

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

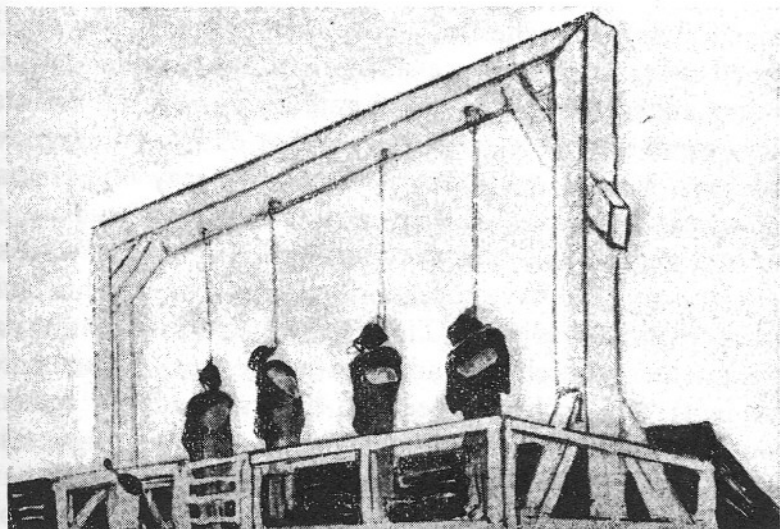
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NEW YORK, AUTUMN OF 1936

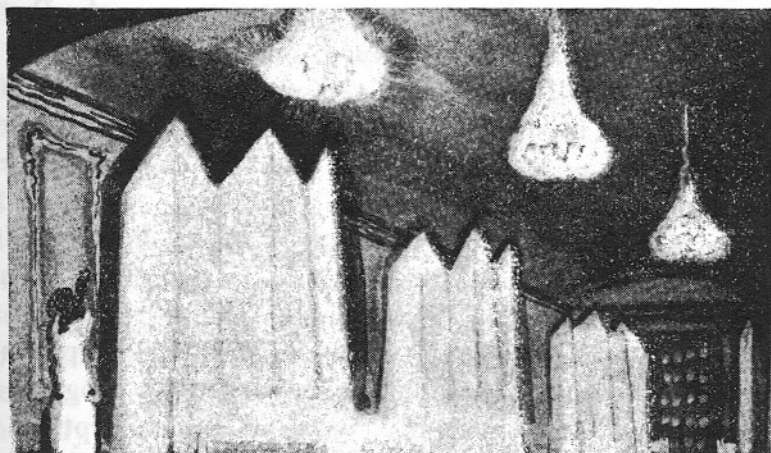
THE character and psychological mood of an orchestral work are definitely established at the beginning through the sonority of the orchestra. This sonority should form the key-note to the general orchestral timbre of the work; together with the musical material it develops in a logical manner. And when the performance is over, the listener should have the impression of a unity in orchestral treatment as well as in musical content. The two are interdependent. For a recent and beautiful example of this one has only to refer to the *Antigona* of Chavez. Here the emotional key is firmly established at the opening, primarily through sonority, and both musical content and timbre progress towards an inevitable conclusion.

I have never heard this principle satisfactorily observed in any English composer since Purcell. The English composers of today are colorists, but in the sense that a child with free reign in the paintbox is a colorist. What I mean is that it is impossible to foresee what will happen next. The orchestra is too often a series of surprises, chiefly because no acoustic program exists as a base. The number of English works played by Beecham last season illustrated this in a striking way. Particularly in the cases of Berners, Lambert, and Walton, the orchestration was what is known as "clever, witty," that is, a dazzling array of heterogeneous sounds, with no resonance. Many works required an elaborate percussion group. But the percussion never became organic; its various timbres were shaken into the score much as one shakes at random a little cayenne, turmeric or fenugreek into a curry.

Although Walton, in his new symphony (given recently for the first time here by the Philadelphians under Ormandy), has



THE BAYONET RUN



WAR HOSPITAL IN A PALACE

TWO SETTINGS FOR JOHNNY JOHNSON

*Designed by*

DONALD OENSLAGER

Drama with music by Paul Green and Kurt Weill,  
produced late in November by the Group Theatre

employed a simple orchestra, and claims to have treated it in a chastened way, former impressions obtained from his music remain unchanged. In the program note to this work it was stated that "the orchestra here employed is that of classic usage, with the addition of one trumpet. There is no array of percussion, and no attempt to dazzle the ear with orchestral virtuosity. The music is concentrated, without external distractions." In spite of this, it seemed to have too many conflicting elements, and to lack directness of purpose. The music opens in a state of artificial excitement which pervades the whole work. The contours are violent; the orchestra seethes, grows suddenly romantic; luscious cello melodies alternate with virtuoso string passages whose frenzy recalls Tchaikovsky. In short, there is no particular style except one resulting from an ill-assorted collection of romanticisms. The work fails to impress, because one does not feel that anything has been consistently stated, either in terms of the orchestra or the musical material.

But in comparison with the new symphonic poem by Bax, the Walton work seemed one of classic purity and taste. In this piece, *The Tale the Pine-Trees Knew*, given its first performance in New York by Barbirolli, Bax has thrown all restraint to the winds. It is the most diffuse "tone-poem" I have ever heard. Grieg, Dvorak, Debussy, Ravel, Negroisms and Slavisms crowd upon each other in a way long familiar through Hollywood symphonies. Celtic dreaminess is continually interrupted by the heroic stampings of Norse giants. The work aims at a romantic and legendary quality; but it is simply amorphous and incredibly long. I wish to quote once more from a program note, this time by Lawrence Gilman; "most of his conceptions stem from those abandoned days when loveliness had not yet become a cause of shame, and a composer dared to be a poet." Now this is not the time to discuss the implied reproach. But I do not think that loveliness and poetry are qualities which a composer of today deliberately eschews. Poetical impulse will always be an important factor in the urge to create, and surely no one is ever ashamed to be accused of having achieved loveliness. But poetry and beauty are not words which can be applied to the violent bed-time story that Bax has just released.

One should be grateful to Mr. Barbirolli for the string suite which he has arranged from music of Purcell. It is high time this composer became better known and appreciated in America. Purcell has a very individual style; the clarity of writing, the beautiful melodic line of his slow movements, the peculiar, personal way in which he achieves dissonance, all these elements unite in forming a music which is always a source of delight.

One of the novelties of the season was the Stokowski arrangement of music from *Boris Godunov*. It is hardly necessary to say that the orchestra glittered like a steel mirror in the sun, sending forth rays of light that would have completely blinded Moussorgsky. A noteworthy addition to the percussion group was the series of seven or eight Javanese gongs, of different sizes. These were used chiefly in the music calling for bells, although their sonority was often obscured by the elaborate superstructure of the orchestra. A gong cannot be struck loudly; the vibrations die at once. Strike it softly and, if it is a good one, the sound will continue as long as five minutes. Needless to say, they are at their best in the orchestra when their overtones are not "eaten into" by the orchestral sonority. Their presence in the Philadelphia Orchestra is one of the most stimulating additions to the percussion group in recent times; let composers take note!

The *Bunte Suite* for orchestra of Ernest Toch was heard recently at a Stassévitch concert. This is unimportant music, a sort of glib Hindemith of a period already dated. It is, however, beautifully scored, in a very special manner. The *Galante Passacaglia*, particularly, has a quite magical effect in its strange and mysterious sonorities.

The only other new work heard so far was the *Third Symphony* of Rachmaninov, performed by Stokowski. There is nothing to be said about this work from our point of view, except that admirers of Rachmaninov's music seemed definitely disappointed on hearing it.

Colin McPhee

PARADISE LOST and the FOURTEENTH of JULY

LAST June, Igor Markevitch's new work received its first Paris performance, under the young composer's direction, with the assistance of the Orchestre de la Société Philharmonique