

FORECAST AND REVIEW

NEWYORK, '42: SOVIET TRIBUTE: STADIUM: BALLET

THE concentration with which everyone follows events of the war on the eastern European front has affected our musical life to an extent that is only partly propaganda-inspired. There are also overtones of a shrewd personal application of publicity values. The present emphasis on Soviet music is not solely due to an honest desire to pay tribute. And since it proves so useful to its executors, more critical weight should in all fairness be put on the music per se. So far there seems to have been too much reliance on extra-musical considerations, and I doubt whether all this plugging will end up as anything but a disservice to Soviet music itself. Not only has much been ill-chosen, but the display has not been sufficiently varied.

An all-Russian program by the Philadelphia Orchestra presented the Shostakovich *Fifth Symphony*, the *First Symphony* by Tikhon Khrennikov, and the Stravinsky "*Fire-Bird*" *Suite*. The Stravinsky was an apt choice, but the manner in which it pointed up the state of Soviet music today was almost insidious. It set the stage for 1910, and from here we hardly moved for the rest of the concert. Back to the old days when one either lined up with Rimsky-Korsakov or the Tchaikovsky-Glazunov faction. Something big beyond this should have happened in Russian music long ago. There's been little but an end to the hostilities and an open field for the second group. A quick way to the audience's heart has always been through this emotionally stirred-up music, personal in its excitement rather than national. But for Russian composers to have gone on believing so strongly in the Tchaikovskian manner as a formula is somewhat provincial. Nor does it appear a very good solution to the problem of music for the masses. The appeal of such music lies largely in its vicarious extension of experience for the average man. There must be something closer to his actual existence which will be truer for him, a real people's music. That will also be newer and more timely.

Of course a good deal of his own has been added to this pattern by Shostakovitch. In fact he is getting to be something of an influence himself, judging by the Khrennikov *Symphony*, which bears a great resemblance to the Shostakovitch *First*. Khrennikov doesn't tend to spread emotionally, he keeps a tighter control; his climaxes are lithe and possessed, never maudlin or overblown. Yet his material doesn't have the personality or compelling quality of Shostakovitch's. This may be better music, but I find it less interesting to hear. Its imitativeness, too, makes the work seem more student-like than the product of a maturing composer.

Shostakovitch's own *Seventh* (first concert performance here by the Philharmonic) is neither so good as its advance réclame advised, nor so bad as it has been made out to be. It is indubitably overlong, without reason inherent in its matter or justified by complexity, and naive in the development processes. Yet some of its themes – the first of the opening movement – are quite fine, and there are new colors and lines, especially in the harmonic methods. The lyricism, too, seems fresher. Though there is much that is banal, here is none of the really foolish material he has given us before. This is no time for nose-thumbing, nor is the lack of it missed. I should like to see what terseness combined with some things in this symphony would produce.

Aram Khatchaturian was the white-haired boy of the Philharmonic's Stadium season, at which his *Symphony*, *Piano Concerto*, and two movements from his *Dance Suite* were performed. These I did not hear, but the *Violin Concerto*, programmed by Miriam Solovieff, reveals a composer following the typical Russian pattern with few saving graces. It is a pretentious, dull, and undistinguished work, moving out of its orbit only for a few trite Orientalisms. Of the rejuvenating folk influences supposedly in his music there seemed no trace. Equally disappointing was the Soviet music presented on one program of a chamber music series by the faculty of the Dalcroze school. Khachaturian appeared again with a *Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Violin*. The material was only slightly more interesting. The *Improvisation* by Dimitri Kabalevsky could hardly be termed post-romantic. A more serious attempt was the *String Trio* by Vissarion Shebalin, but the pallor of conservatism downed any truly original impulse. New talent is hardly being exposed. Shostakovitch looks better and better.

III

The Philharmonic kept up its promise for lots of American music

through the Stadium season. Virgil Thomson's two portraits, *Canons for Dorothy Thompson*, and *The Mayor LaGuardia Waltzes* were performed. Judgment not as pure music is, of course, called for here. As portraiture these pieces had real wit and success, though the slow but determined drive of the first was more pleasing than the somewhat conventional descriptiveness of the second. I missed however the atmosphere of the salon, where this intimate art with its somewhat ephemeral appeal would be more at home. It seemed a little sketchy when amplified. An *Introduction and Allegro* by Herbert Elwell was best in its placid opening. The simplicity of later measures was over-conventionalized. The sonorous scheme of Werner Josten's *Concerto Sacro, Number 2* forms a beautiful, if rich, frame to its stylized, sincere religious emotion. Works, mostly repeats, by Aaron Copland, William Schuman, Henry Brant, Leo Sowerby, Paul Creston, and Samuel Barber, among others, were also performed.

John Alden Carpenter's *Second Symphony* (Philharmonic) gave a rather meager start to the expected parade this year. Little more was offered than in the composer's preceding effort in this form. There are the same homely sentimentality, the emotion incidental in function rather than central, the unnecessary exoticisms. A certain directness and simplicity of expression were wasted.

III

Two new scores were given during the fall season of ballet. The Ballet Theatre's *Don Domingo* was based on six piano pieces by Silvestre Revueltas, arranged by Antal Dorati. This music is very different from that of Chavez, with its sculptured style, its carefully devised national but personal profile, its austerity, nobility, and tightness. More of a people's music, it yet gives more freely of itself. It is gay, spontaneous, and quite sensuous. It is often nationalist, yet such passages as the beautiful night scene are more cosmopolitan. There are abrupt, strange interjections and stoppings which I do not always understand. They damage a line which seems to be running along perfectly well, if a little too dependently on the ostinato method. But this may have been partly the fault of the stage action, which told in a rather confused and broken way an essentially simple tale.

Aaron Copland's *Rodeo* was brought forward by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. In spite of the locale, this is quite a different work from *Billy the Kid*. It is not epic, or full of dramatic suspense. Its poignancy is

personal, it is lightly entertaining. Some have been disappointed because it did not repeat a former achievement. For me, it is apt and charming and, wisely, not overblown. In a more popular, simplified style than *Billy*, it has less personality and fewer memorable moments. But there are longer lines – if not always through interesting developments –, a refreshing and novel treatment of square dances to replace the unrepeatable use of cowboy tunes, and a shy, sensitive understanding and sympathy that are very winning.

Donald Fuller

NEWS FROM PARIS AND ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE

Geneva, October 3

PARIS, according to reports that reach us here in Geneva, appears to have been living several lives at once. It is, first of all, an occupied city, where the New Order reigns and the tread of the German soldier resounds. It is also a political arena with defenders of Fighting France opposed to collaborators, where assassinations alternate with reprisals. It is the center of the French black market where the fortunate get all they want, paying for every course on their menus with hundred-franc notes while others are frequently deprived of bare necessities and follow the giddy upward spiraling of prices with anguish. But Paris is, let us not forget, also the heart of intellectual and artistic France, where the tradition and spirit of the country are centered. This spirit still endures in the rich collections of the libraries and the museums, which in the past have seldom known such an attendance as they now enjoy, and even on the Parisian stage, where a significant word or phrase frequently slips into a song or comedian's dialogue.

The Parisian opera houses, theatres, concert halls, and particularly the churches, still attract throngs of people though the productions are not always very satisfying. There is an effort to gain easy success with popular works. (Performances of modern music are, of course, rare, a situation duplicated unfortunately in most countries affected by the war.) A large number of programs are naturally devoted to German works, which might not be so bad if the subjects were Beethoven or Bach. But Parisians must now learn to swallow operas by Pfitzner or works by Werner Egk, the official prodigy of the Third Reich. Under the direction of Egk, the Opéra recently gave his *Joan de Zarissa*, whose action is laid in the fifteenth century at the court of the Duke of Burgundy. The choreography, by that