

ROGERS, DIAMOND AND OTHERS AT ROCHESTER

THOUGH the works were chosen exclusively from compositions of the faculty and top-notch alumni of the Eastman School of Music, the Twelfth American Music Festival at Rochester more than justified the centralized intent of the six programs. The gamut ran both left and right – with excitement mounting at times to fever pitch.

Dwarfing many other new works into insignificance was the terrorizing beauty of a new choral piece by Bernard Rogers, *The Passion*. This is the second time Rogers has chosen subject matter treated by earlier men and, as in the case of the first work (*Dance of Salome*), the result is great music in the broadest sense. Only one half of the score was given – enough to sharpen one's anticipation of the whole.

This is a choralized concept of chamber music (by that term I mean an intense, concentrated music, since it is not small scale in any sense) designed for solo voices, chorus and large orchestra. There is an "overall" feeling that defies criticism of component parts, as one might judge the separate Gloria or Sanctus of a requiem. I feel in the music a sustained sensitiveness, projected with immense skill. One is overwhelmed by the work's strength, its finesse and the fever of its true religious feeling. It would be trite to analyze the piece technically. Let it be noted that the triad lives again – and nobly; that the dynamic control of the mass voices or soli is in perfect proportion to the grand mass movement. Every bit of the score shows what *spacing* means in a musical work, the spacing of sonorous material, the spacing of voice leadings. Musically rich prose treated reticently, combined with Rogers' sense of color makes this an extraordinary work of religious and humane significance. As usual the orchestral score is amazing, abundant with fantastic new combinations, drawn with large vigorous strokes.

After four years David Diamond's *Concerto for 'Cello and Orchestra* received its first hearing. I liked two-thirds of it; and in that portion I have a reservation or two. The first movement, built on a theme of hurled quarter-notes in a semi-declamatory tempo, is static throughout, the result of a fairly negative development. The third is a highly-strung, nervous athletic kineticism. A virile theme is exhibited and, through the rondo form, undergoes expert manipulation. Everything in the movement is hard and brittle-sec; the orchestration is also nervous, with violent color changes

and entanglements of the bare accents between the solo 'cello and the orchestra. I cannot agree with Diamond's elimination of the 'celli from the tutti mass. The 'cello color in the orchestra serves a special purpose and when properly set neither disturbs nor interferes with the objects of the solo part. Nor do I agree with the final cadence which is weak and all too non-defining. However, the second movement (Elegy) is magnificent, noble in its design, and finely etched. Here the scoring is exceptional – all-white colors, streaked with steel greys in the winds. The solution of the cadenza problem is perfect. Without interruption in the flow of the music, the solo voice hits hard technically, and is given slight rejoinders from esoteric orchestral combinations. It all comes off splendidly. The soloist, Luigi Silva, did as well.

The chamber music evening listed one organ piece, and three new quartets played by the Gordon Quartet. I found two general faults with the string works – the preoccupation of our young men with kinetic eighth notes in order to form their fast movements and the old-hat method of *ostinati* over which (or in reverse) most anything will go.

Best was the derivative but none-the-less worthy *First Quartet* of William Bergsma. Each of the four movements had sufficient new juice to compensate for the old wine. The first was fluid and self-reliant; movements two and three inclined to the Bartók *Second Quartet* and the Bloch *B-Minor Quartet*. But the entire framework was smooth. With patience and consistent self-examination, Bergsma will move far ahead.

Herbert Inch's *Quartet* has a very fine first section, beautifully counterpointed with a swift sincere drive, plus an excellent coda. It was spoiled by a redundant introduction which had the fault of most such preludes, for it simply introduced nothing. The second had a good melodic top but no harmonic flow to set this into real motion.

The *Quartet in E-Minor* by Anthony Donato and the *Organ Variations on the Chorale "Everyman"* by Edward Royce both gave me the same feeling of being enlarged far beyond the slight quality involved; although the former tried the method of grotesquerie and the latter the classic-romantic patterns.

Of the lighter music displayed, the best was Burrill Phillips' *Selections from McGuffey's Readers*. This is bright, sweet-tooth music. The jaunt of the One Horse Shay, the tenderness of the Priscilla and John Alden section and the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere, all had the perfect

Phillips flair for super-shiny orchestration. Phillips out-Hollywoods Hollywood in this one. The music is unashamedly programmatic, with its *Perils of Pauline* and *Superman* of the third movement; but through it all one got the feeling of fresh air in the fresh themes. Maybe this is music for open-air concerts.

Good as well, was Wayne Barlow's *Three Moods for Dancing*. Barlow knows how to organize a fairly competent pastiche (the Neo-Classic section); and can schmaltz a flute and high string combination properly (the Impressionist section). But as for his idea of Cubism (third section) – to me this was the Son of Frankenstein, not Klee.

I did not get the point of Charles Vardell's *The Shelf Behind the Door* – all too overblown programmatically to be successful. The theme and variations idea is of course the trick (vide: Elgar's *Enigma*) – but Vardell took the tack of portraying a personality by variations (*Don Quixote*). The net result was only embarrassing, full of attempted orchestral effects that never came off. The theme is negative, hardly recognizable in its initial statement.

Of the thirteen works given at the chamber orchestra matinee I shall only touch on a few. The James Ming *Larghetto for Strings* showed a lack of understanding of the string choir. A composer should take advantage of the available ranges, but most of the time Ming trod the inner portion, on the false premise that there is where the greatest strength lies. A double irritant was the consistent application of vertical harmonies. Quiet and well-proportioned music was exhibited in Homer Keller's *Serenade for Clarinet and Strings*. Although it is an early work, I still feel that Robert Palmer's *Poem for Violin and Orchestra* is ethnic and vibrantly moving. For sheer pretentiousness nothing was more attenuated than Gail Kubik's *Whoopie-Ti-Yi-Yo* – mixed from a batter of cowboy dude-ranch tunes. It reminded me of the good old movie days when Tabani arrangements of "Selections from . . ." were in flower.

Without choosing to be too severe I still wonder at the technical incompetence of Robert Ward's *Symphony Number 1* with its tonality concept so constricted that nothing results, especially in the second movement; and the patchy William Walton – Vaughan Williams attributes of the final portion. Or of the aimless paleness and lack of contour in Gardner Read's *Songs for a Rainy Night*. The words of the final two songs by Joyce might have been a stimulus for profound lyric statements; but the

pallor of the various strands in these movements proved woefully inept. As a balance however, there was the quiet sensitivity of Harry Lamont's *Music*, with its utterance of sincere beauty, as well as the elegiac chorus of *Hush'd Be the Camps Today* by Robert Ward. This latter piece has artful voice writing, and is nicely incisive in its softness.

The final Ballet evening disclosed three firsts of importance. Alex Wilder's *Juke Box* score I must dismiss as very poor pit music. Consistently low contours and poor scoring never lifted the work to the proper bright level. In the main, these tunes are better in their original form as jazz chamber music. The two other scores could be made into straight orchestral pieces, without any choreographic implications. Both Burrill Phillips in his *Step Into My Parlor* and William Bergsma's *Gold and the Señor Commandante* have all the required attributes, with a pack of good tunes. Bergsma has a genuine sensitive yardstick for measuring orchestral sonorities and results. Especially good is the feeling of the *Tender Dance* and the quite direct quality of the *Disputations and Theology* section. There is absolutely not one bad note in the Phillips score. It soars and is admirable satire throughout, with the *Waltz* a real hit of good humor. This latter ballet was the most successful of the eight presented. It had individual, excellent costuming and was based on an original story by Thelma Biracree, the choreographer of the entire Ballet evening.

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