

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

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## FALL OPENINGS, 1941—I.S.C.M. DATED MODEL

THE PHILHARMONIC'S Centennial gift of a piece of American music for almost every program hasn't yet produced any serious contenders for prizes. But then Stokowski practically confined himself to snippets effective only as encore pieces. Roy Harris' *Folk Dance* for strings and percussion had little enough separate life away from the complete *Folk Song Symphony* when performed last year with the benefit of two companions. Morton Gould's *Guaracho* from one of the *Symphonette* series is a pleasant but ordinarily clever Latin-American excursion in the old symphonic jazz manner. And surely the equally able but undistinguished *Scherzo* of Paul Creston's *Symphony* would show to better advantage as a moment of relaxation between more intense movements. One work was performed in its entirety, Henry Cowell's *Tales of Our Countryside*. These orchestral transcriptions of original piano pieces are in Cowell's fresh and diverting folk style with tuneful appeal. His special technic of piano writing makes a more impressive showing as part of the orchestral fabric than in solo demonstration. A first by Barbirolli was William Grant Still's *Plain-Chant for America*. Such popular bids for a wide audience make their most successful appeal when the main prop is a naive and not very novel, but direct, sincere, and forceful vocal line. If the manner of textual presentation is quasi-declamation, however, it is bound to focus attention on the orchestral "background," more than this could bear as music per se. For the mere possession here of the qualities of sincerity and directness does not suffice to make listening interesting.

On a program which also included an arrangement of the virile Bartok *Roumanian Dances* and the Hindemith *Five Pieces*, a useful but uninspired opus from the Gebrauchsmusik period, the Farbman String Symphonietta gave the first performance here of Anis Fuleihan's *Epithalamium*. These carefully written variations for piano and strings are a little pale, lacking

in contrast. Fortunately Fuleihan's too consistent indulgence is in relaxed flowing lyrical invention. The writing for strings is rich and sonorous, that for piano however too dependent on conventional, outmoded frills.

Prokofieff's new *Sixth Sonata*, given its premiere by Vivian Rivkin on the All-Soviet Music Festival of the *New Masses*, is largely in his percussive, metallic piano style. Occasionally the sonorities are too sparse, and certain passages seem conceived orchestrally, but it is generally striking. If not the best Prokofieff, with a less than his usual display of melodic talent, the sonata has the seasoned maturity of his later output.

Though the instrumental treatment in Bloch's recent *Piano Sonata*, played by Alexander Hellman, offered nothing quite so new, it was a welcome reversion to the composer of the *Quintet* and the *Violin Sonata*. The three movements with their carefully calculated emotional plan, the motives, the cyclic digressions are all there with their engendering faults, but this sincerity and real emotionalism make more clear than ever how off the track Bloch was in his spurious symphonic fresco period. A new arrangement of the familiar *Baal Shem* suite, now with orchestral accompaniment, was given its first performance by Szigeti with the New York City Symphony.

#### MUSIC AT THE MONTE CARLO

The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo offered only one new score during its fall season. The selection of Jaromir Weinberger for such an American subject as that provided by *Saratoga* still remains a mystery. Fortunately, in the treatment of late nineteenth-century popular ditties, plentifully scattered throughout, he discarded his usual lush, ornamented manner. But these settings are still cheap, in their own simple way, and also so undistinguished as to suggest that a mere stringing together of the songs in their original versions might well have been more vigorous, less lacking in real movement, certainly more authentic and no less personal. There is a pale period fragrance in this soft construction, but the accent is definitely continental.

The Ballet however did include three Stravinsky works in its season's repertoire, *Petrushka*, *Baiser de la Fée*, and *Jeu de Cartes*. Comparison reveals an interesting development – the substitution for the early rhythmic vitality of a far subtler sense of motion in the later works. There are broad sweeping lines here, in the rapid gliding movements and the more reposeful, moderately-paced sections, which were not possible when the metric

patterns split the form up into short phrases and which Stravinsky has never been able to achieve through melodic surge. Perhaps *Baiser de la Fée* needs to be heard in its planned setting before it can be appreciated in the concert version. Certainly it is as nearly perfect a score for dancing as Stravinsky has given us, and a thoroughly intriguing work I found it the night I attended. Instead of the colorless and even dry expressiveness which are generally attributed to it, there emerges a poetic, tender sentimentality. It is Stravinsky in an intimate, almost romantically personal mood, a mood he has rarely at any other time attempted. The melodies, freely borrowed from Tchaikowsky, are treated with a true sensitivity and understanding that enhance their aroma. Even the dying fall of the epilogue, whose delicate tapering off reminds one of the similar section in *Apollon Musagète*, has not, as does the latter, a spacious, majestic grandeur; it remains to the very close an innermost, confiding expression.

I. S. C. M. — DATED MODEL

The much-postponed eighteenth festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music finally arrived in New York City late last spring. The first to be held in this country it offered much, including all its orchestral programs, to a wider than local audience via radio.

Despite the presence of several American works the general impression was, as has been usual with these festivals, of a far-flung adherence to twelve-tone methods, even among our younger composers, four of whom were represented on the last chamber music concert. In two, Russell G. Harris and Emil Koehler, the Vienna teachings were firmly entrenched. Considered abstractly their works compared very well indeed with the foreign brand, Koehler's expressive intensity coming through strongly even in this tortured form. But as examples of our characteristic trends they can be assigned little value. Even so they were easier to accept than the shamelessly cheap excerpt of Paul Nordoff, who alone showed a freer musical approach. Edward T. Cone's sure-handed and deeply sincere work, far less restricted than the atonal specimens, still bears the mark of a similar unrelaxed super-seriousness, which always gains the Society's seal of approval.

Present difficulties in obtaining works from abroad cannot explain away this arbitrary emphasis in the United States selections. Nor the choice of Juan Carlos Paz (Argentina) as the only South American entrant. However by arranging his *Trio*, pure string music, for an unusual and unsuitable

combination of wind instruments he stole a march on his twelve-tone brothers and gained at least a pleasing peculiarity of sound. And what of the *Second Piano Sonata* of René Leibowitz, who, though born in Warsaw, appeared as the sole representative of France? This work had nothing at all to qualify that impersonal sameness of sound so characteristic of most atonal music.

Five more or less strict Schönberg retainers created a real chromatic efflorescence at the second concert. This was but momentarily interrupted by the *Piano Sonata* of Viktor Ullman (Independent), a former pupil who now seems to have turned apostate, reverting to post-Straussian banalities with folk overtones. Anton von Webern (Independent) alone, in his *String Quartet*, brought distinction and individuality to the style. His delicacy and acute sensitivity are what we have come to expect from him, though this work is conceived on a larger than usual scale. (There still remained the need to close the windows so that it might be heard.) Merely characterless were the examples provided by Matthias Sieber (Hungary) and Artur Schnabel (Independent). The overlaid complexities of Paul Dessau (Independent) evoked only a futile hysteria, showing an amazing disregard for the implications of his text, as did the Biblical settings of Stefan Wolpe (Independent) heard on the first program.

Here however some relief in the general strain was supplied by the exciting but too closely-patterned-after-Bartok *Second String Quartet* of Paul Kadosa (Hungary). Also by an inoffensive *Divertimento for Solo Flute* of William Alwyn (Great Britain) and the *Fourth String Quartet* of Jerzy Fitelberg (Poland). This last, though it upholds the German tradition of heaviness and length, exhibited many passages of real emotional power and adventurous if not completely successful formal plan. But the most satisfying pieces of these three evenings were heard in the final concert's string works by the Mexicans, Salvador Contreras and Silvestre Revueltas. This lightly-textured, spontaneous, strongly rhythmic, gay and directly expressive music, so refreshing, is not peculiar to Mexico as the rest of the program might have led one to believe.

Those who heard only the air-wave concerts were spared the atonal contortions. Another of the few high points in the festival came with the beautifully orchestrated *Tre Ricercari* of Bohuslav Martinu (Czechoslovakia). For me their wisely relaxed security represents modern music in its mature stage. There is no striving for restricted leanness, yet the generous, easy-going flow is quite controlled. Thus a rich but balanced style with

great expressive warmth results. Other European works included those by Holland's Henk Badings, a solid neo-romantic, and Piet Ketting, whose Shakespearean settings were most unsuitable; slight but graceful and spirited pieces by Poland's Antoni Szalowski and Roman Palester; the flat and ponderous *Hymnus* of Willy Burkhard (Switzerland); and a dull quartet opus by Edmund Partos (Palestine). Rodolfo Halffter's (Spain via Mexico) synthesis of folk and neo-classic material needs much refinement before it can approach Falla's perfection. A sensitive piece of textual setting was the very French *Les Illuminations* of Benjamin Britten (Great Britain); smooth and suave, its subservience to the words however allows little space for the personality of this usually original composer.

American music fared better on the radio than in the concert hall. However neither Bernard Wagenaar nor Aaron Copland appeared at his best. Wagenaar's *Triple Concerto* is typical of his distinguished recent manner, but the cadenza style necessitated by the nature of the *concertante* damages the smooth formal lines. Copland's *Music for Radio* achieves a simple direct style but not without sacrifice of the strong personal flavor of his later more popular works. Charles Naginski's *Sinfonietta*, despite the confused mirroring of the composer's complex personality, the occasional emotional incongruities which obscure the direction of the music, was more like what the general representation of Young America should have been.

Blas Galindo's pieces brought us more open-air Mexicana. Indeed if the native selections to be heard in Mexico City at next year's festival are as good as their offerings this time, we may expect some new life for the I. S. C. M. The Society's all-time high for doling out decadence must have boomeranged. There seems now to be some understanding of the need for an immediate and definite change in policy. The jury for next year has been announced; it reveals a group of composers of quite different outlook.

Donald Fuller

## LETTER FROM MEXICO

*Mexico City, November 1.*

THE composer's opportunity to live solely from the music he writes, rare enough in the United States, is reduced to all but zero here in Mexico. Due to the absence of any royalty-collecting organization, even