

INTER-AMERICAN REVIEW

BIG THREE IN MEXICO

THE Symphony Orchestra of Mexico occupies, on the whole, the most important position in the musical life of the country, for quantity and quality of programs, caliber of its guest artists and prestige of its director, the composer Carlos Chavez. Concerts run from the middle of May until early in September, the musical season in Mexico City. Like all large orchestral organizations, the Symphony supports itself by subsidies, patronage, subscriptions and the public sale of tickets. Official assistance permits daily rehearsal for the weekly program (offered Friday nights and repeated Sunday mornings), which makes it possible to achieve technical proficiency and, especially, to study new scores.

During the past season of seventeen concerts, more than forty works by moderns and contemporaries were presented – a really extraordinary number for any orchestra in the world – and of these more than twenty were played for the first time in Mexico. The presence of three great contemporary composers, Stravinsky, Milhaud and Hindemith, as guest conductors in programs mainly of their own works, made this an exceptional season. Whether or not the Mexican public understood the eminent masters, they showed their interest and sympathy by crowding the theatre at the Palace of the Fine Arts and applauding with great enthusiasm.

The music of Milhaud, moderate in taste and more emotional than that of other contemporaries, was the most easily understood. Hindemith's too evident craftsmanship and coldness impressed the public less. The extraordinary musicality and genial talent of Stravinsky caused, as always, disagreement and amazement, and was the most applauded of all.

Some of Chavez's most interesting interpretations were of the *Fifth Symphony* by Prokofiev, the Russian work most admired in Mexico, Aaron Copland's exciting *Short Symphony*, Chavez's own *Four Nocturnes*, which are surrealist in expression, and his *Piano Concerto* (with Sandor as soloist), a most profoundly Mexican, but not nationalistic work.

The Monday Concerts were organized in March by a group of composers and musicologists – Adolfo Salazar, Chavez, Luis Sandi, Blas Galindo, Rodolfo Halffter, Pablo Moncayo and Jesus Bel y Gay – to present their own works and those of other composers, mainly contemporary. They have aroused a great deal of interest in professional circles, and it is hoped that this interest will soon extend to a less restricted public. The participation of the organizers and other distinguished interpreters gives these programs a special atmosphere. At one concert Chavez was at the piano as accompanist to his own and other songs; at another Milhaud accompanied

the singer Raoul Jobin. The group is also publishing a bi-monthly review, *Nuestra Musica*.

Another group, Chamber Music of Mexico, cultivates the taste for classic and romantic chamber music. At their six concerts we heard some little known works, a quintet with guitar by Boccherini, a quartet, also with guitar, attributed to Haydn but probably not his, as well as some works of slight interest by contemporary Mexicans of the conservative school.

The University Symphony Orchestra presented a spring series and announces another for the autumn. Aspiring to a more professional status, it has moved its concerts into the Palace of Fine Arts and has imported guest conductors for three concerts – Daniel Ayala from Merida, Reginald Stewart from Baltimore and the South American composer, Marcel Rubin. But in the new surroundings, and without the old enthusiastic student audience, the instrumental shortcomings of the group were only too apparent.

Under the direction of Francisco Agea, the National Conservatory of Music seems to be emerging at last from its stagnation of recent years. In addition to public recitals by students, the Conservatory offered a series of concerts at the Palace of Fine Arts at which we heard various important modern works together with others little known to the Mexican public. One of the programs, dedicated entirely to Respighi, included his orchestral suite, *Gli Uccelli*, whose rough draft, in the composer's own manuscript, was recently given to the Conservatory by his widow. Another program offered *L'Enfant prodigue* by Debussy and Milhaud's *Le pauvre matelot*, both sung for the first time in Mexico. The *Sonata* for two pianos and percussion by Bartok and the concerto tryptich, *Maria Egiziaca*, by Respighi, were also given first performances here in this series.

There have not been many public lectures on music this year. Milhaud, during his stay in Mexico, gave three on themes related to his own work. The Spanish musicologist, Salazar, who has been living here for several years, is lecturing on *Dance and Ballet*, sponsored by the College of Mexico. The writer is outlining the history of music in a series of talks illustrated with the most important recordings, and the Society of the Folklore of Music continues its regular sessions.

The zeal of Carlos Chavez in encouraging symphonic activity is at last bearing fruit in the whole republic. Various local orchestras are growing up, modeled on the Symphony Orchestra of Mexico. Outstanding are those of Jalapa, directed by José Limantur, of Guadalajara, directed by Leslie Hodge, of Merida, with Daniel Ayala as conductor, and the new Puebla Symphony under the direction of Higinio Ruvalcaba.

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