

FORECAST AND REVIEW

BADEN-BADEN, 1927

THE festival of *Deutsche Kammermusik* which was inaugurated in 1921 at Donaueschingen under the patronage of Prince Max Egon zu Fuerstenberg took place this year at Baden-Baden, a need for larger quarters making the change necessary. Five varied and engrossing programs were presented thanks to the perspicacity of a committee of three: Heinrich Burkard, Josef Haas and Paul Hindemith. Two concerts of chamber music, an afternoon of original works for mechanical instruments, an evening of motion pictures with music, and finally a performance of four one-act chamber operas gave an excellent cross-section of music in 1927. Men of established reputations like Bartok and Berg rubbed elbows with young radicals like Kurt Weill. Even new talents were disclosed such as the twenty-four year old Russian, Nicolai Lopatnikoff.

The festivals when formerly given at Donaueschingen differed from all others in that a new form was suggested to composers each year as a field for experiment. Thus compositions for small chorus in madrigal style were encouraged in 1925 and music for military band and for mechanical instruments in 1926. This policy was retained at Baden-Baden and the attention of composers was directed to chamber opera. Chamber opera is a growth from the recent wide-spread interest in chamber orchestra, the intention being not to write grand opera reduced to a small scale but to conceive a work directly for a few singers and a few instrumentalists. It was a delightful experiment, suggesting manifold possibilities, and the four little operas heard on the evening of July seventeenth proved unquestionably to be the event of the festival.

The shortest and best work, in my opinion, was Darius Milhaud's "opera minute" as he calls it: *The Abduction of Europa* on a libretto of Henri Hoppenot. The entire opera takes only eight minutes to perform. Milhaud, who understands the medium admirably, was the first to venture in this field and has already produced several small operas, notably *Les Malheurs d'Orphée* and *Esther de Carpentras*. My own enthusiasm for this recent example of his work was not shared by many of its hearers at Baden-Baden. A renewed acquaintance with the vocal score, however, has only served to strengthen my conviction that it is a little *chef d'oeuvre*. Milhaud possesses one of the most personal styles of our day. In *The Abduction of Europa* he expresses the tender, nostalgic side of his nature in which a French sensuousness and elegance of melodic line is tinged by an Hebraic melancholy. The heavy-handed performance afforded this delicate work at Baden-Baden did much to obscure its very real merits.

The chamber opera which aroused most discussion was Kurt Weill's *Mahagonny* (accent on the third syllable, please!). A pupil of Busoni's, Weill is the new *enfant terrible* of Germany. But it is not so easy to be an *enfant terrible* as it used to be and nothing is more painful than the spectacle of a composer trying too hard to be revolutionary. Weill, in writing *Mahagonny*, cannot escape the accusation. It is termed a "songspiel" and is, in effect, a series of pseudo-popular songs in the jazz manner. (One remembers particularly Jessie and Bessie repeatedly singing in English, "Is here no telephone.") Weill is not without musical gifts but these are too often sacrificed for the sake of a questionable dramatic effectiveness.

Hindemith's *Hin und Zurueck* is based on a sketch from Charlot's Revue in which a little melodrama is played first forward and then backward with hilarious results. The music was also reversed, with Hindemith's customary mastery. Though not particularly remarkable for its musical content, *Hin und Zurueck* proved a highly diverting piece.

The Princess on the Pea by Ernst Toch, after the fairy tale of Hans Andersen, was charming enough but did not avoid the pitfall of being grand opera on a small scale. Toch is a com-

poser who has been gradually coming to the fore in Germany, but though he commands astonishing facility in the use of modern technique, his music seems to me essentially conventional.

Of the works played at the two concerts of chamber music Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* for string quartet found most favor. Unlike so many examples of this composer's output, the *Lyric Suite* is comparatively easy to comprehend. Perhaps this is due to the striking clarity of construction. It is in six well-contrasted parts, all of them frankly emotional, containing a lovely *andante amoroso* and a shadowy and original *allegro misterioso*. Berg is now forty-two and it is foolish to continue discussing him merely as a Schoenberg pupil. The similarities between his own style and that of his teacher's are only superficial. In reality their natures are opposed, Berg, unlike Schoenberg, being essentially naive, with a warm, emotional, *Tristanesque* personality. The *Lyric Suite* seems to me to be one of the best works written for string quartet in recent years.

On the same program Bela Bartok played his own *Piano Sonata*, composed in 1926. Nothing could be more characteristically Bartok than this sonata with its Hungarian folk tunes, its incisive rhythms, its hard unsentimental quality. To possess so characteristic a manner carries with it the danger of self-repetition and Bartok has come perilously near it in his sonata.

A first performance anywhere was given of a little cantata for a trio of women's voices, tenor, piano and violin, by Hans Eisler. In comparison with the amusing and purposely banal text of this *Diary* the music seemed lacking in humor. Nevertheless it was apparent that this young pupil of Schoenberg and Webern is more than usually gifted. It is sufficient to mention the other chamber works: two string quartets by Bodeslav Martinsu and Krsto Odak, a *Duo* for violin and piano by Max Butting and a *Cello Sonata* by Herman Reutter.

The afternoon devoted to mechanical music made clear that only music written expressly with the special problems of mechanical instruments in mind can be called entirely successful. This was well understood by Nicolai Lopatnikoff, one of the discoveries of the festival. His *Toccata* and *Scherzo* for mechanical piano combined astonishing *prestissimos* and other

manually impossible feats with a freshness and originality of inspiration that reminded one of Prokofieff. A *Suite* for mechanical organ by Paul Hindemith was composed in his best manner. Ernst Toch also had a *Study* for mechanical organ. A garbled version of the first part of Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique* was given with a badly functioning mechanical piano.

One word should be added about the music that Hindemith wrote for mechanical organ to accompany an animated cartoon called *Krazy Kat at the Circus*. The wit and *diablerie*, the abundant flow of melodic ideas, the vitality and force of this little commentary on a very amusing film, confirmed one's opinion that in Hindemith Germany has its first great composer since 1900.

Aaron Copland

A FESTIVAL THAT FAILED

IT is impossible for any one vitally interested in the International Society for Contemporary Music to discuss the fifth festival at Frankfort last summer without commenting freely on its results, which were frankly disappointing to the hopes of those who attended. Indeed the discouragement felt after this festival of an opera performance and six concerts was so great that one is justified in doubting the future benefits of such arrangements. The ideal plan of Edward I. Dent, the chairman, is splendid, and in himself he, more than anyone else, embodies the society's traditions. But with the entrance of a jury into the scheme, there are injected all kinds of extra-musical considerations, and diplomacy begins to play a role.

In keeping with the purpose of the society, progressive art should be given first place. This need not mean the purely experimental, but rather the fruitful experiment. What we want is to hear new music in the making and on its way to a goal. Thus we can acknowledge and salute the master works of our own time. On the other hand we cannot separate these too finely, for it is also vital to compare the less mature product with the master work. And if the festival is to be for the younger com-