

FINNISH YOUTH MOVEMENT

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UNTIL recently, to have written about Finnish music without immediately mentioning Sibelius would have been rather fruitless. He ruled the field so completely that those about him seemed condemned to be mere satellites without individual existence — he stood as his country's only worthy representative. Sibelius' position in Finnish music, somewhat like that of Richard Strauss in Germany, has long been undisputed.

Until 1920 his personality swept everything in its wake, and as national romanticist, he had a deciding and stifling effect on the composers around him. But since that date this influence has been forced to yield to the power of the new styles which have appeared even in Finland. The young Finns honor and respect their "old master" but for ten years have been trying to go their own way. Today Finland has a generation of thirty to forty year old composers who seek contact with the new musical world, having eagerly turned their backs on Sibelianism. Trying to discover which of the European tendencies, more or less established as "schools," have obtained a foothold here, one finds interesting and unexpected developments.

Finland's contact with Central and West European efforts was determined by completely external factors. Geographical isolation, the great cost of presenting or even obtaining new foreign music, confined the introduction of new works into Finland to completely fortuitous circumstances. Young musicians desiring not to be cut off from the progress of music were advised to go to foreign lands themselves. Ready to accept the new, in their short periods of study they willingly yielded to prevailing tendencies. On many, these influences left a lasting impression, placing a stamp on their future composition. As yet no national note appears to vibrate in the music of these progressive men.

Their mode of expression contains nothing indicating a close relationship with their native soil, neither the austere reserve nor the grave lyrical elements which establish Sibelius as a master of Finnish art. On the contrary, a large number of these new works reveal a special predilection for external show and polished structure and an extremely colorful art of instrumentation, with its effects painstakingly planned. The young Finn's preference for the orchestra is especially noticeable, and for this too, external factors are partly responsible. There is a certain corollary to post-war Central European music, where different circumstances produced correspondingly different results. After the war, the young Germans were forced into chamber music by the limited prospect for orchestral performance and brought it to remarkable fruition. (The first battles for the new music were fought on the field of chamber music.) The young Finns, however, on their first appearance in the new music life of Finland, which developed several years later, found their only real opportunities in the field of the large orchestra, for the Helsingfors Radio and its ensemble were at their disposal, thanks to the progressiveness of the director, the high-ranking musicologist, Toivo Haapanen. Furthermore, Finland has no string quartet society like those which give regular or occasional performances in other countries and therefore encourage the creation of chamber music.

Most of the works of young Uuno Klami are for orchestra. What has been said previously about the fondness of many young Finns for a colorful, luxurious orchestral style, is especially applicable to him. He studied for some time with Florent Schmitt in Paris, fell under the influence of Ravel, completely foreign to his own nature, and later, of the early and middle Stravinsky. Such works as his *Karelische Rhapsody* or the *Kaleva Suite*, which have certain Finnish national elements, reveal the hand of a real expert and a master of impressionistic orchestral technic. Unfortunately he appears to have neglected his inner musical development in favor of external brilliance and bare orchestral effects. Thus there is a marked separation between the real substance of his music and its surface. But his great talent is unquestionable and it is to be hoped that when he

attains more maturity he will strive for depth in his music instead of merely skimming the surface.

In complete contrast to Klami is Aare Merikanto. A creator of character and unyielding consistency, he has given his work the stamp of an individual and strong personality. His music includes an opera, orchestral scores, concertos for different solo instruments and orchestra and chamber works in various settings. Most of these still await performance since their radical form makes acceptance by the otherwise complaisant radio difficult. Merikanto was a pupil of Reger, then studied for a short time in Moscow, and has gained really sovereign mastery of a technic which enables him to express his ideas with the greatest economy of means. Selecting only a few of his works, say the *Concertino for Violin, Clarinet, Horn and String Quartet*, which won the 1925 prize contest of the Schott-Verlag, or the latest of his violin concertos, we note the asceticism and the clarity of expression, the controlled form, which lend character to his music. Certain Schönbergian tendencies are visible, but they have produced individual results. Merikanto's music should be accepted outside of Finland — it is the speech of an interesting personality.

Sulho Ranta occupies a place between Klami and Merikanto. This young composer, after a Helsingfors education, studied until recently in Paris and Vienna. After first expressionistic attempts, with a readiness to break loose from tradition at any cost he reacted to influences of impressionism and jazz, to come to a pause in neo-classicism. He too, after chamber music beginnings, has turned to orchestral works, among which are several in the neglected field of program music, including a *Sinfonia Programmatica*, inspired by Greek mythology. While most of these show that he is still searching without yet having found himself, nevertheless they indicate a talent of favorable potentialities. Of his latest works, his *Sinfonia Piccola* is most significant. Ranta, who is a capable writer on music as well as a composer, has published a short history of music in Finnish, which illuminates the problems of modern music in a thorough and individual fashion.

To get a complete view of the production of the young Finns,

who have no publisher devoted to their interests, one is restricted to the study of not always easily obtained manuscripts. The list of those who are outstanding also includes Väänö Raitio and Eino Linnalla. Raitio, who has studied in Russia, has written numerous orchestral works, whose Franco-Russian tone is characteristic of him. His preference for a large and pretentious orchestra and his ecstatic expression are signs that Scriabinian tendencies have been transplanted even to Finland. Raitio's latest composition, *Prinzessa Cecilia*, is a large work, a complete evening's performance. Linnalla has made a favorable impression with a symphony and various choral works.

Apart from this group, stands Yrjö Kilpinen, a prolific and really individual composer of songs. Because of his conservative attitude, he has no share in the forward-looking efforts of the previously mentioned composers.

All of them, except Kilpinen, really follow a single goal, freedom from tradition, union with the new world. But they travel separate paths. We cannot yet speak of a young Finnish school, the tendencies are too varied and different. Most of these composers began their studies with the influential instructor of the younger Finnish generation, Erkki Melartin, who, after Sibelius, is the most important representative of Finland's older composers. A cosmopolite, in his comprehensive creation (two hundred opus numbers, including seven symphonies), he has espoused the most diverse, even conflicting styles, all with the sincerest conviction. Perhaps his eclecticism is the primary cause for the many directions taken by the younger generation; perhaps this juxtaposition of romanticism, neo-classicism, impressionism and linear polyphony is typical of them.