

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

## FIRST FRUITS OF THE SEASON

THE whole question of what it means to be in front nowadays has been thrown up in our faces again by the concerts of contemporary music presented to us in the last few weeks. Messrs. Copland and Sessions let us hear some works of young men who do not know that the musical Civil War is over. Pro Musica gave us a miscellany ranging from Concord, Massachusetts, to the Ecole d'Arcueil and back again. The League of Composers played music of Saminsky and Hindemith. Mr. Damrosch brought forward Gershwin and Bloch; Mr. Mengelberg, Atterberg, Bucharoff and Whithorne; Mr. Stokowski, Casinière, Knipper and Szostakowicz.

In all this there was perhaps one first-class work, *Die Junge Magd*, Hindemith's song cycle that Madame Cahier sang for the League, accompanied by a chamber orchestra under Saminsky. None of the other composers were so fortunate in their interpreters. *Die Junge Magd* made a profound impression even though it came at the end of a long evening of music of uneven worth. The League would offer us a much better opportunity to know the works it presents if it gave only two or three first auditions each evening, and repeated the most important at the end of the concert. Koussevitzky set a good example when he followed that procedure last year with *Sept, Ils Sont Sept*. On the League's program there were no less than five composers, nearly all represented by works in more than one movement. All the music given seemed to indicate a greater mastery of idiom and a surer formal grasp than we have been used to in these years of search. There was a little, to be sure, where the search seemed still ahead. But in none of it was there any preoccupation with

means; its content was not uniformly important, but it was clearly with its content that the composers had been engaged.

It was something of a shock, then, to find that the group of young composers sheltered by Aaron Copland and Roger Sessions (Lopatnikoff excepted) are still a few years behind. The spirit of dada is no more contemporary or modern than the spirit of Straussian post-romanticism. The one is only the reaction from the other, and we have left both behind. It is a disappointment, therefore, to find that a musician of George Antheil's undoubted gifts has made no progress away from the perverse aimlessness that we knew two and three years ago. His first string quartet, played by the Société Musicale Indépendante in the spring of 1926, had unmistakable vigor. This second had hardly that. It returns, not to Bach or Mozart or Gounod, but to Kreutzer and Popper. A man of Antheil's talents cannot be altogether sterile rhythmically, but one feels that here too, he has encountered frustration. Yet even the negation of his genius gives an impression stronger than things like Cowell's *Paragraphs for Two Violins and Cello*, or Marc Blitzstein's settings of selections from Walt Whitman's *Children of Adam*. Cowell knows something about pianoforte sonority and he plays with a certain rhythm, so that when he plays one is never sure just how little his piano pieces mean. These *Paragraphs* that wander around for a score of measures to land on an inevitable triad leave one in no such uncertainty. Marc Blitzstein hid his talent completely behind his collection of *Coon Shouts*. I suppose that is one form of modesty. Wagenaar contributed a string of musical spores which he hopefully called a *Sonata*. Colin McPhee gave an excellent performance of a *Sonata* by Lopatnikoff, severe, logical and vigorous.

There have been few orchestral works of importance. Gershwin always has a public for his "serious" music—a public that is said to be lacking at his current musical comedy, where I have no doubt there is some excellent music to be heard. There is very little in his *American in Paris*. Its themes (except that of the taxi horns) are not very amusing, and the orchestration is exceptionally unattractive. The latter defect was made strikingly apparent, of course, by contrast with Ernest Bloch's prize-work,

*America*, which stood on the same program. The latter, I understand, was written, or largely blocked out, before the prize was offered. It cannot be dismissed, therefore, as a prize composition. At any rate, no one who knows Bloch will be surprised at his having written an apotheosis of America, past, present and to be. If the anthem, which is foreshadowed and developed throughout the work and written out for chorus and "the people," at the end, were less banal, the work would be a contemporary masterpiece; as it is, the nobility of conception and execution of a major portion are dragged down by the commonplaceness of the hymn tune. Haydn wrote a tune "any bootblack" could sing, without descending as far as Bloch has. That the work was written in the greatest enthusiasm and sincerity is not enough.

None of the other orchestral novelties presented was of even comparable importance.

At the Opera House we have had *The Egyptian Helen* of Richard Strauss, and *The Sunken Bell* of Respighi. The former echoes the Strauss of another day, who was himself not too substantial an echo of greater men. *The Sunken Bell* echoes Puccini, but it has not even the coherence or the mellifluous sentimentality of Puccini to recommend it.

*Arthur Mendel*

## JONNY OVER THERE

AS this is written *Jonny* is still within several weeks of striking up at the Metropolitan. I am therefore unable to report what changes have been made to fit Krenek's opus for American consumption. Nothing definite in regard to such modifications has thus far leaked out from behind the little black door at Thirty-ninth Street and Seventh Avenue. But that something of the sort is contemplated I firmly believe, unless the wise men of the Metropolitan want the opera to be laughed into an early grave.

I do not think that producing *Jonny Spielt Auf* in America is really an act of kindness to Ernst Krenek. It would have been doing the young man a greater service if the Metropolitan board of directors had chipped in, raised a few thousand dollars to