

freshened up with a few small compositions, *Dionys* by Schen-schin, and the Slavic Dances of Behr.

At the present moment the Moscow and Leningrad ballet and opera offer programs strongly colored by romanticism. The operas of Tschaikowsky, Rimsky-Korsakow, Borodin and Moussorgsky are still the greatest attractions. Leningrad however has more of a Western orientation. Here we have heard Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Krenek's *Jonny* and *Sprung über den Schatten*, Schilling's *Mona Lisa*, as well as Strauss' *Salome*, Wagner's *Ring* (with the exception of Siegfried). But in the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre the choice of works is made much more carefully, being confined principally to the nineteenth century standbys, splendidly staged. No venturing here into the uncertain waters of the twentieth century. The daring is furnished by Nemirowitsch-Dantchenko's progressively minded opera theatre known in America through its guest tour. The Moscow premiere of Schostakowitch's *Lady Macbeth* is to take place here. The Bolshoi Theatre's competition for a new opera promises a rich harvest, the results to be made known, however, only in November.

Eugen Braudo

## BOSTON'S FIRST TIMES

FOR the sixty subscription concerts that the Boston Symphony Orchestra gives annually in its own city, Dr. Koussevitzky assembles twenty-four programs. With few exceptions, each of the twenty-four programs includes one piece new to Boston. It may be a long neglected work that the conductor believes worthy of revival, or a recent work of a living composer for which he has at last found room. Usually, however, it is music of the present hour for the first time anywhere; or for the first time, as the program-book has it, in the United States.

The outcome is an array of "novelties," season after season, that no other orchestra in America may equal. Some pass quickly under the process that business men name "trial and error."

Others prove of sufficient interest to be transferred to the concerts of the Boston Orchestra in New York. Others still exact a chorus, too costly in these times to be conveyed to another city. A few more may require the presence of a pianist, or other "assisting artist," not at disposal for repetition in Carnegie Hall. A final few are dropped merely because they fail to fit into these New York programs, or because the conductor wavers over them until there is no available room.

Take, for example, the two new choral-orchestral works of the season lately ended. One was William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, requiring a full mixed choir and an occasional baritone solo-voice. The other was Loeffler's *Evocation*, using incidentally a women's choir and, still more briefly, a "speaker." *Belshazzar's Feast* was heard for the first time in America; *Evocation* for the first time outside the concerts of the Cleveland Orchestra for the dedication of whose new hall it was written. Osbert Sitwell, the minor English poet, assembled for *Belshazzar's Feast* a text drawn from the Book of Psalms and from the Book of Daniel. The first division sets forth the vindictive mourning of the tribes of Israel in Babylonish captivity. The second recounts the "great feast," the handwriting on the wall, the doom and destruction. The third is Israel's savage psalm of triumph. There are "purple" descriptive passages about the "great city" and its gods, but even there the text is stripped and sinewy. Throughout Sitwell writes with keen sense of words for massed music.

Throughout also, Walton writes as a composer who, being English and working in England, can find no outlet into opera for his dramatizing instincts. Therefore he does the next best thing and embodies the feast in choral music that is theatre-music without a stage. There is no doubting both the theatre-sense and the dramatizing power with which he uses the massed or divided voices, the driving and projecting orchestra, the thrusts at capital moments by the solo-voice. The music of the captivity signifies dramatically by the sullen, restless menace that underlies the sharper-voiced wailing. The psalm of rejoicing is a barbaric shout of frenzied counterpoint masterfully conducted, relieved by a sombered interlude of the fallen city,

but prolonged beyond its climax. Walton writes in an idiom that is neither old-fashioned nor new-fashioned; that assimilates all his means into his own imagination for his own purpose. His invention and resource are inexhaustible. Through half an hour, almost to the end, he sustains *Belshazzar's Feast* at unflagging pitch of graphic and dramatic power. Whatever he may will in future, he seems ripe to accomplish.

Loeffler's *Evocation* is at the opposite pole. A composer of literary as well as musical culture, he opens the Greek Anthology; finds in it verses for his chorus of nymphs to sing, plaintive for Pan departed from their groves into the new temple man has reared for him. By that temple Loeffler sets, again from the Anthology, the stone singing because upon it Apollo once laid his lyre. Out of a confused, clouded fugue, *Evocation* expands into clear line, light and color. A practised, plastic hand shapes the design. The orchestral and the vocal melody is sinuous, fine-textured, tinged with melancholy, curiously suggestive of the viola that the composer long played and since has cherished.

This melody, once the fugue is dispelled, floats upon an iridescent stream of harmonic and instrumental color out of Loeffler's ripe resource and sensitized imagination. Saxophones (which he believes neglected instruments) and a deep-toned vibra-harp enrich it. The whole music seeks and gains the luminosity and serenity, the ancient beauty of the classic poets. For them Loeffler writes in quasi-modern but altogether individual tones—writes at seventy as though he were in full prime.

Two pieces for orchestra and piano were unheard outside Symphony Hall: Schmitt's *Symphonie Concertante* played for the first time anywhere with the composer as pianist; Bax's *Winter Legends*, for the first time in America, with Miss Harriet Cohen in a considerable and sometimes preponderant piano-part. Schmitt outdid himself in intricacy and abundance, unfolded a musical idea only to obscure it with offshoots, redundancies and embellishments; proceeded by an insistent and tireless cerebration. At the end of forty minutes he, an exhausted conductor and an exhausted orchestra achieved a work of the largest dimensions in which it was often impossible to descry

the wood for the trees. Through the undergrowth of notes wound a piano-part along which even the composer found his way with difficulty. The only clearing was a Debussyan slow movement. In this respite the listener heard, understood, occasionally felt.

Bax's *Winter Legends* came off more fortunately. Again the ancient, bardic North stirs the composer to music-making. He would be landscapist in tones like Sibelius. He would be romanticist hearing heroic tales told by blazing fires in smoky halls to listening warriors in their cups and ease. He would also be twentieth-century composer gaining these ends by ample but austere symphonic means. Consequently a music that sloughs away the lush Bax of the earlier years; that often runs cold and beats hard especially in the piano-part; that maintains itself by inherent strength, propulsive force and imaginative suggestion. To hear was to be impressed, yet to feel for the twentieth time that some shortcoming in Bax once more denied him full accomplishment.

Two lesser works, withheld from New York, deserve a word: Hill's *Sinfonietta in One Movement*; Martinu's curiously titled *String Quartet with Orchestra*. The first was written at Koussevitzky's suggestion to condense into a brief, compact music the evolution and the successive moods of a full symphony. The composer answered with thought and will, resource and skill. But when all was said and done there remained an occasional piece that lacked creative warmth and imaginative impulse. The mind was interested in Mr. Hill's readiness and dexterity; most other perceptive faculties wandered. Martinu's *Concerto Grosso*, with a string quartet for solo-instruments, exhibited the earmarks of the neo-classicists—a precise and orthodox form; a music contained and complete within its own patterns; the newer counterpoint abundantly and acridly in flow.

Between the Flute-Players Club and the Chardon Quartet from the string choir of the Symphony Orchestra, Boston has also heard chamber-music that New York knows not—notably a *Quartet* by Walter Piston of the younger Americans. A trustworthy colleague who has twice listened to the piece may replace the present chronicler: "Mr. Piston's quartet is notably

well-made; is thoroughly at home in the newer idioms; has for basis persuasive thematic matter; will stand comparison with the best of the new things from the other side of the Atlantic."

H. T. Parker

### NEW MUSIC IN CHICAGO

AS USUAL, the significant novelties of the Chicago season were introduced by two agencies, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the local chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music. Mr. Stock and the orchestra gave about twenty first performances. Of these twenty-odd works six remain strong in one's memory after the season is over. Of the six, five were by Russians—Stravinsky, Prokofieff, Schostakovitch, Dukelsky and Miaskowsky, and one by an American, DeLamarter. The most impressive was the least novel, the Stravinsky *Symphony of the Psalms*, which had been frequently played and broadcast before it received public performance in Chicago. This performance was not particularly good, but the music's enormous sincerity and deep ascetic expressiveness could not be smothered. It is possibly the greatest work Stravinsky has written since *The Rite of Spring*. If my judgment of it is correct it means that Stravinsky, as completely and thoroughly modern a man as one can find, has composed his two finest creations on religious themes.

The Prokofieff *Fifth Piano Concerto* was the composer's vehicle as soloist with most of the big orchestras of the country. Except for a certain Bach-like interlacing of counterpoint in the slow movement I found in it little that Prokofieff has not said before a thousand times. There were the same vigor and the same sparkle and sly edges of satire. Prokofieff also conducted a new suite from an old opera, *The Gambler*, based on Dostoievsky, which sounded like a mad noise when he played it in Chicago and like a totally different work when Koussevitzky broadcast it from Boston.

Dukelsky and Schostakovitch were represented by symphonies of radically different character. Dukelsky's work proved a very light, sophisticated, melodious and brief affair. The third sym-