

with, except when he is a voluntary visitor in search of musical health. Technical complexity unjustified by expression, emotional vagueness, most particularly that air of owning all Musical Truth that German composers so naively and so impregnably assume, all get short shrift here. Let America handle the composers if she can and she can probably handle quite a lot of them. France has all she can take on, I fancy, with sixty thousand unrestrained music-lovers to digest.

In the field of light music it is different. The town is full of Viennese *Wälzerkönige*, mostly doing well. Rudolf Révil, twenty-five, a German by birth but of French musical education (Boulanger), has written a half-dozen or more best-selling *javas* (French popular whirl-around waltzes). *Connaissez-vous les moules marinières?* and *On ouvre demain* are sung everywhere and they are charming. They have melodic grace and correct harmony, and they are astoundingly simple. He might easily have a career like Offenbach's.

Any visitors coming this way are recommended to attend Gluck's *Alceste* and Berlioz's *La Prise de Troie* at the Opéra, also Bizet's *Djamileh* at the Comique. See our next issue for further news of *La Chartreuse de Parme* and for a full description of Cliquet-Pleyel's *Espagne*. Not to be missed.

Virgil Thomson

IVES' CONCORD SONATA

THE scene was The Old House, an ancient lamp-lit mansion near the post-road at Cos Cob. There, before an intrigued, tense, somewhat puzzled little audience on November 28th, John Kirkpatrick gave what to all appearances was the first complete public performance of the work containing possibly the most intense and sensitive musical experience achieved by an American. It is *Concord, Mass., 1840-1860*, the second pianoforte sonata of Charles E. Ives.

Sonorities frequently unique in character and finely veiled, penetrating with a curious sensuous spirituality in which the secretive soul of Puritanism would seem again to have materialized itself, constitute much of its medium. The structure is

Beethoven-like in breadth of conception and cyclic, oftentimes in the grand style, elevated in mood and pitch, stirringly rhythmic, melodious with a subtlety not incomparable to that of Debussy or Schönberg; and one of those in which every note during entire pages is rhapsodically alive, tremulously expressive, fraught with special poetic emphasis and meaning.

The exploitation of a pair of melodic germs, one of them actually the tattoo of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, the other a tender, wooing, chromatic little subject, furnishes the principal material of its four extended and complementary movements. They are a broad andante, a fantastically wild scherzo, a simple intermezzo and a slow quiet finale restrained in point of dynamic scale. Various new material, in instances of a folk-song-like character, including *Hail, Columbia!*, the hymn-tunes *Shall We Gather At The River* and a Scotch folk-melody, is texturally introduced into the three latter movements; and the work, which is tonal in spots, polytonal in others and in still others perfectly atonal, is a subtle, sometimes a trifle coarsely but oftentimes exquisitely drawn web of these thematic and melodic wisps. The style in the opening movement is momentarily Lisztianly grand, frequently flighted and oracular, at times prophetically rapturous and wistful, at others almost paroxysmal with the excitements of the instants which untrammel the spirit. That of the scherzo is humorous in the syncopated passages which Kirkpatrick calls "proto-jazz" but prevalently spookish and dithering to a degree which makes the whole unbridled, extravagantly frolicsome section a supreme bit of spook-romanticism and more than any similar page in Reger the habitation of a *poltergeist*. It is in this scherzo too that Ives, who anticipated European polytonalism and polyrhythmicality in works earlier than this sonata (the date of its publication at least was 1920) surpasses Ornstein and well nigh out-Cowells Cowell in the bold use of tone-clusters, in instances containing as many as sixteen close-lying notes. However he takes pity on the performer and spares the piano incarnadining effusions of manual blood by prescribing the use in the performance of these chords of a strip of wood fourteen and three-quarter inches long and heavy enough to press the keys down without striking them. The ensuing softly blent sonorities are ghostly.

The contrastingly diatonic intermezzo is a naive movement, almost sentimental but for the nobility of the style and completeness of the form. Actually it is an opposition and interplay of lofty and majestic and humble, homely sonorities: the *Fifth Symphony* material and the Scotch folk-tune. Then in the stilly mysterious finale with its slow almost monotonously swaying beat, the second cyclic theme, the wooingly chromatic one, attains its fullest development in singularly glamorous music. The subtle melodic invention and veiled elusive quality of tone are at their sublimest here, and the rhythm is profound. Twice the weighted, tremulous volumes surge gropingly upwards and forwards before culminating in the fluting peroration of the sonata. There might that night at Cos Cob have been some question of the perfect beauty, the fully realized intentions, of the heroically initial movement. There was, indeed there could, be none of that of this finale. It seemed music as beautiful at the very least as any composed by an American.

It thrilled, it touched, again and again, the entire work; releasing something in the depths, restoring enchantment to them and to things. Some of the "vibrations of the universal lyre," of the earth itself, seemed in the music; and for more than one conscious member of its audience it brought the body to the state where Nature seemed to flow through it once more, and the whole of it was "one sense," and he felt "a strange liberty in Nature and a portion of herself." Thus it could be said that the work had transmitted its composer's experience, the comprehension of the forces and values of the Concord transcendentalist band. It was a nationalistic one, this experience: an American instance of the one vocal in all nationalistic music: that of the individual at the stage when, possibly in consequence of some activation of his inmost self, he comprehends his relationship not only to the present life of his group, race or nation, but to its very past. Imaginatively he grasps the forces and the values of the individuals who existed on his soil before him, the forces and values of the group, race or nation incarnate in them; recognizing their survival in the best of himself and comprehending them with love. In the small book *Essays Before A Sonata* with which Ives, Shaw-like, prefaced *Concord, Mass., 1840-1860*, the composer

mentions a moment of this mystical fellowship in which "Thoreau—that reassuring and true friend—stood by him one 'low' day when the sun had gone down, long, long before sunset"; and *Thoreau* is the title of the sonata's concluding movement, and *Emerson*, *Hawthorne* and *The Alcotts* those of the other three. For just the frequency of states of sympathy with Nature when "the whole body is one sense," of conditions of "liberty in Nature" when man is a part of her and the self and all which limits it are divinely acceptable, and humblest clay "instinct with celestial fire" smites upon the infinite: precisely the frequency of these states was the essence of Concord an hundred years since, the genius of the prophetic Emerson, the fantastic Hawthorne, the homely earth-fast Alcotts, the deeply-earth-submissive hermit of Walden Pond, and is the source of the American and democratic idea. But in moving us towards the transcendentalists and their fount, the music moved us towards Ives himself. He seemed the "Hesper of their throng," a seer and surely one of the most exquisitely sentient of American artists.

Paul Rosenfeld

TRIUMPH OF REACTION, BELGIUM, 1938

ABOUT four years ago under the leadership of Richard Strauss a number of representatives from various countries united in a "Conseil Permanent pour la Coopération Internationale des Compositeurs." Nineteen nations joined and their delegates now meet twice a year. These sessions are made the occasion for large international music festivals. The recent meeting held in both Brussels and Antwerp was combined with a music week of operatic, orchestral, choral and chamber music performances. Works of more than forty-five composers were included, ranging from piano pieces to symphonies, from solo songs to operas.

Anyone hoping to get a picture of present-day creation from this assembly was doomed to disappointment. All contemporary expression of the newer music was studiously avoided, the names of leading modern musicians were sought in vain. Most of the delegates came from strictly academic spheres, and they pre-