

The revival of *L'Histoire du Soldat* gave us an accurate, biting reading of the score, one of those heart-warming performances, when each man playing knows and loves the work; the dancers were not nearly so good.

*Marc Blitzstein*

## ROCHESTER'S AMERICAN SERIES

**I**T is a commentary on the condition of native music in America that a single city of a third of a million harbors annually the production of more new American symphonic works than probably the rest of the entire country. Rochester owes its preëminence in this effort to the Eastman School, and more particularly to the generosity of George Eastman and the imagination, will and spirit of the School's director, Howard Hanson.

I do not intend to retrace the history of this unique series of concerts, now completing their sixth year. They are sufficiently known throughout the nation to make unnecessary more than a few words about their purpose and result thus far. In the face of continued, confident critical assurance that there is no American music worth the name, Howard Hanson five years ago launched a series of American orchestral concerts. These were conceived in the belief that there are American composers, that their apparent scarcity and silence are due to the single fact that none will give them a hearing, that the most practical way to encourage these scattered and rather hopeless men is to rehearse and perform their works in their presence.

Technical advance and ultimate expertness in creative music is virtually impossible unless the composer may test the score he has written in the laboratory of the concert room. This was an important part of the premise upon which the concerts were founded. The scores played receive four rehearsals, and a large majority of the composers represented have been on hand for at least two of them, besides the concert itself. Most of the younger American composers have found a place on the programs of the last five years, mainly with works heretofore unperformed; and several of the older, established men have contributed scores. The performances have been signally helped by the devotion and technical excellence of the Rochester Philharmonic players.

Dr. Hanson has never nourished the naïve hope that masterpieces of symphonic music await deliverance from the apathy of the foreign conductor in this country. He believes, if I understand him rightly, that good music is being composed here, and that its makers need the kind of stimulation and instruction which sympathetic performance affords. Himself a creative musician, he is peculiarly qualified and equipped to understand the situation that has been stunting the growth and rendering impossible the fair appraisal of symphonic music written by Americans.

In addition to performing new music, the Eastman School included in its project the plan of publishing selected works represented on these programs. Thus far it has issued ten scores. This year the scope has been further enlarged; at the festival in May, the programs will include in addition to new choral and chamber music, the world premières of two American stage works, a ballet, *Sahdji*, by William Grant Still and an opera, *The Marriage of Aude*, with music by Bernard Rogers and poem by Charles Rodda.

The impending four-day festival this year has reduced the total number of concerts from the usual five to three, which have been given since last October. The first, on October 24, 1930, brought three new works and one by an older composer of established reputation. The latter, John Alden Carpenter, was represented by his suite, *Adventures in a Perambulator*. The new works were: *Suite for Small Orchestra*, by Herbert Inch; a suite, *Africa*, by William Grant Still; and a *Symphony*, in one movement, by Bernard Rogers.

Mr. Inch, who has lately returned from a two-year stay in Europe, is one of the youngest American composers, and to my mind, one of the most promising. He possesses a clear, fluid technic, a sensitive feeling for style; his touch is refined and sure, and he excels especially as a contrapuntist, writing polyphony which is genuinely distinguished. His *Suite* included three sketches—a *Barcarolle* written several years ago, a *Nocturne* of exquisite reticence, and a lively *Finale*. The finest of the three is the *Nocturne* with its silvery coloring and intimacy of mood.

William Still is probably the greatest Negro composer of our day. His style and his expression, deeply sincere and modest,

suffer somewhat from the influences to which he has been exposed. For me these account for the occasional sentimentality of his musical line and for the luscious colors with which his palette is set. Those who pretend that the American composer has not yet mastered the technic of his art should listen to Still's orchestra, with its clear, bright hues and silken surfaces. His suite, *Africa*, is in three parts: *Land of Peace*, *Land of Romance*, *Land of Superstition*. These are all superbly written with a fastidious sense of note values and are irresistible in their rhythmic charm and verve. The second sketch is a perfectly delightful *Blues*, as delicate and finished as Debussy; while the third has a savagery and a dynamic impact hitherto rarely realized in music written on this continent. Still's is a rich talent which seems to grow with each new work.

The second concert this season, on February 20, included five works. They were Frank Patterson's overture to an opera, *Mountain Blood*, a *Symphony in E Flat* by A. C. Kroeger, *Abraham Lincoln—A Character Portrait* by C. Hugo Grimm, *Two Sketches* from a ballet suite, by Robert Nelson, and Bernard Wagenaar's *Divertimento*. Of the five, the work which really impressed me was the last. Wagenaar, a native of Holland who has adopted this country, has not escaped European, particularly neo-Russian, influences. There are impish flashes of Stravinsky in this score; Wagenaar must be accounted one of the comparatively few living composers who has a sense of humor and the ability to communicate it through his music. He has managed to parody some of the old musical forms with extraordinary drollery, and in the final rondo has written an exhilarating and lusty piece of music.

On the most recent program, given April 2, Douglas Moore's *A Symphony of Autumn* towered above four companion works. Moore's score is definitely his best work and I should be inclined to place it, despite its flaws, among the most eloquent American works of recent years. He writes not as a modernist or classicist but without any preoccupations other than those of the spirit. He is less concerned with technic and its showy products than with expression. I imagine that he has not found the latter easy in this score, music troubled by pain and beauty, poetic and



brooding. One is made glad by every such evidence of the determination on the part of our composers to hold to what is true and what is their own.

A scene from an opera, *Paolo and Francesca*, by Dorothy James, revealed another sign of sincerity, feeling and the ability to write for orchestra. Miss James, I believe, had till this concert never heard a score of her own performed. She displayed a remarkable instinct and style for her medium.

Most of the works on this year's program, in common with those of preceding years, have shown that there is something idiomatic and personal which sets our composers apart from those of Europe. Far better, they are going their own way, seeking their own expression, carrying a style that shall one day mark and distinguish America. The testimony of these concerts is that we can make music and that we will make music.

*Bernard Rogers*

## THE COOLIDGE FESTIVAL—MUSIC AND DANCE

**I**N former years the programs of the Library of Congress festival of chamber music were divided about equally between music of the standard repertory and compositions played for the first time. This year's festival, which ran from April 23 to 25, brought forward only one first performance, that of Prokofieff's *Quartet*, opus 50.

The opening concert of the series was given by a group of dancers, trained by Irene Lewisohn, who performed to the Bach *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, to a group of troubadour tunes arranged for voice, viola and harp by Carlos Salzedo, and to the Bloch *Quartet*. The middle piece, the troubadour tunes, was like some crude woodcut at the head of an old black-letter ballad broadsheet come to life. It had all the vivacity of these old dancing figures and their spontaneous casualness and frankness. Of the other two dance creations not as much can be said.

In the choreography to the Bach a male figure danced and prostrated itself before a group of women clad in curious costumes of red tights and oil-silk envelopes. In the Bloch *Quartet* a woman dressed in a billowing yellow gown lighted with violent shadows so that she looked like something designed by Rockwell