer cash customers. Somebody should take note; inexpensive symphony concerts seem to be in order.

This large, less articulate audience is well-known to the Federal Music Project which up to now has supplied its demand. At the World's Fair, all during the summer when every other serious musical enterprise had collapsed, the WPA carried on. Now that the government appropriations have been cut, many of the Project's important activities seem to be on the way out – either through curtailment or complete liquidation. But the Composers' Forum Laboratory, which has always interested so many of us, seems instead to have gained stimulus. It will now combine its concerts with those of two very important organizations, the Music Division of the New York Public Library and the Juilliard School. The student programs, to be held at the school, have been wisely separated from the others which are to be at the Forty-second Street Library; admission to these concerts is by invitation. The combination of such elements will probably bring about a change of character in the WPA concerts which have occasionally suffered from a too mechanical effort to show what composers are doing. The first program (at the Library) will be an all-Sessions evening, an excellent way to start the series. The Project also tentatively hopes to arrange for three orchestral concerts at Carnegie Hall after the pattern of the one which was

so successful last spring, and that is certainly something to look forward to.

Few new works have as yet made their appearance this season. At the Philharmonic Jaromir Weinberger repeated his *Schwanda* success with *Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree.* The same kind of fugue in the same kind of rhythm topped off the variations, only this time an English tune stuck its incongruous head up through the musical comedy Czech atmosphere.

Of quite different stuff were the two Castelnuovo-Tedesco works, introduced here by the same orchestra. The *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2* is charming; it reveals great sensibility and deftness. This is the work of a man who, though his idiom is to a certain extent reactionary, has revived some of the lightness and humor of Rossini and Bellini, in short of the best recent period of Italian music, and adapted them to his own ends. Castelnuovo-Tedesco, however, like many Italians is less at home in abstract music than when he is describing something, which is what he did very gracefully in his *Overture to Twelfth Night* (also on the program). Though without the depth of Malipiero or the occasional wit of Casella, his music has the attraction of work well conceived and executed.

Elliott Carter

NEWS FROM BRITAIN

London, November 1st

MUSIC in England is only just beginning to get on its feet again. Immediately after the declaration of war the remaining Promenade concerts and the Russian ballet season were abandoned – under the ban on all entertainments; in fact the only music to be heard at all during September was provided by the BBC. Similarly nearly all provincial concert societies cancelled their arrangements for the season, and though now a limited number of concerts is announced and various organizations have issued revised programs, there is naturally nothing approaching the peacetime scale of musical activities.

As a class, musicians have been very severely hit by the war. Thousands are now out of work, their contracts cancelled. Owing to evacuation, concert audiences have decreased, the number of concerts has diminished. Broadcasting contracts also have been severely cut down. A number of artists have been absorbed into some kind of national service, and a few