

The *Second Symphony* of Randall Thompson evidences the ripening of his powers. A better constructed work is hard to find. Thompson uses jazz rhythms with the utmost refinement of style. He is one of our best craftsmen. This is essentially an American work, and, to the writer, one of the best symphonies written in a long time.

The first movement of Henry Cowell's *Concerto* for piano is an interesting study in sonorities, but its value as music is debatable. The *Symphonic Fragments—Proem, Threnody, Persiflage*, by Dorothy James, are as illusive as their sub-titles. However, Miss James has talent and youth; with maturity comes discretion. *Natchez on the Hill*, the work of John Powell, is a well orchestrated piece, rhythmically pulsating, in which Virginian fiddle tunes are used. With this number the last concert of the season came to an end.

The second annual festival, May 3, 4, 5, and 6, was scheduled to include the following "first times": *Concerto* for oboe and orchestra by Irvine McHose, *Prelude and Fugue* for piano and orchestra by Daniel Gregory Mason, and the *First Symphony* of Herbert Inch. Also on the first program of this festival were two choral numbers, *The Raising of Lazarus* of Bernard Rogers, an emotionally inspired cantata which has a decided spiritual element all too rare in these days, and *Exultate Deo* by Mabel Daniels. Other works were more or less familiar and have received many performances. Of particular interest were the ballets, *The Happy Hypocrite* of Herbert Elwell, and *Skyscrapers* of John Alden Carpenter. Owing to the pressure of time a review of the festival could not be written for this issue.

Emanuel Balaban

MORE AMERICANS AND KURT WEILL IN BERLIN

THE current concert season in Berlin was under the zodiac sign of American music. In December the Berlin section of the International Society for Contemporary Music presented works by Copland, Gruenberg, Ruggles and Sessions under the direction of Ansermet. Early in March, two Berlin concerts were sponsored by the Pan-American Association of Composers;

twelve American composers, some entirely unknown to Berlin, others more or less familiar, were introduced to the public and the musicians. Compositions by Adolph Weiss, Charles Ives, Amadeo Roldan, Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell and Edgar Varese were played at the first concert; works by Pedro Sanjuan, Wallingford Riegger, Ruth Crawford, Roy Harris, Carlos Chavez and Alejandro Caturla at the second.

It is interesting to compare the International Society concert with the two others. In the first the music, on the whole, achieved simplicity of form and sharp precision of the musical idea through craftsmanship and the definite shunning of experiment. In contrast, the twelve composers in the second group were addicts of experimentation, and thus, despite personal differences, their music may be considered from one point of view. Its characteristics were the renouncing of classic form, the carrying of harmony to the ultimate implications of a polytonal or atonal basis and a certain lack of contrast in sonority and form.

Henry Cowell's *Synchrony* and Charles Ives' *Second Suite* made the greatest impression in this group. *Synchrony* is clear in structure, its sonority is transparent, it is splendidly instrumentated. The work tends to be individual in style, despite certain influences of French music especially noticeable in the harmonic structure.

Charles Ives' *Second Suite* is striking. The second movement, *The Fourth of July*, is unquestionably noisy but the real spirit of a musician comes through. The *Elegie* is built entirely on tonality; a breath of romanticism pervades this last movement of the suite. These three movements are as inconsistent in style as if they had been written by different composers; perhaps this is why the work fails to express its musical idea precisely. A will to experiment is present, although restrained by the musical element.

Such a conflict is apt to provoke a whole series of inconsistencies, as was most apparent in Varese's *Arcana*. Here is music which avoids the development and extension of form. The work is constructed of small groups of short duration, which, aligned, create the whole. Thematic work, strict formal construction are also renounced. It is chaotic musical structure. Nevertheless,

perhaps despite the intention of the composer, one can still recognize a certain thematic line; there are repetitions of single groups which give the music dynamic strength. Yet the work lacks sufficient unity to be completely convincing. So complicated is the rhythm that its unrestrained power is a handicap and it becomes tedious. The instrumentation lacks plasticity and tonal economy. There is, it seems to me, little justification for the use of the large orchestra; the recurrent doubling of woodwinds and brasses induces monotony, and the C major *Zarathustra* reminiscence just before the close of the work is strange and illogical.

Wallingford Riegger's *Dichotomy* is a clear score of sharp outline, admirably set, tonally. There is much that is individual in style and delivery in Carlos Chavez's *Energia*. But the dynamic climax does not realize all its potentialities and the final effect is weaker and less convincing than the beginning. The other works made a fainter impression, despite Nicolas Slonimsky's splendid conducting.



The Municipal Opera gave us the premiere of the new, impatiently awaited opera by Kurt Weill, *Die Bürgschaft*. In its tendency, form and plot may be seen a close relationship to the *Jasager* and *Lindbergh's Flug*. The plot concerns Johann Matthes who finds gold hidden in two sacks of straw, and brings the money back to the seller who refuses to accept it. The judge decides that Matthes' son should marry the daughter of Orth the seller and the money be given them as dowry. But a powerful commissar decides otherwise and arrests the two friends, confiscating the money. During the war Matthes and Orth become profiteers, and their friendship is destroyed by greed. When Matthes, hounded by the mob, seeks refuge with Orth, the latter betrays him and turns him over to the vengeance of the people. The moral of the plot is made obvious: man's nature does not change; only his relations alter his external attitude.

The opera is also supposed to have a didactic purpose; it shuns everything artistic, all esthetic diversion which is an end in itself. Nevertheless certain influences of Stravinsky and Milhaud

can be seen, especially in the use of the chorus. Here, as in *Christophe Colombe*, the chorus links the stage and the audience. It explains the plot, supports the action and instructs. Weill is an absolute disciple of the theatre, his music is inseparable from it and only from this viewpoint can it be approached. Without drama, it loses its powerful effect.

The music is simply constructed, a few harmonic functions form the tonal structure. The vocal parts are diatonic throughout and are based on eight-measure periods. They are characterized by an almost popular simplicity. Weill repeats his peculiar method of instrumentation, the ostinato movement and accompaniment which were so effective in smaller form in the *Jasager* and *Dreigroschenoper*. But in a generously proportioned opera the persistence of that technic becomes monotonous and tedious. As a whole, the work lacks dramatic strength.

Die Bürgschaft marks the end of that line of Weill's development which began with the *Dreigroschenoper*. It does not seem possible to carry this style and its development further. But Weill is a genuine creator and will find a new path along which to guide opera. Today he is probably the only real opera composer in Germany, a fact which is generally accepted and which explains the great interest that awaits all his further development.

Concert life in Berlin this season suffered from the depression. Little that is new, little that is interesting is heard. A few of the matadors of the new music have turned reactionary. They court the favor of the public by avoiding contemporary works on their programs. Even Klemperer, greatest pioneer of the new, conducts no modern work this season. Fortunately, however, there remains with us the Berlin radio hour which seeks to give its audience something new and interesting.

Jerzy Fitelberg

CORRECTION

The Volume number of the last issue of MODERN MUSIC was erroneously printed on the cover as X. The proper indication is Volume IX, No. 3.