

what to do with it—witness the *St. Louis Blues*, *The Beale Street Blues*, *The Florida Blues*, and a few others.

The blue *clichés*—the “blue note” (flatted third of the scale,) the twelve measure refrain, certain oft-appearing melodic phrases—soon pall on the ear; the harmonic pattern is restricted and monotonous; few of the texts have more than transitory interest or value. Handy himself, in the refrain of one of his newer songs, *The Harlem Blues*, (an original composition, not founded on a folk theme) has written a sixteen measure refrain and dropped the “blue note” entirely. Also it is a comment on the whole material that, from the aesthetic standpoint, by far the best song in the book is the artificial *The Half of It, Dearie, Blues*, manufactured by George Gershwin.

As a document the book was necessary and is valuable. It is the only anthology of a distinct branch of genuine folk music, part of the very little produced in our country; but it hardly seems material of sufficient strength or value perceptibly to influence in any way the development of music as an art, here or elsewhere.

*Henry O. Osgood*

### PLAYING SAFE AT ZURICH

ONE noted with regret at the fourth festival presented by the International Society for Contemporary Music last June in Zurich, that no name entirely unfamiliar appeared on any of the six programs. In 1923 and 1924 a more adventurous spirit prevailed. Were undiscovered talents more numerous or were juries more perspicacious? In any event, this year's jury seemed quite content simply to offer a list of names which looked impressive, without concerning itself overmuch about the quality of the music played. If we were spared a great bore, we were also vouchsafed no revelations. The programs had an even, safe tone which augurs none too well for future festivals.

Of equal significance is the fact that no one work proved an outstanding success this year; but there was, so to speak, an outstanding failure—the Arnold Schoenberg *Quintet for Wind Instruments*. Seldom has a new work from the pen of a composer of wide repute suffered such universal condemnation

Except for certain parts of the scherzo and the final rondo, there seemed to be nothing but principles and theories of composition leading to complete aridity. The Schoenberg disciples, however, are undismayed. Mr. Anton von Webern assures me that one has no more reason to expect to appreciate this *Quintet* on a single hearing than to understand Kant after a cursory perusal. This sounds well enough to make us hope that there is truth in it, even though our musical sensibilities remain sceptical.

As usual, the majority of compositions performed came from the French and German contingents. The juxtaposition of their works made clear once again the different ideals which actuate the composers of these countries. The young Frenchmen are inspired by the example of Chabrier and Fauré, the young Germans by that of Reger and Mahler. With these backgrounds it is curious to note that at the latest festival the Germans, with Hindemith, Webern, and Petyrek, made the better showing.

Paul Hindemith was represented by his *Concerto for Orchestra*, Op. 38, one of his latest and best works. Like Balzac, Hindemith possesses a healthy, robust talent. Mere notes mean nothing to him, it is the spirit which matters. That is to say, he is capable of taking common melodies, trite rhythms, tasteless harmonies, and by sheer temperament combined with a formidable technical equipment, transfuse them into something completely irresistible. It is an extraordinary vigor and exuberance, as demonstrated in this *Concerto*, which has singled Hindemith out as the most promising composer of young Germany. No less remarkable—but less remarked by the critics—is the peculiar beauty of his quiet episodes, a searching, wistful, hopeless quality such as we find in the earlier song cycle *Das Marienleben*.

How different an art from Hindemith's is that of a super-sensitive musician like Anton von Webern. Where one writes four pages, the other writes four measures. That these *Five Orchestral Pieces* had been written as long ago as 1913 seemed almost incredible. One listens breathlessly: each piece lasts but a few seconds and each separate note seems filled with meaning. Most striking of all is Webern's orchestration—a subtle mingling of single timbres producing a magical result.

Less well known in America is Felix Petyrek, who contributed a *Litanei* for mixed chorus, two trumpets, harp and percussion. It is an extremely effective work; there is much brilliant writing for the voices and at no time does the composition drag. Petyrek has to his credit a long list of works; we should like to hear more of them.

The French ranged against these men Caplet, Ferroud and Hoérée. *Le Miroir de Jésus* is undoubtedly André Caplet's most noteworthy accomplishment, yet a foreigner cannot consider it, as they do in Paris, a masterpiece. It seems rather, like Scriabin's *Prometheus*, a *chef d'oeuvre manqué!* Its qualities are obvious: the atmosphere of purity and restraint, the liquid harmonies, the original melodic line; and yet it too patently lacks variety to leave us with anything but a sense of monotony.

P. O. Ferroud is a native of Lyon, a pupil and ardent disciple of Florent Schmitt. His orchestral work, *Foules*, seemed rather amorphous and not particularly original. Arthur Hoérée of Brussels fared even less well with a *Septuor* for flute, string quartet, piano and voice.

Two young men deserve special mention: Hans Krasa of Prague and Wm. T. Walton of London. The two movements—*Pastoral* and *March*—taken from a symphony for small orchestra seemed more important when we heard them under Straram a few years ago in Paris, but they still are indicative of a brilliant gift. Walton's overture, *Portsmouth Point*, is gay and pleasant music, an English version of the "Back to Bach" style, with well-turned melodies and square-cut rhythms.

While Russia was inadequately represented by a second rate piano sonata of Miaskowsky, Switzerland had contributions from two composers: a *String Trio* by Walter Geiser and Ernst Levy's *Fifth Symphony* in one movement. The Zurich public seemed to find the latter work rather long and tiresome. Levy is a metaphysical composer in the line of Beethoven and therefore, of course, hopelessly out of style. Nevertheless, this symphony seemed to come from a genuine urge and a keen ear could detect moments of real power and imagination.

One need hardly more than mention Casella's *Partita*, Tansman's *Danse de la Sorcière*, or Frederick Jacobi's attractive

string quartet which, in our opinion, is the best work we have yet heard by this composer; all of these had been previously performed and discussed in America. Last, and probably least, was a *Concerto* for violin and wood wind orchestra by Kurt Weill, a young German. The less said about this very dull work, the better, particularly since there seems to be a certain tendency to regard his more recent one-act opera, *Der Protagonist*, as quite important.

Two extra concerts were given under the auspices of the Society: the Zurich Mixed Chorus sang Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus* and Honegger's now famous *Roi David*, and the Swiss Marionette Theatre gave de Falla's charming *El Retablo*.

One leaves these festivals with the distinct impression that the music played is after all a secondary matter; but that an international meeting place is offered where the composers and other musicians of all countries may come together seems in itself invaluable.

*Aaron Copland*

## STEP-CHILDREN OF MUSIC

THE most interesting feature of the festivals held at Donaueschingen for the last six summers, has been the practical policy of the executive committee to study special problems of contemporary music through the commission and performance of works to be written by selected composers. By means of this method an attempt is made to develop tendencies which the committee feels may have been neglected in the general tide of progress. Last year, 1925, the subject of inquiry was chamber-music in its relation to choral music. This year it was primarily music for mechanical instruments.

Mechanical music is old; even antiquity knew the clockwork of Heron the Alexandrian, and since the Jesuits of the seventeenth century, Athanasius, Kircher and Kasper Scholt, built their musical automats, mechanical instruments have shot up like mushrooms. Yet in spite of their incalculable number—the orchestrion, panharmonikon, accordion, aulodian—practically no music has been written for mechanical instruments ex-