

FORECAST AND REVIEW

IN RETROSPECT

JUST after Griffes' untimely death, almost seven years ago, a generous number of articles appeared giving him belated praise. The growing interest in his compositions, sponsored originally by such sensitive and forward-looking artists as Eva Gauthier and Georges Barrère, received a tragic and sudden impetus. It was too soon though for a comprehensive appraisal of his work and none was undertaken.

Now, however, in the light of what has since happened, one can look back with fresh and impartial eyes. Griffes' music has not lost its gentle and wistful charm; it is still cold, it is still distinguished. It is strangely personal and its individuality is its claim to our lasting attention.

American music has been, on the whole, a stream which has flowed all too parallel with its sister-stream in Europe. MacDowell, still the most complete figure we have produced, was a traditionalist or at best an artist who walked abreast of his contemporaries—though, of all things, originality is the most difficult to appraise in retrospect. We were under a complete, if self-imposed, bondage to Germany. Griffes came. He dissipated the German myth—which in itself would not have been extraordinary, since this too was happening in Europe. But he did more; more than substitute a French for a German ideal. He introduced into our music a certain element of daring and independence, *an experimental frame of mind*.

Things have moved so rapidly that independence today is no longer necessarily a virtue and experimentation has frequently been the cloak of impotence and affectation. At that time it was not quite so. Griffes was no revolutionary. His experimentation was not the half-cocked star-shooting we so frequently meet with

now-a-days; it was the searching of a mature and serious-minded human being, fully aware of what has been done in the past, eager to enlarge his means of expression and ours, by the conscious and legitimate development of his own individuality and genius. Through the course of the years Griffes' harmonic sense grew increasingly original and bold, his melodic line became increasingly his own. One sees him, discontented with the established conventions, tentatively feeling his way. There is about his work an atmosphere of flexibility and open-mindedness. All this had happened in Europe often before; but with Griffes the experimental frame of mind makes its first musical appearance in our country. This is his unique importance—the more singular because of the fact that his talent was limited perhaps and his achievement incomplete.

Griffes wore no mantle of self-imposed responsibility; he did not look on himself as the apostle of any creed. He was, for a number of years, music-instructor at a boys' school on the banks of the Hudson, near New York. His room, on the ground floor of one of the buildings overlooking a wide lawn, was cold, perhaps, but not lacking in a fastidious and individual charm. Here he worked, quietly, unassumingly and un-self-consciously. His tender and charming flute-poem, his stern and uncompromising piano sonata, the fragments to *Salut au Monde*, unsatisfying but evocative—these were but milestones along a path he was blazing, at that time alone, through the new and unexplored musical forest. How tragic that his progress was so cut short!

Frederick Jacobi

"FOR THE PEOPLE"

AN essential part of the American democratic credo is the belief in the possibility of completely educating the masses. That men die unequal is often attributed to the differences in their training and opportunity. In music the dogma takes the form of a faith that all our citizens are potentially lovers of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

In the United States today there is an unprecedented propaganda for the popularization of serious music. It would be