FORECAST AND REVIEW

STRAVINSKY FULL-LENGTH PORTRAIT

STRAVINSKY opened his Philharmonic program unostentatiously with the *Scènes de Ballet*. On this occasion the work seemed more suave, better made than before. Its relaxed grace put one in a pleasant humor for the new *Symphony in Three Movements,* a world premiere, which followed. The opening is serious, but most simple and not very surprising in manner. Thus a few minutes elapse before one realizes that something quite amazing is being unfolded. At its conclusion I was convinced that the *Symphony* is Stravinsky's real masterpiece. How remarkable that such a composition should have been brewing in his mind these past few years, all the while his output has consisted of attractive but not too important ballet scores, which many have considered evidence of the final weakening of his powers. Stravinsky's sensitivity in the *Symphony* to the confusion and conflicts of the times, or at least his own resulting perturbation, often startles, like some brilliant grasping of an event's significance by a philosopher. Yet the work ends triumphantly, with an optimism we can only hope is an accurate prediction of the future.

But the *Symphony* is mainly a wonder for what it reveals about Stravinsky's development as a composer. Whether the neo-classic form of his later pieces has somehow expanded to comprehend the type of material usual in his earlier writings, or whether this material has found a new way of self-expression—through a form which extends and enlarges its meaning —would be hard to say. Certainly the *Symphony* pulls all the strings together. It contains reminiscences of just about everything Stravinsky has ever done. Now we can see that his excursions in varied directions were not merely attempts to shock, indicated no failure at stylistic orientation. They were probing drives toward completion, parts of the whole that the rich yet completely integrated manner of this symphony represents. It is fascinating to hear how a harmonic progression which might have come from *Les Noces* is resolved in the fashion, say, of *Danses Concertantes.*

Possibly the first movement, especially in the passage where violent

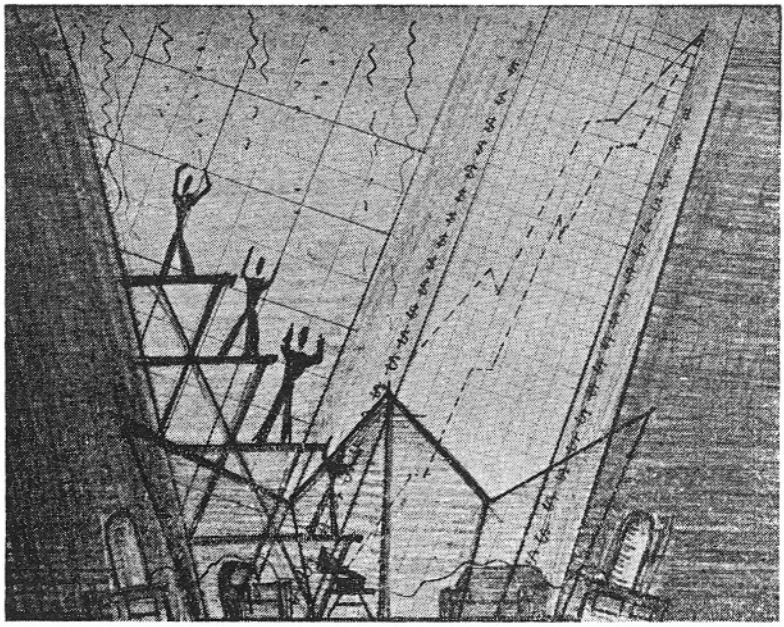
interjections are torn from the piano over a steady but disturbing rhythmic motion low in the orchestra, excites one most. But the slow movement, which contrasts mysterious, almost metallic, harmonic sequences with the tender yet very proper ornamentations characteristic of Stravinsky's late music; the subtle elision of the close of this movement, which yet expresses absolute completeness; and the finale, whose marvelously alive and growing fugue transcends the usual limitations of this form, almost constantly move one too. Melodic interest is at a minimum, even in the middle section, yet this is hardly noticeable. For expressive force gives the music the same profile that is usually acquired through vital melody. And even its absence indicates further the intense sincerity of the work. Stravinsky has never been very convincing when lyrical: his melodies rarely flow spontaneously and always seem a bit calculated and ornate, even at their best. Striking effects are obtained by giving great prominence to the piano and the harp.

Like the *Symphony,* the program itself revealed, through careful planning, how Stravinsky has really always been heading for one certain destination. A new, augmented version of music for *The Firebird,* with a few added sections and brief connecting links between the movements, managed in some way to tell us something more about the recent piece. And on a later program *Fireworks* served very well as a prelude to the *Symphony; Scènes de Ballet,* heard after it, could more easily be enjoyed for what it represents. Few composers of any period would be able, in the space of a few hours, to display such diverse resources.

III

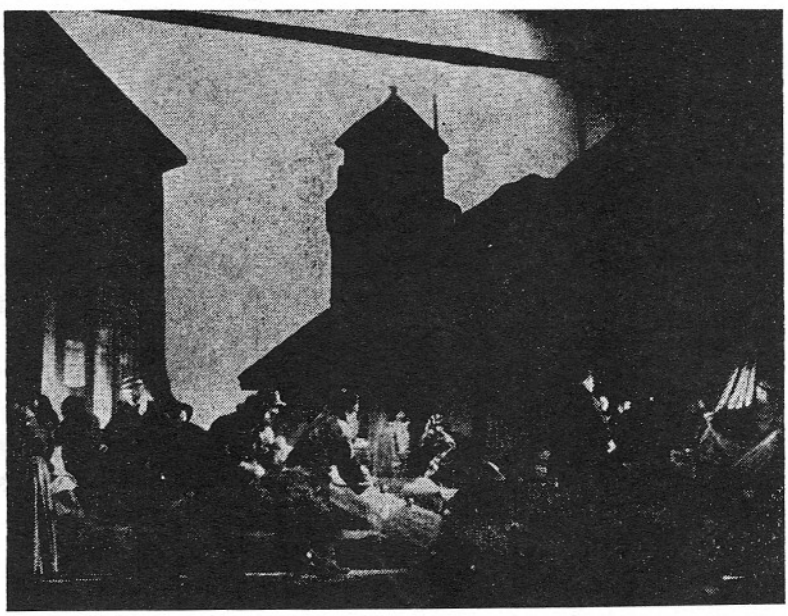
Aaron Copland's suite from *Appalachian Spring* (Philharmonic) wears its large orchestral trappings with nobility. As a theatre piece the work was quiet, thoughtful, even in its joy somewhat restrained and meditative. These qualities remain, yet are intensified and take on greater significance in the new version; an epic feeling is closely approximated, but with no pretentiousness. Copland's lines get longer and longer, and he does find different things to do with folklike material. The texture, though simple, seems richer and more luminous than before. Especially eloquent are the slow parts, but the fast sections have a likeable severity that is fresh and very appealing.

Walter Piston's *Second Symphony,* another important recent American work on Philharmonic programs, fuses form and expressive content as successfully as any piece of his. A strongly romantic touch, suggestive of late nineteenth century French music, produces some harmonic progressions that sound strangely familiar and yet elude one, because they are nonetheless viewed from a very personal slant. The first movement is possibly the best, for not only is its first theme one of deep beauty, and its second engagingly good-humored, but the contrast between them, the justness of



BILLION DOLLAR BABY
A Musical Play

Original designs by OLIVER SMITH for the New York production, 1945
Score by MORTON GOULD,
Choreography by
JEROME ROBBINS



PETER GRIMES
Opera by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Stage set by
KENNETH GREENE
for the Saddlers Wells production, London, 1945

their placement, and the inventiveness and proportion of the developments all afford pleasure. The Adagio, if a bit rambling in its course, unfolds a melody of great breadth and feeling. And in the finale, more in Piston's usual energetic manner, one is again surprised by the charmingly passé character of the main theme. The *Sonatina* for violin and harpsichord, in a first performance by Alexander Schneider and Ralph Kirkpatrick, shows Piston reverting somewhat to his straitjacketed neo-classicism. The results are of course expert, yet not often very moving.

Milhaud's *Sonata,* also a premiere on this program, adds little to what we know about him. But it is ingratiating—a better grasp of the medium is shown than in the Piston work—and the lyrical spirit persists unflagging. In the slow movement we see how a melody, all by itself, can completely absorb one's attention. Milhaud appeared with the Philharmonic to conduct his *Suite Française,* originally composed for band. The clear atmosphere and sharp sonorities of the *Suite Provençale* are here, and the material itself—some fine French folksongs—should inspire anyone. The moods seem just about to be caught when they are away again, spirited, richly sentimental, but proud. In *Le Bal Martiniquais,* another first, a deliciously languid *Chanson Créole* precedes a *Biguine,* whose characteristic solid yet alert rhythm is prettily adorned.

Hindemith was tendered a festival by the Juilliard School of Music to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. After two chamber music concerts, a final program, on which Hindemith conducted a chorus and orchestra, gave us a first concert performance of the ballet, *Hérodiade.* The composer has a real eye to the theatre, and this has led him to write a considerably more atmospheric work than usual. In one middle section high piano chords alternate with orchestral rumblings. The feverishness here is most effective, but the sustained passages too are often moving. The lack of dominant melodic lines, strange for Hindemith, is not so apparent in the theatre; the stage action takes over in part the function of the lyrical element. As in *The Four Temperaments,* which has still failed to be produced with choreography, the piano adds mysterious color. This piece, less free formally than *Hérodiade,* whose spans are expressively calculated, gives a really dominant role to melody. The result, if not so imaginative, is yet more solid. A revised version of *Frau Musica,* a jolly and easy-going work, had the audience participating with obvious pleasure.

A set of variations for cello and piano on *A Frog He Went A-Courting,* performed on Joseph Schuster's program, appealed to me more than most of Hindemith's chamber works. He has delightfully realized the essence of this Kentucky mountain song and pictures its train of events with considerable wit. Earlier in the season the *Konzertmusik* for strings and brass was given by the New York City Symphony. One cannot but

regret the loss of the urgency and intense lyricism characteristic of this work in Hindemith's more recent music.

Prokofiev's *Summer Day,* an orchestrated version of a piano suite, *Music for Children,* was played by the Philharmonic just at the time the pieces appeared in their original form, along with an extended but typical *Gavotte*—also a new work—on Anatole Kitain's recital. These pieces are merely good childhood evocations, but the orchestration is so imaginative and apposite that the sketches are sharpened to the degree where they become, if not important, certainly most enjoyable for their sweet delicacy. Two songs by Prokofiev on Jennie Tourel's program were plainly in the Russian song tradition. But the excerpts from Theodore Chanler's cycle, *The Children,* had a breadth and variety which far surpassed what one expected from the texts. Three of the Revueltas *Songs of Childhood* showed how the folk elements, which seem always to be the sole motivation for Central and South American songs, need not imply the conventional procedure of a Mignone or a Villa-Lobos, who also appeared on the program.

III

Several American works for various orchestral combinations, mostly by young composers, have recently been given a hearing. Howard Hanson brought two to the Philharmonic repertory, William Bergsma's *Music on a Quiet Theme* and Peter Mennin's *Folk Overture.* The former, a nostalgic pastorale, has a free variation form. The mood is fully sustained, though there is excitement as well. Mennin's rousing piece, despite its technical command, shows as yet no very clear idea of a personal style. The first impression is of Harris's material expressed with Copland's assurance. Later, hints of a less prefabricated outlook emerge. . . . Arthur Berger's *Three Pieces* for strings were presented by Harold Kohon's American Chamber Music Ensemble. He has learned how to weave short motives into more extended lines and often, as in the broad, singing theme of the slow movement, he simply writes long melodies. The textures of the sprightly end movements are always distinguished and the writing for strings is full-bodied. Two new pieces, *Capriccio* and *Canzona,* by Richard Arnell, though expertly formed, seem somewhat distant. The emotional content is perhaps too well-known to convey any further message. . . . Jerome Moross's suite from *Frankie and Johnny* was performed at the Meth Symphonette's concert. The jazz style is most individual yet authentic in feeling. Without the ballet, however, one feels the lack of a stronger melodic element. Voices sing fragments of the familiar song, which are effectively and knowingly placed to serve almost as a binding principle. . . . John Alden Carpenter's *The Seven Ages,* a symphonic suite (premiere by the Philharmonic), describes impressionistically the various stages of man's life according to the famous Shakesperean quotation.

Keyboard music: Virgil Thomson's *Ten Etudes* for piano, a premiere by E. Robert Schmitz. These explore an amazing set of technical problems which have probably never before been examined so conscientiously. Though difficult and eminently practicable they are most engaging. . . . John Lessard's *Second Sonata,* on John Kirkpatrick's recital, a neo-classic work with an admirable first movement. Later the excitement becomes submerged under formulas. . . . Joseph Achron's *Concerto for Piano Alone,* performed by Jakob Gimpel, very eclectic in style but often quite powerful. *Two Etudes* by Ernst Toch, on the same program, finely-spun and directly expressive. . . . A group of *Etudes and Polkas* of Martinu, presented by Rudolf Firkusny, quite elegant and sensitive little pieces which often communicate more than his larger chamber music works.

For strings: Martinu again, with a *Third Violin Sonata* given a first hearing by Angel Reyes. Elaborate orchestration really seems needed now for his extended pieces. *Three Hebrew Melodies* by Jacques de Menasce reveal very original ways of treating such material. The music is lithe, with expressive simplicity and no overblown dramas. Fuleihan's *Four Preludes,* another premiere here, are very brief, but nevertheless manage to convey an expanded outlook. . . . At Ruth's Posselt's recital a clever *Capriccio* by Oscar Levant, a lyrical *Arietta* by Lopatnikoff and short pieces by Hindemith and Prokofiev stood out. . . . Two concerti with small orchestra, especially written for Andres Segovia, appeared on his guitar program. Castelnuovo-Tedesco's is far from outstanding, but its simplicity, expressive nicety and rather neo-classic turn give it considerably more charm than his other works can exert. Manuel Ponce's *Concerto del Sud* is slight and pleasant, certainly not of this age, but somehow appealing for its old-fashioned orientation.

Donald Fuller

NEW MUSIC IN RECITALS AND SYMPOSIUMS

ALL the soloists and chamber groups now have the idea that a first performance after intermission will assure the presence of the critics, and for that purpose either a minor work by a major master or any work by a minor master will do.

A first audition of Elsie Siegmeister's *American Sonata,* by Rose Goldblatt, pianist, so introduced, proved to be a rather lengthy and tiresome travel tale about the composer's discoveries among the folk of North America. Similar in intent but more sophisticated in approach was George Antheil's slick and spoofing *Violin Sonatina,* premiere by Werner Gebauer. Antheil's talent seems to me of the monkey-see, monkey-do kind. He is a whiz at it, but frankly avoids making up anything – just patches together bits from the work of his superiors, in a word, passes the buck.