

AMERICAN CONDUCTOR AND WORKS FOR L. A.

THE appointment of Alfred Wallenstein to head the Los Angeles Philharmonic has given rise to fresh but conflicting hopes for the improvement of the local musical situation. Various "special interests" are already presuming to read into his appointment a vindication of their own private criticisms of the orchestra's past policies and a recognition of their privately spoken recommendations for future action. Thus the classicists, recalling Wallenstein's Bach cantata and Mozart concerto series from WOR, expect that he will bring about the revitalization of the orchestra by an extensive revival of eighteenth century music. Softer souls, remembering a particularly luscious reading of Rachmaninov's *Second Symphony* two seasons ago when Wallenstein guest-conducted, look forward to a full-blown romantic revival. Even the chamber-of-commerce mentalities have great expectations: Wallenstein's native American enterprise will guarantee ending the season in black. The American conductor, it seems, is more endowed with enterprise than with musicianship.

All of this is manifestly unfair. So far, according to all reports, the new conductor has been concentrating on getting his band together and composing programs, which are his proper business. To date (end of October) he has committed himself only to one plank of a platform: fair representation to American composers. These works will get Philharmonic premieres: Paul Creston's *First Symphony*, Roy Harris' *Third*, Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait* and *Billy the Kid*, Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*, Russell Bennett's *The Four Freedoms*, Schuman's *A Free Song*, Barber's *Second Essay*, excerpts from *Porgy and Bess* and an overture by Morton Gould. Besides, there will be Shostakovitch's *Seventh*, two of Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas*, and pieces by such last-generation contemporaries as Ravel, Enesco, Albeniz, Kodaly, Turina and Sibelius.

The list will hardly impress most readers of this journal and they will doubtless note obvious omissions. But for Philharmonic audiences the program is a fairly bold one, accustomed as they are to having all contemporary music doled out timidly if not grudgingly. In spite of this conservative policy, the orchestra's annual statistics about performances of American works make a respectable showing in figures. But the figures are deceptive since they make no distinctions between a symphony by Harris, for instance, and a grand waltz by Gottschalk orchestrated by a second-rate studio arranger. So that we may have heard half a hundred

American works without having heard five representative of our best talents. In general, the impression given is that American music is overtures, comedy scherzos, animal pictures and patriotic clap-trap. Such being the case, Wallenstein's list is most encouraging: there are several works of large size, and the names of many of the composers appear for the first time on a Philharmonic program.

Meanwhile Werner Janssen continues to prove his faith in new music by opening his fourth season with local premières of Kabalevsky's *Overture to Colas Brugnon*, Copland's *Quiet City*, Dubensky's *Fugue for Violins* and Hindemith's *Symphony in E \flat* – strange company indeed for an Elman performance of the Tchaikowsky *Concerto*. The Copland piece confirmed rather than added to the general high regard for his work. Hindemith's symphony, on the other hand, has enhanced the composer's reputation immeasurably, scoring a very great popular success and winning over many listeners who had hitherto been skeptical. For them, what had been at best merely persuasive in other works proved now to be commanding. The nobility of the themes and the molding of them into designs of magnificent sweep and power, the sureness of craft and consciousness of mastery – these gave the music qualities of justness and inevitability which only a handful of today's composers are capable of achieving. For future programs Janssen promises Vaughan-Williams' *Fifth Symphony*, Piston's *Sinfonietta*, Villa-Lobos' *Uirapuru* and a first anywhere of Robert Delaney's choral work, *Western Star*, with text by Stephen Vincent Benet.

In the field of chamber music there have been new pieces by Ernst Toch, Adolph Weiss and Ingolf Dahl. Toch has a song cycle, *Poems to Martha*, for baritone and string quartet. It is pure lavender and old lace, both in its idiom and in its sentiment. Expertly fashioned, it gives evidence that Toch means to forego the risks of "modernity," to the development of which he made definite contributions some decades ago, and return to the comparative safety of the last generation. Weiss' *Concerto* for bassoon and string quartet is the most accessible and exciting music that I have heard from this composer. All of its three movements are based on a tiny figure consisting of a semitone and a minor third. The expansion of this motive is carried out with the utmost scholarship and imagination, the two so completely complementary and so justly balanced that the end result is a composition which should prove to have a very great audience appeal. Ingolf Dahl's *Toccata and Arioso* for woodwind quintet is its composer's most ambitious effort. Reflecting his very inclusive knowledge of the whole field of contemporary music, it shows many diverse influences

to be at work. It might be said that there has been an attempt to weld together some of the rhythmic versatility of Stravinsky, the contrapuntal procedures of Hindemith and the expressionism of Berg. Of these the last is by far the strongest and probably represents most completely the composer's own musical thought. This seems to me to be true even when the pages look most like Stravinsky and when the players are most busily engaged in making their proper contrapuntal entrances. Dahl's work is shortly to be heard in the East under the sponsorship of the National Composers' Clinic.

Lawrence Morton

WHERE NATIONS STILL MEET

Geneva

SWITZERLAND continues to be an outpost of cultural activity in the midst of ever-encroaching war. It practices a kind of musical lease-lend. Composers and musicians from many other lands appear in its concert halls; and if they themselves are not present their music is heard, while works of Swiss composers as well as those of foreigners are broadcast to the world by Helvetian radio stations. Even in the smallest cities – the very names unfamiliar to most readers, like La Chaux-de-Fonds, Soleure, Lenzburg, Baden and Frauenfeld – there are a remarkable number of orchestral, choral and chamber music concerts. The sympathetic audience is a lodestone for internationally known virtuosi. Especially striking has been the interest of this local public in contemporary music.

In Switzerland there has been close collaboration between those interested in modern music and the leaders of university circles. Students' associations in the two Zurich universities support Pro-Musica; the University of Geneva has assisted the Groupe Culturel de la Chambre Syndicale des Artistes-Musiciens in organizing the "Tuesday Forums" at the Maison Internationale des Etudiants. The first was intended to prepare for the hearing of Arthur Honegger's new symphony; Ernest Ansermet expounded the composer's ideas and tendencies. Then followed a lecture by Marcel Raymond, eminent professor of literature, on C. F. Ramuz and his spiritual relationship to Igor Stravinsky, whose *L'Histoire du soldat* was also scheduled for the series. The success of the lecture-recitals, which attract crowds of young people, will undoubtedly develop the circle as a center of modern music, and expand the students' interest in the important works of today.