

mentation but to a veritable orchestration which, though reduced to strictest economy, yet has an unexpected richness. The work represents the most powerful effort to which Stravinsky has as yet bent his will but the appearance of mastery and at the same time of freshness remains undisturbed.

The jubilee of the Six emphasized both their non-existence as a group and the incredible manner with which they lend themselves to poor performances and pseudo-technics imposed by ideologists. A festival of this kind should have been organized with more care and critical sense. It was apparently easy for Poulenc, represented by his new *Aubade* for eighteen instruments and his *Trio*, to rise above his comrades; less expert than Honegger, he nevertheless has youth, a naive sense of play, of melodic rhythmic expression and a spontaneous harmonic grace. Auric, undoubtedly an outstanding figure today, did not at all justify his own achievements. Milhaud and Honegger made the impression of boxing with modern music. Further in the background, Durey and Tailleferre gave evidence of an art undeniably sincere though tenuous. Perhaps in leaving the care of preparing their jubilee to others, the Six would have lost less. Certain of their individual works undoubtedly have a worth superior by far to all that can be said for the group.

André Schaeffner

VOCAL INNOVATORS OF CENTRAL EUROPE

AN extension of vocal possibilities, particularly in the use of voices alone, is the keynote of a new musical development now growing rapidly in central Europe. There may be a hint of neo-classicism in the idea of returning to the voice; but it is not the purpose of the young composers to revive the old vocal style. They are finding new sorts of vocalization, sometimes quite foreign to anything formerly considered singing, yet always strictly within the easy capacity of the voice without undue strain.

Outstanding innovators are three young men, E. F. Burian, Hans Eisler, and Kurt Schwitters. Their music is not alike nor does it belong to the same general "school," although probably all of them are a bit influenced by Schönberg's half-spoken songs. They live far apart, and have not influenced each other; the idea

of investigating new vocal possibilities seems to have struck several talented men quite independently.

Burian, the Czech, has a vivid personality, cleverness, jazziness, and a liking for publicity. By profession a drummer, he is generally considered the best trap-artist in his country. As a member of one of Central Europe's first jazz bands, he invented numerous new percussion noises on his own group of instruments and wrote a *Sonata* for piano and trap instruments, using the latter so that they spice the piano tone to quite an uncanny degree.

He first began to employ the voice in an unusual way when he discovered that some desired qualities of noise could not be produced by any of the instruments in his jazz band but were easily within the range of the human voice. What he wanted was a sort of vocal noise to be sounded in some particularly pat position in the rhythm of a piece of jazz. Finding that these "vocalisms" added greatly to the popularity and hilarity of his band, Burian experimented with a wider gamut of entertaining sounds. Finally he segregated his vocalists into what he calls a "Voice-Band," which then practised, a capella, more serious compositions, some of which were based on noises and distinctly jazzy rhythms, while others were quieter and built up on the recital of poems.

Two or three years ago, when this Voice-Band was still in its infancy, it rather over-hastily courted world interest at the International Festival of Contemporary Music at Siena. Critics from every country vied with each other in downing it, either with sarcastic humor, or deadly digs. A few grudgingly conceded originality, but none saw that here was the germ of a new way to treat the human voice, always the most powerfully gripping of instruments. The Band has now rehearsed together for a number of years and has been brought to a degree of perfection; original crudities have been weeded out. It gives many performances in Czechoslovakia, but opportunities to hear it elsewhere are few.

The music which Burian writes for this band is polyphonic at base. Every singer has his own melody or line of vocalism. In order to help the auditor follow the voices separately, different languages are often employed simultaneously, a language to each vocalist. It is hopelessly puzzling to try to follow the words and according to Burian, they are not meant to be followed. The

music makes no attempt to express their meaning; they are merely a convenience, an ordered succession of vowels and consonants on which to hang the vocalics of the performers. The languages, used for their different sets of sounds, are treated as if created for the express purpose of use in a Burian composition. Sometimes a purely musical tone is employed; sometimes a tone which has pitch but is partly noise; sometimes sounds which are almost pure noise. Sometimes the vocalist takes a vowel sound high, with a shriek, dropping down in stages and with each change to lower pitch, emitting an altogether different sort of howl or moan. This music often causes an instantaneous reaction of hearty laughter, and Burian is by no means unaware of the effect; much of it is deliberately calculated; for, a thoroughly modern young man, he values publicity at any cost. But whether or not he himself will develop solidier and more conscientious ways of using his materials, his innovations may eventually be employed by musicians of more earnestness.

Hans Eisler, a Dutch Jew who makes his home in Berlin, has studied with Schönberg but has reacted away from his influence. His music is based on singing in the ordinary sense of the term, and on harmonies familiar in music, but not vocally employed. Modern music has built up certain sorts of harmonies, accepted today as pleasing, which have been developed instrumentally. Partly because of the difficulty of training any body of singers to render them, very little application of these has been made vocally. If they were used in choral just as they are in instrumental music the result would be unsingable. Eisler has evidently made a thorough search through a wearying amount of material, and picked out those which could be used to accentuate certain choral passages and are at the same time practicable to sing. By very simple leading of each individual part, he builds up a counterpoint in which there are an amazing number of modern harmonies never heard before in chorus, which thus take on a new character; the fabric created is decidedly original.

This material Eisler uses not as an end but only as a means to further his primitive desire to give vent to the feelings by shouting, howling, and otherwise making vocal sounds. A vital joy permeates his composition and carries his audience with it.

They forget the flaws in the vivid sweep of tone, which lashes to enthusiasm. It is the sort of music that singers whole-heartedly like to sing. I heard his *Arbeiter's Chor* in Berlin at a concert of modern music, with the audience cheering lustily at the end, forgetting all about the far greater formal perfection of Hindemith's *Trio*, played the same evening. The *Chor* is made up of a number of short choruses, the words of each dealing realistically with some aspect of workaday life. It is lively and gripping. The fullness of sound, the primitive rhythms, the refreshing relief of hearing unaccompanied voices singing new harmonies, all create a state of pleasurable excitement. The rhythm of the otherwise purely musical choruses is sometimes punctuated with hearty shouts and cries, quite pitchless, startlingly right in the rhythmic inevitability of their positions.

Kurt Schwitters, one of the leaders of modern art in Hanover, has experimented in building compositions of words to be spoken aloud. The words are invented to suit the vocalization he wishes; or letters of the alphabet are spoken in different tones and pitches. To such compositions Schwitters applies musical form, sometimes quite precise and classical. He has written a *Sonata* with all the movements. No musician need be told where the first theme ends and the episode begins, or where the episode ends and the second theme begins, for he almost exaggerates the clarity of outline. The idea of his new art, which is curiously effective when heard, although hard to explain, is to reveal an abstract beauty in the spoken voice, dissociated from the meaning of words, but preserving all the subtle innuendoes of which speech is capable. This has already been attempted in poetry, but Schwitters contends that as soon as the interest in words is entirely disconnected from their meaning and exclusively centered on the sound, it becomes musical rather than literary; poetic attempts in this direction have therefore failed because of a lack of musical form. However this may be, he proves that the technic of musical variation can produce thrills when applied to the shades of tonal distinction with which words may be pronounced.

Schwitters himself renders his word-compositions to perfection. He uses a wide gamut of pitch and a wide range of dynamics from a slight whisper to a tremendous yell. He makes a sparing

but precise use of wheezes, bleats, and unusual noises. Unfortunately, like Burian, he has not unraveled the problem of notation. No one who had not heard him could conceivably take the words and make what he does of them. If he would even use present musical notation to indicate the rhythm, tempo, dynamics and approximate pitch of his performances, it would be an aid.

Of these three talents, Burian, Eisler and Schwitters, Schwitters' is the most finished. Burian is developing an art and is continuing to enlarge its possibilities. He lacks entire seriousness but not persistence, and he has cleverness enough to see new ways ahead. Eisler has poured primitive and vigorous feeling into a new choral harmonic scheme. But his music is technically crude and he makes no attempt to improve it. Schwitters has taken one original idea of expression, and kept it within such limits that he has developed an exquisite perfection of form and technic.

Henry Cowell

GERMANY'S NEW MUSIC LITERATURE

MUSICAL literature in Germany, in the days before the war, was dominated by the scientist. He offered panoramic views of development in cultural history, he wrote standard biographies of the classical composers and erudite monographs, flavoring his learning with anecdotes about half-forgotten old masters. Besides the academic literature there were any number of dilettante works, composed for the most part with more enthusiasm than competence, interlarded with curiously naive legends about the great masters. Almost all the Wagner literature belongs in this category.

After the War, however, a reaction set in, and the musical literature market met a crisis. The public no longer bought sentimental, uncritically eulogistic biographies, and the philological researches of the pedants, consecrated to the past, were, if anything, even less highly esteemed. The musical book publishing trade had come upon evil days.

During the post-war years, a new temper and a new idiom in musical literature gradually emerged. Not the academician and the dilettante, but the musical specialists have coined this new idiom. It is the distinction of Paul Bekker and Adolph Weiss-