

The total composition, I feel, is unimportant. The dance is like a string of beads, where the string has a utilitarian rather than an aesthetic purpose. In this respect a comparison with Mei Lan-fang suggests itself, and I think it is a legitimate one, since he is in the same general tradition and uses, essentially, the same linear style. But in him there is a clearer sense of composition, of pattern, the lack of which is the greatest weakness of Shan-kar's presence. One cannot deny the hypnotic effect of his personality or the perfection of his technical resources; and, if one accepts the intimate nature of his art, the concession of greatness is easily made. But on the stage his intricate and highly-wrought gesture often fades against the equally intricate costume, or against the whiteness of his body, and the flourishes of the padding become over-stressed. He was at his best in the encore to *Indra*, from which the distracting excitement of the orchestra was absent; at the poorest advantage, perhaps, in the *Astra Puja*, sword games, where his manipulation of the swords was rendered negligible by a too-fresh memory of Mei's interlacing of the silver points in the *Sword Dance* New York saw three or four years ago.

Doris Humphrey, incidentally, emerged from her preoccupation with Milhaud's *Orestes* long enough to arrange the *Hymn to the Moon* for Hall Johnson's *Run, Little Chillun*. It and the final revival scene present one of the genuine thrills of the season. The opening ritual, except for the two solo dancers, suffered from lack of more finished performers. The final orgiastic revel, however, could hardly have been bettered, and, throughout, her handling of the crowds in relation to the relatively small space of the stage was consummate. The whole scene worked through ascending tensions from the processional, slow and decorous, to a disintegration the more complete for this contrast.

*Paul Love*

#### ALL-AMERICAN

THE second of the season's League of Composers concerts, taking place on the evening of February 5th at the French Institute, presented works by six American composers. These

were Mark Wessel, Alexander Lipsky, Susanne Bloch, Virgil Thomson, Vivian Fine and Israel Citkowitz.

The *String Quartet* by Mark Wessel showed flexibility, resourcefulness and a fine sense of balance in his handling of this most difficult medium. His forms are concise and telling, neither tedious through too much development, nor confusing through want of it. His initial ideas do not, unfortunately, seem to have received always the same amount of careful study and polishing as has been given to the structure as a whole. The opening theme of the first movement, *Allegro Appassionato*, for example, seems jerky, fragmentary, lacking in any real unity of impulse. Again, in the opening theme of the *Finale*, the charming first phrase, with its sly, teasing, humor, promises something less commonplace than the careless slapstick into which it falls.

The two songs with piano accompaniment by Alexander Lipsky, *Tears* and *Lilacs*, are written with finish and delicacy. They convey a mood, subjective and yet authentic, in a penetrating manner. The close of *Tears*, with its sinuous, falling line, with the three-fold repetition of "tears" on the same note, has a poignancy that reverberates long in the mind. The only marked weakness these songs reveal is an undeveloped sense of the rhythm of English words, and of the melodic inflections which best enhance their meaning. Such a phrase as "careening with swift steps along the beach," crowding the words "with swift steps" in a way that makes them hard to enunciate clearly, and ending with the word "beach" on a high F, which is hard to sing, is a mere detail in itself, and yet typical of what has made singers so unjustly hostile to English as a language to be sung.

The *Suite for Flute and Piano* by Suzanne Bloch is charming in its spontaneous and naive musicality. That it benefitted greatly in performance from the superb playing of Mr. Barrère goes without saying, but this does not diminish the merit of its being written with an unusual sense of the color and scope of the instrument. One could only wish that the bass of the accompaniment were not, throughout the first three pieces, quite so persistently pondered and lifeless in movement. This monotony ends by depriving the music of much of its freshness and charm. The closing section of the last piece is also too short.

The *Stabat Mater* by Virgil Thomson, for soprano and string quartet, which was admirably sung by Mrs. Ada MacLeish, is, as music, only vaguely impressive. The vocal phrases, ranging from the sentimental to the trite or merely inept, and the accompaniment, with its purposeless meandering, its loose counterpoint whose strands begin at no particular point and break off for no particular reason, and the haphazard sequence of tonalities, all combine to give the air of a piece of "automatic writing." Indeed, its very quality of vague impressiveness reminds one of some Ouija board production—the best, say, of an evening's batch, preserved from the fire to show to one's friends the next day.

The three songs by Vivian Fine, the most "advanced" offering of the evening, with accompaniments scored for one, two, and four stringed instruments respectively, are elaborate and sticky. It is not against their atonality that one protests, since much effective music, no less atonal than this, has been written, but against their total absence of movement.

The *Andante Molto Tranquillo* for string quartet, by Israel Citkowitz, is remarkable for the fervent, sustained and singing quality of its line. Though lacking in a certain freedom—the flow is perhaps too even, too constant in density—it is effective as quartet writing, revealing in the composer an intimate awareness of the quality of sound in which he embodies his thought. In this respect it compares favorably with the quartet by Mark Wessel, for, with all the latter's superior resourcefulness and scope in instrumentation, one feels his relation to the living realm of sound to be somewhat abstract, where the other is fairly steeped in it; remote and condescending, where Citkowitz communes closely.

*Theodore Chanler*

### THE GAIETY AND SADNESS OF HARRIS\*

THE first performance of the *Overture from the Gaiety and Sadness of the American Scene* by Roy Harris in Los Angeles on December 29, 1932, aroused an excitement in the audience and in the press which is easily understood—the work is exciting in the extreme! That it provides excitement while

\*This is the first of a series of reviews of new works by the conductors who introduce them which will appear in *Modern Music* from time to time. Mr. Nicolas Slonimsky gave Mr. Harris' music its premiere with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.—Ed.