

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

bring him over here for five or six months and then shipped him back to re-write his stuff after he had assimilated what the night clubs and the "nigger belts" could teach him. For Mr. Krenek is somewhat in the predicament of good Captain Corcoran—"he means well, but he don't know."

A few days after seeing *Jonny* at the Deutsches Opernhaus in Berlin last summer I happened to discuss the work with Intendant Leopold Sachse, of the Hamburg Stadttheater. Herr Sachse was party to the instigation of *Jonny*. He became struck by what he considered the jaunty demeanor and the swank of Krenek's scheme. He mounted the piece with all the benefits of Hamburg's new Ferris-wheel type of stage. He had more than one good word for it. And yet he ended up with the shrewd reflection: "Why should you people want *Jonny*? It isn't for Americans, it's for Europeans!"

That is the long and short of it. *Jonny Spielt Auf* (and I say this with no reference whatever to its sleazy musical qualities) is a good, home-grown European's assurance of his own jazzification. The people who believe it a veracious representation of influences from the general direction of Sandy Hook are, after all, just sons and daughters of the generation which was easily persuaded that red Indians roamed Broadway and that lions mingled with the shoppers on Twenty-third Street. They get out of it some of the same vicarious thrill that part of our best domesticated ladyhood derives from the topographical tea shops of Alice Macdougall, where flappers and matrons can take nourishment amid tailor-made illusions of Italy and Spain. I should not be surprised if Krenek considered *Jonny* a vindication of his own thorough "Amerikanisierung"—a condition to which innumerable Germans nowadays aspire. And then does not the black-skinned, jazz-venting scamp conquer the world in the last act and achieve there a kind of apotheosis? "Es kommt die neue Welt übers Meer Gefahren mit Glanz und erbt das alte Europa durch den Tanz," all unite in singing at the last curtain.

"The new world comes sailing over the sea in splendor . . ."

Such being Krenek's conviction he probably felt no need to sail over the sea himself in order to make sure that what came sailing his way was the real thing. That is precisely one of the tragedies

of this piece. In a manner it will be a pity if *Jonny* is put before us very radically altered. For the opera itself is of vastly less consequence as an art work (in which aspect I venture to believe it is of no consequence whatsoever) than as a mirror of what some people conceive American elements and influences to be. The supposedly American features of Krenek's opera are about as American as a Konditorei on the Kurfürstendamm.

Of course, if the Metropolitan translates *Jonny* from a negro to a white or a gypsy or something else in deference to what many are pleased to consider the inexpugnable proprieties the stultification of the work will be complete. For to Krenek *Jonny* incorporates the spirit of jazz, and jazz in turn the all-conquering spirit of the dance (never mind the kind of stuff the composer turns out by way of jazz). Since witnessing the piece I have often wondered whether any flesh and blood negro sat for the black that Krenek drew or whether the composer-librettist evolved him as did the artist the famous camel. The impersonation I saw at Charlottenburg from the baritone Ludwig Hoffman—reputed one of the best Jonnys in Germany—was a simian burlesque. When I protested to some German friends that negroes did not act or talk that way I was admonished that when they were in Europe they did. Yet the actor in the case should not be charged with the main burden of the offense. He did little more than text and stage directions demanded. What is a defenseless singer to do if he has to blacken his face and hands and then in all seriousness say: "Oh! by Jove, die weisse Frau ist schön!" It is not the German in the case that sounds ridiculous, but the "by Jove!" One evening in a One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street cabaret would forever have cured Herr Krenek of that sort of thing. And if he tarried a little longer in Manhattan I doubt if he would ever have permitted Jonny to declare: "Oh! my dear, so ist gut! Oh! you know I love ydu!" Neither would he have let him consider going back to Alabama (of all places!) with a stolen Strad in his baggage. Yet while several of us writhed in our *erste Parkett* seats in Berlin that September night, the singer, to a phrase of *Old Folks at Home* went on unmercifully thus: "Ich werde Alabama wieder schauen und meinen lieben Swanee River nie verlassen!"

By way of a "song hit" (which Berlin audiences usually re-demand) the opera boasts a passage for Jonny (it is also worked up into a triumphant finale) as he gloats over the violin he filched and over what he conceives to be his proved destiny. The passage is a C major *maestoso*, marked in the score "im Ton eines Neger Spirituals." Krenek's notion of a negro spiritual sounds like the fruit of a union between a German chorale and a Turnverein solemnity. As for the harmonization, one hears it with an uneasy suspicion that someone must have furnished Krenek with a *Deep River* or two as treated by our own worthy Harry Burleigh.

And why, when all's said, so much pother and glorification over a violin? Doesn't Herr Krenek know that the instrument sacred above all others to jazz is the saxophone, not the fiddle?

Herbert Peyser

STRAVINSKY AND RAVEL, WINTER, 1928

FOLLOWING in the footsteps of Serge Diaghilev, Mme. Ida Rubinstein has undertaken the organization of a ballet company and the staging of new works, enlisting some of the best musicians of today. While we may regret that all she asked of Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud was a simple arrangement of old works, she did at least order original compositions from Stravinsky and Ravel.

First then, let me state my disappointment on hearing the *Baiser de la Fée* of Igor Stravinsky. We all know, of course, that the great Russian master has undertaken to create the ancient forms anew. He has given us a *Sonate*, a *Concerto*, an *Oratorio*, an *Opéra*, and finally, last year, a classical ballet, *Apollon*.

When we think of the creative powers revealed in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Les Noces*, *L'Histoire du Soldat* and the *Octuor*, of the great number of this composer's works which have literally transformed the aspect of music, we regret to see him halt in his progress and strive to infuse new life into forms which fail to meet the needs of our emotions. But this reactionary movement in artistic creation is general today. There is no doubt that in music, as in painting and literature, we have gone too far and feel the need of a new classicism. I believe, however, that the best