

the mood of Bloch, nor is it the biting depression of Stravinsky's slow movements. The opening measures are here quoted:



Vivacity and exuberance pervade the last movement. Its vigor is stupendous. These are dances of a man to whom a dance is a demoniac ritual. The demons here are, however, those of birth and death, not of the play-time and love-time between.

What is the result? Disturbing, certainly, as are all works of art so long as they remain vital. It is stark, almost grim in its restraint. I venture to assert that its mood is that of a modern, thoughtful man who feels without desperation and without illusion the beauty as well as the despair of his world. This, it should be remembered, is a *first* symphony. Its composer, though he has traveled far, is still a young man. He will have much more to say. He now plans an opera and other extended works. Whether this music, yet to come, will be more rounded-out, more expansive, more tender than the first symphony will depend largely upon what life does to Mr. Sessions. But whatever he says will command attention.

Roy D. Welch

BALLYHOO

ABOUT the time the red flannels are hung away in the back closet and before the proverbial harbingers of spring "bob" their way into a sweltering summer, there comes a lull when

winter activities are replaced by that restless laziness known as spring fever. Against this complaint our wily elders fortified themselves with the thousand witch brews of the patent-protected medicos, while we fall easy victims to the insidious wanderlust. But almost in answer to our cry comes the Circus, and after two hours under the tonic spell of acrobats and equestriennes, the magic fascination of the *aerialiste extraordinaire*, we emerge reborn, almost optimistic, resigned to the crash of cars, the scream of brakes, the push and bustle of the streets, the all-pervading odor of gasoline, even our neighbor's radio and the myriad other delights of city life in America.

It was thus under the lure of the sawdust that the capacity audience found itself expectantly seated in Carnegie Hall on the evening of Sunday, April 10th. The show billed was the "All-Antheil Concert" and gave promise to run second only to the successors of Barnum. Ever since the day that a gifted, somewhat shy young man from Trenton set sail from these shores to wrest the musical fleece from the long-wonted hands of Europe, there have been recurrent tales of strange sonatas for drum, piano and violin, riots and rumors of riots, and panegyrics from the pen of Dr. Pound, poet and Antheilist, and others technically so well equipped to speak. Here was a greater than Stravinsky, with shoe latches graciously proffered. Here was musical revolution beside which the once heretic Varese would appear demure as a deacon's daughter. Antheil himself, in person, in the flesh, —drums, player pianos, airplane propellers—a performance cinematically termed "super-jewel," and all for a paltry three dollars.

The audience waited eagerly. Riot! At last Carnegie Hall would rock to the storms, hisses and jeers sacred to Guild concerts. So enthusiastically did the audience wait that one young lady went into hysterics early in the trapeze act and long before the best clowning began.

But the show begins; and where is the grand procession? Only four black-garbed players ushering in a quartet for strings, a quartet which we are assured will replace the conventional symphonic form "with one more delicate, possibly more fragmentary, eliminating (in the mind of the composer) the objectionable

feature of most string quartets—orchestral writing.” Yet the contours were familiar. There remained a good family likeness to Schoenberg, Webern, Berg and others of Austro-Germanic hue.

Scene II—sonata for violin, piano and drum—might also be termed a “sister act” wherein the banalities of “sweet jazz” on the violin vie with the clichés of modernism on the piano, finally to “go into their dance” when the drum comes along as the ultimum dictum of percussive piano writing. Unfortunately the blurred and indecisive notes of the bass drum sounded soft after the crispness of the preceding piano tone, and the acrobatic feat of rushing from the piano to beat the drum standing backwards, seemed hardly warranted by the effect.

And now a *Jazz Symphony*—an ambitious effort, but to our surprise one well worthy to stand with the best attempts in this direction, and much more to the manner born than several of the more widely acclaimed products of this school. This symphony was excellently played by the orchestra of W. C. Handy. Unlike some of its predecessors, Mr. Antheil’s composition avoids the saccharine. It is written with a healthy sophistication and successfully escapes the platitudes which have hitherto glorified the American Jazz Symphony. It has rhythmic interest and provocative orchestral sonorities.

The *Ballet Mécanique*, written earlier than the *Jazz Symphony*, is billed as the feature of the show. Originally scored for sixteen player-pianos and percussion, it was here performed with ten pianists, one player-piano supplemented by xylophones, rattles, airplane propellers, bells, buzzers, percussion—and how! “Starting forte, it ends forte,” beginning in one tempo, it ends in the same tempo. In other words, as succinctly described in the program notes, “its three main divisions are Allegro—Allegro—Allegro”—and therein lies its fault. Mr. Antheil has achieved much of the mathematical beauty of machinery—the glistening play of pistons, the oily smoothness of ever-revolving wheels, the almost hypnotic over-emphasis of rhythmic formulae. Despite a Stravinsky influence the work has significance, but Mr. Antheil is not a good showman. There is a sameness beyond the necessity for an effect of mere mechanical monotony. There is

a lack of contrast and a length that defies close attention. At times one wished for the volume of the symphony orchestra to supplement the hard glitter of the piano and give the all-compelling sound needed. Yet, after all has been set against it that should be, the *Ballet Mécanique*, if judiciously cut, would well merit further hearing.

As for the riot, the New York audience, ever polite, employed that cruelest weapon, a gentle apathy. The circus proved a wash-out and the elaborate and sensational publicity merely served to aggravate a bad criticism. The real gifts of Mr. Antheil were obscured in a network of boasts, criticisms and arguments. It is only to be hoped that when Antheil again returns to these shores with the fruits of future labors, he will earn the serious attention his talent deserves and not be exploited as material for the cheap, journalistic drum-beating of sideshow barkers.

Richard Hammond

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

STRIPPED of publicity and palaver and considered in the perspective of six performances, *The King's Henchman* wears a drab look. This should not be a cause for surprise. To a degree unparalleled in the record of American music, the Taylor-Millay opera had greatness thrust upon it. Its glorification was largely the result of conditions which one year create a heaven-inflaming artist out of a pleasantly talented baritone and the next proclaim a half-baked school girl an empress of song. Its progress has been instructive and should become more so. *The King's Henchman* has consistently sold out the Metropolitan Opera House to palpitatingly expectant throngs. But the applause and obvious favor of these audiences have been strikingly disproportionate to their numbers. The undercurrent of disappointment has been inescapable.

The King's Henchman is a facile, honest, well-intentioned piece of work. But instead of the plumed accomplishment and prodigious beacon discerned in various irresponsible (and, for that matter, responsible) quarters it is a thing basically sterile and commonplace. That Deems Taylor's music proceeds from