

as in much of modern dancing, it is vitalizing to have the changes sharply indicated on percussion instruments. Composers who work with dancers come to know percussion instruments and their possibilities; daily association with the problem of rhythm forms their background. Having mastered the gamut of the instruments used in the studios, they very naturally proceed to compose for them works in larger forms, with enough tone-qualities and rhythms to achieve independent musical compositions.

Potentially rhythm and tone-quality are as important as melody and harmony, but the former are underdeveloped in our music. The full possibilities of percussion, whose accepted role is to provide unimportant splashes of color, have hardly been tapped in our symphonic literature. The work of a young, talented and well-trained group experimenting with rhythm and percussive tone qualities, may lead to their development as genuine structural materials to create differentiated outlines and combinations. It is encouraging too that the interest of these men is not the result of an abstract theory, but has grown quite naturally out of their own working musical environment. Some of their efforts already prove exciting to audiences, some seem boring. The question is raised why the group should deliberately exclude melodic instruments. To which the answer is simply that these have never been present. As a matter of judgment why is it more reprehensible to write for four percussion instruments than for two violins, viola and 'cello? The string quartet may at times be quite boring as a combination of instruments. Percussion alone may prove monotonous, but it is less apt to, because it is still in a state of experiment. New tones and rhythms are constantly being discovered. When the young experimenters have succeeded in fully exploring the field, there will still remain the untried possibilities of combining these results with the better-known resources of the full orchestra.

*Henry Cowell*

## NEW WORKS AT YADDO

IT may be that bombers over Europe and the sense of very few good days remaining ahead account for the packed houses at all four concerts of Yaddo's annual music period last September. The performances were, in any case, well nigh perfect, especially that by the Galimir Quartet. Statistically there were thirty-eight works by thirty-six composers — all Americans but one, with an age span from the early twenties to the late sixties. Tendency inclinations, with rare exceptions, were bluntly divided

into two opposites. 1940 at Yaddo showed American composers either insistently interested in the trivia of light-quasi-Hollywood-poco-radio style, or else solidly serious. Throughout there was marked evidence of a concern with problems of form and instrumentation rather than with actual inner content. What emerged was an impression of fullblooded technic, employed to model concise colorful structures. The ear has travelled many miles since the 1920's, so harmonically nothing sensational was uncovered, but a continual semi-contrapuntal fixation was in the air, and could be sensed in practically every measure of the music. By semi-contrapuntal, I mean that free horizontalism was mainly lacking; what we heard was a basic expanded vertical harmonic scheme.

Top honors go to works by Charles Naginski, Richard Donovan, David Diamond, and Wallingford Riegger. Naginski's *Sinfonietta* is one more proof of the cliché that composers must die before performance and appreciation are given. Here was a substantially sound four-movement piece, with a non-derivative freshness. Naginski understood the proper manipulation of the chamber orchestra. His scoring is wide and conceived with spatial relationships; it never makes the error of attempting to fulfill the obligations of the normal-sized orchestra. The second and third movements were outstanding – an intense somber mood prophetic in its tragic contours, followed by a French-Americanized take-off on a waltz.

Donovan's *Serenade* for oboe, violin, viola and cello showed a decided change and marked maturity in this composer's career. The piece is plastic and free in its consistent movement. Donovan has in the past shown a penchant for thickness, as in his *Chamber Symphony*. But here the counterpoint moved and sounded out with ease, and there was a surety of feeling. The title, incidently, is misleading since the oboe predominates throughout.

David Diamond's latest exhibit, just finished this past summer, was a *Concerto for Chamber Orchestra*. It is undoubtedly his best work. In two major parts, the premise is mainly cyclic, consisting of a fanfare, two preludes and fugues, an interlude leading to a transition and then a return to the opening fanfare. The fanfare, built around a solo trumpet, is the usual rugged Diamond affair, in 6/8 meter. The fugues are sure, direct and full of ictus-driven scoring, with very tight developments. But it was in the second prelude and the interlude that the peak was reached. For those who still claim that cerebration dictates the work of contemporaries, these sections should prove revealing. Through soaring melodic lines, a complete, warm richness pours out of the music. It was one of the big moments of the

concerts.

A new *Quartet* by Riegger was the surprise package. The only twelve-tone dissertation of the series, it demonstrated the values that can be obtained from that school. The four movements are amazingly clear, only in the first is the too often broken-up feeling of twelve-tone thought evident. The scherzo has a compact dynamism which is frenetically displayed throughout the whole gamut of the scale; while the close of the adagio, with its breaking of a chord into minuscule particles, is a unique piece of super-scoring. When will Riegger's works attain their proper place in the sun?

Of the lighter things, Quincy Porter's *Quintet* for flute and strings, based on the old childhood tune (revised in 1939 as *A Tisket A Tasket*) was skillfully wrought, but Porter can show us a better brand of goods than this slight piece. McBride's *Wise-Apple Five* (the title means nothing whatsoever) was a staggering, shagging piece with allusions to Peer Gynt's *Hall of the Mountain King*. Van Vactor's *Divertimento* was acceptable, but all too reminiscent of polkas and galops by Shostakovitch.

Of eleven songs, two brought honors to their composers — Paul Bowles, for his crafty showmanship in the *Letter to Freddy* with as fine a tag line as a blackout (the type used in burlesque houses), and Theodore Chanler, for a blandly beautiful bit, *These, My Ophelia*.

From the serious side came Harris with his *Third Quartet*. A similarity in sonorities due to the length of the piece, and subjection to the form of four successive preludes and fugues, made this work less successful than the usual Harris productions. And for purposes of the record, again there appeared, as in part of the *Viola Quintet*, a very odd, inexplicably Celtic feeling, in the third section.

One of the "finds" at Yaddo was Robert Laidlaw whose *String Trio* was given its initial hearing. The three movements are completely linear, mainly worked out over a basic motif. One fault was the consistent usage of all three instruments within a restricted tonal span and with an insufficient timbre contrast. There was, however, an impelling logic and full-throated drive, which should prove fruitful in later works. Henry Cowell was represented by his *Chorale and Ostinato*, Numbers 1 and 2, for oboe and piano. Both were charming bits, with the second full of a Scotch twang; but I feel the better and real Cowell is the one of the earlier days of experimentation. Well-written was a short *Andante* for strings by Clark Eastham, though all very much à la Roy Harris throughout.

Ross Lee Finney's *Bleheris* for voice and orchestra and Norman Lockwood's *Piano Quintet* were both disappointing. The former was entirely too obvious, especially the orchestral coloring. The cartoon-technic scoring, which made the entire music functional, weakened and destroyed the scattered good points. The Lockwood I found very dry and entirely too long, with a considerable dosage of tempi adagio. Thematically romantic to the hilt, it fails to use the special and expressive means of the piano quintet combination, being entirely static in its instrumentation.

Other works included a competent *Solo Viola Suite* by John Duke, some *Piano Inventions* by Otto Luening, which could well be used by the teaching profession, a *Fourth String Quartet* by this reviewer, as well as pieces by Robert Palmer and Paul Creston previously reviewed here. These music periods should be continued at Yaddo; there are so few places left in the world for the examination and performance of new music.

Arthur Cohn

## BENNINGTON'S FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

IT would gratify professional pride to be able to say that modern music came, saw and conquered at the first summer festival of the Bennington School of the Arts. Actually it betrayed the tentative uncertainty of a debutante, for the contemporary program—one of four devoted to the dance, drama, old and new music—under the direction of Otto Luening, suffered from an apparent feeling of obligation to include too many different items. Fifteen composers were represented but no central work of stable dimensions. A spotty total effect was inevitable.

The first movement of Quincy Porter's *Third String Quartet* is full of his usual grace and distinction, but it seemed on the whole a little disappointing, remembering the strong effect of its first performance in Paris ten years ago. Either its hues aren't fade-proof or the performance was underdone. Still the whole quartet should have been played. Szymanowski's violin piece, *Dryades et Pan*, seemed very far away, in a late-romantic decadence of voluptuary harmony and luminous trills and arpeggi, yet by virtue of the performance its magic worked.

Three groups of songs followed. Ives' *Thoreau* was an unusually beautiful demonstration of this richly paradoxical composer as the impressionist he so fundamentally is. His *At the River*, a scherzo impression of Robert Lowry's hymn, demonstrated more the paradox. Less rewarding were