

ALEXANDRIAN AMERICA

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AMERICA today is in the process of absorbing a great cultural migration and in particular, a great musical migration. Here there are now assembled a preponderant number of the leading composers, conductors, artists and musicologists of this generation, almost all the important and gifted musicians of Europe. But before we discuss the significance of that change, let us consider the effect of migrations in general and their resultant ethnic mixtures, on music.

History tells us that not only great dispersions of peoples, but also the internal political and economic tensions within nations have been attended by corresponding movements of musicians. Thus the old Greek migrations eventually led to the development of varied musical modes and varied methods of instrumentation. These contributed later to the character and unity of Hellenic music. After the time of Christ, Eastern elements were carried by migrants into European music. These still characterize modern Occidental music in its instrumentation, rhythm, and melody. They were in turn borne to all points of the compass. The German nationalistic musicologist, Heinrich Bessler (*Die Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*), speaking of this formative Oriental influence in medieval music, says "Wherever a broad stream of Germanic settlers has been fused with the native populations we find, eventually, new and unified cultural structures. It is only a conjunction of diverse elements that creates the tension which is later resolved in spontaneous, artistic activity. On the other hand, old Germanic soil seems, so far as musical history goes, to have been relatively unproductive. The proverb 'Frisia non cantat,' applies to original creation in the old Saxon homeland and the entire territory of the North Germanic tribes (Scandinavian)." These statements differ of course from the racial theories currently held by the National Socialists and are by implication in direct opposition to their new policy of re-establishing in the homeland all German ethnic groups from Italy, Roumania, and the

East. The high musical level of all the eastern border peoples appears to a great degree to be the result of ethnic mixtures. But let us further examine Besseler's theory.

The rich musical territories of Europe lie on the periphery. Wherever racial and ethnic fusions take place, in short where there have been migrations, musical life has followed. England, which suffered invasion by the Saxons, Norwegians, Danes and Normans; Italy, the melting pot of Germanic, Slavic, Greek, and Italic groups; eastern Germany, which domiciled the Germans, Slavs, Huns, Avars, Magyars and Turks – these have been the musically fertile lands of Europe since medieval times, and in these territories the periods of unusual production seem to coincide with the periods of ethnic assimilation.

The Gothic style in music developed in sections of Romanic Gaul settled by the Franks, that is, northeastern France. To what degree this disseminating center was responsible for the "Netherlandic Age" in Flanders, Brabant and Hennegau cannot be determined, but at any rate these in turn were a center for various influences of German, Gallic, English and Scandinavian influences. The migrations of the Germanic tribes to Italy and the subsequent mixture of the Longobardi with the Romanic population gave us the music of the Venetians (Gabrieli, Monteverdi, Cavalli, Cesti) and the Neapolitan opera.

It has long been clear that in the development of German music, or more properly speaking, Middle-European music, the important sections are those lying in the east and south, territories which were in the path of migrations from the east. To these belongs Thuringia, whence Bach and Händel came; the Bachs indeed had some Hungarian blood. Thuringia represents a mixture of Germanic and Slavic tribes which fused into a new unit and produced a new culture.

The English ethnic mixture of the Middle Ages expressed itself in the unified culture of the Elizabethan Age.

The Czech musical school of the eighteenth century and, more important, the Viennese classical school, we owe to the mixture of Slavic and German tribes in the Danubian and East Elbian sections from the fourteen through the sixteen hundreds and, principally, during the Thirty Years' War. The Czechs were Slavs who penetrated farthest west and brought with them from their eastern homeland a rich treasure of folksong and dance. They came in contact with a highly cultivated German population which itself was a fusion of Germanic tribes with the original Celtic popu-

lation. Bohemia above all other sections was an ethnic melting pot in the Thirty Years' War. After the effects of war had passed, there developed a musical renaissance, to be followed in the eighteenth century by a musical migration such as had not been experienced before in the history of music and which was due primarily to economic reasons.

After the development of Italian opera around 1600, a flood of Italian musicians spread out over France, Germany and England. Prosperous France, whose ethnological development had long been concluded and whose musical life had become sterile, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries drew its best musicians out of Italy (Cavalli, Lully, Piccini); in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from Germany (Gluck, Meyerbeer and Offenbach). France indeed had so strong an attraction for foreign musicians that they tried to write a music more French than that of the natives. Although Händel remained a German even after he had gone to England, like the Italian, Lully, who had created the French national opera in Paris, he produced the English national musical work of art, the epic oratorio. And the German Bohemian, Pepusch, took part in the creation of that most genuinely English national opera, *The Beggar's Opera*.

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I do not, however, believe that today an Americanization of the European composers – of men like Krenek, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Milhaud, Bartok and Weinberger will take place. They may, perhaps, discover new forms of art suited to American life as Händel once did for the English, but Schönberg will always remain Austrian, and Bartok always a Hungarian. Schönberg himself recently gave a forthright expression to this conviction in an interview in the *New York Times*.

Under the famous Professor Sievers in Leipzig an elaborate study was once made to determine whether the musical rhythm of Meyerbeer and Offenbach had been affected by their nationality. The conclusion was that both men – even Offenbach, the "most French of all composers," had retained certain peculiar German characteristics, probably the result of the linguistic rhythm every individual owes to his mother tongue. Anton Dvorak's son once told me that his father designated the *New World Symphony*, which American journalists sometimes refer to as the beginning of a new American music, as perhaps the most Czech of his works. A Bohemian myself, I feel in the "American" parts a genuine Czech homesickness.

But the second generation of musical emigrants will certainly be completely Americanized. What will this Americanism be like? Will ear and

eye be directed toward Europe, or will they be firmly fixed on American soil? I believe the latter will be true. For the music of Europe belongs to the past.

I am convinced however that musical America is destined to fulfill a tremendous mission of conservation, the conservation of Europe's great cultural values. Indeed, she is already fulfilling it. America today invites comparison with Alexandria of antiquity. After Rome had subdued Greece, Greek culture sought refuge in Egypt. The dynasty founded by Ptolemy, a general of Alexander the Great, made Alexandria a brilliant center of Hellenistic culture in which the Greek tradition was cultivated and extended.

The outstanding characteristic of that era is not so much that it created culture, but that it preserved and commented on it. It was a culture of scholarship, symbolized by the renowned Alexandrian Library. Here historians, physicians, scientists and other scholars found a new homeland. Here lived the most important musicologists of antiquity and of the Middle Ages - Claudius Ptolemy, whose teachings of harmony dominated the musical science of the Middle Ages, Euclides, Didymos and others. For eight full centuries this Alexandrian culture maintained itself.

Compared with Europe today America appears to be a second Alexandria. In the past twenty-five years there has been a tremendous growth of musical activity, but the reproductive element has been much stronger than the creative. The gargantuan, technically perfect radio system surfeits us with elaborate performances of the best, even the rarest works of former centuries, carrying them to the most distant parts of the country, to the isolated prairies, to the Arctic. Millions are now acquainted with music. And the phonograph not only preserves works of art, but preserves them as they are played. A mighty network of musical libraries helps to spread knowledge.

Above all, the gigantic Library of Congress is like the great Library of Alexandria. It has the largest operatic collection in the world. The inter-library loan service, unknown to Europe, has put every book at the disposal of anybody who has need of it. And now all the great musical manuscripts of the masters can even be photographed and made available. The best orchestras with the best artists in the world help to cultivate and spread the music of the past. The most important musicologists at the universities, colleges and other schools teach the history, philosophy and science of music. Musical education begins in the elementary schools and continues through the university. Even the smallest schools have their own or-



KRENEK



HINDEMITH



STRAVINSKY



WOLPE

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NOW LIVING IN AMERICA

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The Well-known Artist

B. F. DOLBIN



BARTOK



MILHAUD



SCHÖNBERG



BRITTEN



WEILL

chestras. Music here is not a matter of individual talent – as it was in modern Europe – but it is a goal of general education, as in the Middle Ages.

This enormous, elaborate cultivation of the music of the past on a scale hitherto unknown in the world, has a significance which, in my opinion, at present overshadows the cultivation of native music. Some years ago the German critic Benz forecast the coming century as an era of "Wiederklang," an echoing of the music of former ages. It almost seems as if that prophecy were being fulfilled in America, that America has become the land of European music. And that, it seems to me, is the significance of the present, the latest European migration, which surpasses in importance, all previous musical migrations.