

Gliere, who has already written seven symphonies, an opera, chamber music. In *Maku*, he echoes tunes south of the Caucasus, blending folkloristic material with satire and orchestral humor. It is unproblematical music, seasoned with percussion, and won an easy response from the audience.

Not so easy was Pittsburgh's reaction to the fifth subscription concert. On that occasion the program included Menuhin's performance, not of Mendelssohn or Tchaikovsky, but of the *Violin Concerto* of Bela Bartok. Credit for a virtuoso performance of this great score goes to Yehudi Menuhin. After the intermission, he appeased those who would not accept Bartok as the sole offering with the playing of Bach's *E Major Concerto*. Of course, comparisons – where comparing makes no sense – were immediately made, and the value of such double featuring is, in effect, the value of any appeasement.

Still to be heard in Pittsburgh this season are William Schuman's *Side Show for Orchestra* (a first performance of the concert version); Paul Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes by Weber*; Richard Mohaupt's Overture to the opera, *The Landlady of Pinsk*; Arnold Schönberg's *Theme and Variations for Orchestra*; Alban Berg's Fragments from *Wozzeck*; Virgil Thomson's *The Plow that Broke the Plains*; Rodgers-Bennett's *Oklahoma Interlude*; Herbert Inch's *Answers to a Questionnaire*; Paul Bowles's *Pastorela Suite*; Prokofiev's *Suite Diabolique*.

Assistant Conductor Vladimir Bakaleinikoff has imported, for his concerts, a Hollywood score – Lionel Barrymore's *Valse Fantasia*. Other works of contemporaries on his programs are the *Classical Symphony* of Prokofiev and Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration*.

Leonard Bernstein will conduct a special concert. Recalling the good luck which the Pittsburgh premiere of his symphony, *Jeremiah*, brought to this young composer last year, we anticipate the local try-out of another initial symphonic venture of a still younger composer: *The Symphony Number 1* by Lukas Foss.

Frederick Dorian

DELANEY'S WESTERN STAR

SOME interesting contrasts in Americanistic music have been provided by two works performed during the opening weeks of the San Francisco Symphony season, Robert Delaney's *Western Star* and Louis Gruenberg's violin concerto.

Western Star is a big choral piece employing a text drawn from the poem by Stephen Vincent Benét. Commissioned by Werner Janssen for his own concerts in Los Angeles last season, it was given its world premiere by the San Francisco Municipal Chorus under the direction of Hans Leschke. This is Delaney's second choral work to a Benét poem. The first is the well known *John Brown's Song*, which had rather a sensational career when it was new fifteen years ago. *Western Star* may turn out to be less sensational, but I have a notion that in the long run it may prove to be the finer composition. Benét's *John Brown* is a Technicolor spectacle in words. *Western Star* is the preliminary, brooding fragment of an epic which the author did not live to complete.

The poem deals with the establishment of the earliest American colonies, Jamestown and Plymouth. Its story-telling is suffused with a kind of questioning poetic feeling about the deep tides of historic movement that set the ships afloat on their western courses. It is this atmosphere, rather than the history itself, which Delaney translates into his music. An extraordinary sense of herioc foreboding runs through and through Delaney's score. It has a kind of Moussorgskian ruggedness, directness and lyricism. Delaney is not afraid to be simple, not afraid to let a tune spin out its long course without learned complication or embellishment. But he also has immense rhythmic energy and, without the obvious intrusion of folk tunes, his work seems to hold in its own personal solution the essence of Anglo-Saxon musical folkways. The music is exceptionally restrained. Despite its clear radiance of choral and orchestral tone, despite the eloquent statement of its big, noble theme, it does not reach any great climax, and that may be a weakness. But the work as performed in San Francisco was incomplete. There were two parts, and a third is yet to come. Perhaps that will make the difference.

At all events what we heard was clearly the work of a man who, like Benét himself, Sandburg, and some of the other poets, seems to have pondered long the suffering and strangeness, the hopes and fulfillments of which American history is made, and who has written a deep, rich and greathearted song to express what he has felt.

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Mr. Gruenberg said he wrote his concerto on a commission from Jascha Heifetz "who desired to add an American concerto to his already stupendous repertoire, and this, of course, was nothing less than a chal-

lenge. It raised the question of questions as to what was really American in music. To my mind American music consists (or should) of all human emotions and characteristics. Nothing less." There was really another challenge implicit in this commission – to write a concerto with which Heifetz could lay 'em in the aisles, and that is precisely what Gruenberg has done. The work is a kind of instrumental magic-show or Fun House. The huge orchestra is deployed like a vast chamber ensemble, embroidering a formidably complex fabric behind and around the soloist, while the soloist himself spins out a long, intense, and devastatingly difficult rhapsody which is always the core of the proceedings. Heifetz stands in the center of it all like a man in a black cape and silk hat waving his wand over the ensembled tricks and devices. You fully expect him to extract a rabbit – well, at least a white mouse – from the F holes of his violin before he is through; he *does* extract some spirituals and fiddle tunes and other things of that kind which commonly refuse to participate in the essential structure of a big form like a concerto, although in this case they fit very well.

It is traditional to condemn a work of this kind as having no musical substance or quality, but it seems to me that Gruenberg's concerto is actually a musical achievement of considerable force and merit. To be sure, a performance like the one Heifetz gives can seduce you into liking practically anything, but when it is all over you are convinced that Gruenberg has said something, too.

Alfred Frankenstein