

## THE TRANSPLANTED COMPOSER

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SINCE the migrations of composers these days are apt to be non-voluntary, their spiritual luggage may carry a heavy burden of resentment. This piece of baggage is often supremely cherished by the unhappy travelers as they set out on their dismal journeys, for anger is the only link with the homeland which they are willing to recognize. Obviously it is a device set up to counteract unconfessed home-sickness.

It would of course be well to throw overboard these sterile emotions before submitting to examination by the customs officers of the New World. First, for a very practical reason. Whereas in Europe the right to self-complaint is generally conceded to an artist (indeed he often furthers his cause by some display of misery), the New World, on the contrary, abhors such aspects of gloom. It prefers to bestow success on those who seem already possessed of it. More important of course is the fact that a mind oriented to the past is impeded in planning for the future.

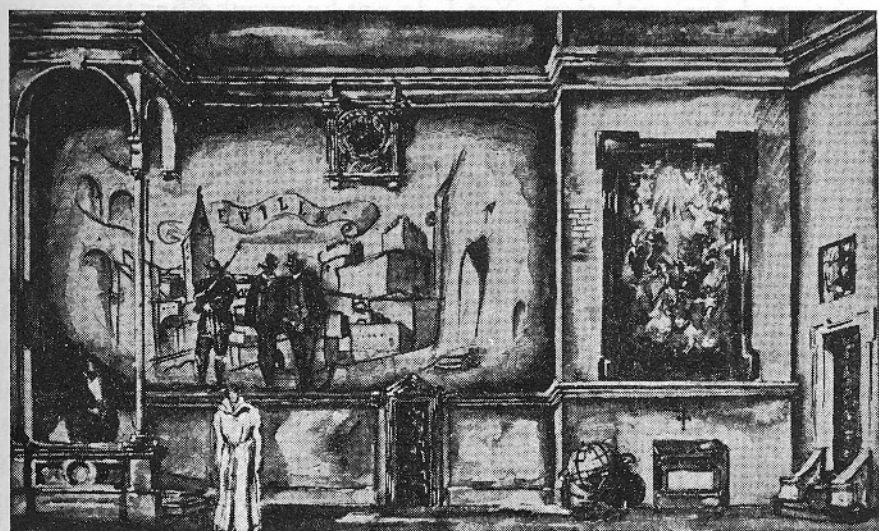
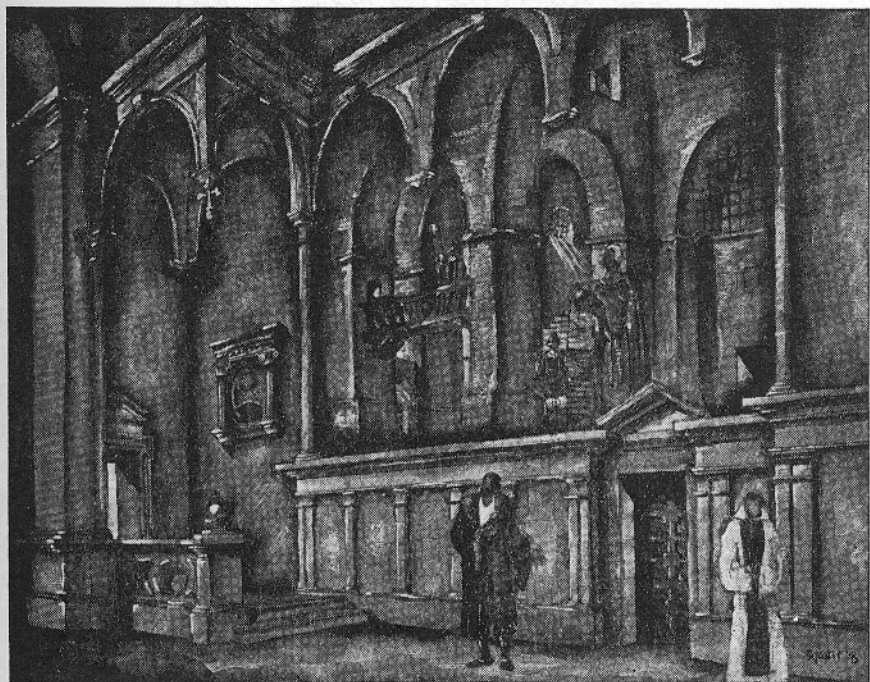
There are, however, many positive convictions which the immigrant can bring with him to this New World. It would indeed be foolhardy and futile to attempt the abandon of all former mental equipment although the delicate psychological situation may tempt him to such desperate resolutions. He feels that he is hardly an invited guest, that no one awaits his arrival, and that, perhaps, to fit into strange surroundings, it would be best to remodel himself entirely. But no greater mistake could be made, for only time itself can accomplish such a metamorphosis.

The European composer preparing to settle in America is exposed to two very different sets of impressions. Between the musical cultures of the Old and the New Worlds, he observes at times a much closer relationship than he had expected. This is largely because many musicians established in America, especially the conductors and instrumentalists, are native Europeans trained in the schools and orchestras of the old continent. The program material of leading musical institutions resembles, with

slight modifications, what is used for similar purposes in Europe. On the other hand, he meets situations which awaken doubts that there is any basis whatever for a common point of view. Thus he alternately overrates or underestimates the differences between his former and his new environment.

This problem is all the more complex because in the modern composer, adherence to tradition is counterbalanced by the adventurous lure of the unknown. To him the vista of a country like America which is not yet overburdened by the musical past, is fascinating. Everywhere he meets young people curious and eager to learn new things, open-minded, full of hope, untouched by fatigue or suspicion — the failings of so large a section of youth in Europe. Of course this state of mind is accompanied by a certain lack of purely scientific knowledge. Musical discussions here do not take for granted all those things which many Europeans find self-evident. That condition, however, involves no real disadvantage. For empty routine and open reaction take root exactly where much goes for granted, or where the cynicism of despair bars all approach to new ideas. It is not such a paradox after all that the modern European composer finds it easiest to establish his own connection with musical tradition in those centers of American musical life least dominated by tradition. For there at least the historical development of music is not viewed through prejudices marshalled to support some new-born reactionary dream.

Many other outstanding characteristics in American musical life are of great importance to the immigrant. What strikes him most forcibly perhaps is that here the position of the composer has not been so completely formulated in the nation's social consciousness as, theoretically at least, it is in Europe. Obviously American music has not the same historic background, although the ancestors of our European art are also those of America's. But the living presence of the great masters of the past, the intimate contact with the facts of their personal lives, the unbroken continuity established by generations of pupils, have created a very special atmosphere in Europe. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert are honored here as abroad, but since they lived far away when creating their works, their personalities are not so actual for the American as they are for the European. Classical music



KARL V, opera by ERNST KRENEK  
 Décors for the premiere given  
 in Prague in June, 1938  
 By FRANK SCHULTE

is brought to the attention of the American public as something "ready-made," separated psychologically from the idea of the human beings who sat down and wrote it.

Moreover, there is a notable distinction in the development of practical musical life on the two continents. Europe is dotted with centers founded by aristocratic sponsors and only later directed by business men, whereas most American musical opportunities have been provided and administered chiefly by commercial interests. Salesmen of music are naturally less concerned with the original source of their programs than with the possibility of making an immediate impression on the public. The burden of selling is passed on to glamorous performers, who, entrusted with the choice of music, naturally select works directed at keeping and increasing their own market value. Such conditions do not of course altogether forbid the spread of some good music; however, they do not focus attention on the music itself, that is, on the product of the composer.

For all these reasons the future of music as an intrinsic expression of its spiritual life is not yet a vital issue for the nation. Of course there are many Americans conscious of the dilemma, who work for a solution. Yet I do not know whether the goal can best be achieved by insisting on the creation and development at all costs of a specifically "American" music. Such movements are all too reminiscent of that tide of nationalism which has risen to menace everything worth-while in Europe and has already performed its work of destruction in several countries. The history of music, and of every other art, bears the most striking proof that what is valuable is the result of the inter-fertilization of different civilizations. It would be ludicrous to reduce Mozart and Beethoven to German folk-lore composers, for they obviously acquired world significance by surpassing their racial limitations. On the other hand it would be ridiculous to outlaw Palestrina as "un-Italian" because he was influenced by the Dutch school. In the face of today's prevailing attitudes, it seems incredible that there have been periods in Europe when emigrants were not only not feared, but even sought after by princes and kings, as the best stimuli for their own countries. But one need only look toward America for the most spectacular proof of the value of collaboration by the most heterogeneous nationalities.

And just as America builds the best highways and bridges, and not specifically American highways and bridges in some pseudo-mystical sense, so her aim should be to produce the best music. Toward this end she can be assisted by the newly arrived composers. They have left their native countries because their musical language does not conform to those opinions about the "national" qualities of art that have grown up everywhere in Europe during recent years. This curse of nationalism has fallen on all that is best in modern music, that is, music which reaches the highest artistic and spiritual levels, and sets forth new and original ideas in the greatest technical perfection. Music so dedicated is always endowed with a universal all-human significance, and can never be restricted to a local clan living in the shadow of its own church steeple. Such a goal should be especially adequate to the spirit of America where the idea of a culture embracing all humanity is more deeply rooted than anywhere else. The common denominator of America's ultimate contribution to the development of music should read "the good and the new."

Modern composers during recent years, have nowhere been spoiled by exaggerated benevolence and so they carry few illusions with them. But they do hope to find some sphere in which they can perform their function. Of course no one expects to find surroundings similar to those he left behind him. In the light of recent changes this would perhaps not even be desirable if possible. Anyone compelled to leave his country should not view the change as a fatal blow. It is obviously better to attempt to control the consequences of fate, handling them, so far as possible, as if they had been deliberately planned.

The situation of all composers in America depends largely on the mental attitude of those in control of the mechanism of distribution. These directors in turn are strongly influenced by the tastes which they conceive to be prevalent among the public. The crucial issue then is centered in the field of education, both of musicians and laymen. Here it seems to me the immigrant composer, if he is at all articulate, can play a very useful role. He can collaborate practically on the solution of the pedagogical task. Thus both host and newcomer will improve a situation which is a creation of neither and work together to overcome here those evils which have brought it into existence elsewhere.