

The reviewer's knowledge of Lazare Saminsky's *Symphony of the Seas*, performed at concerts he was unable to attend, is confined to the printed page, which discloses a work of cohesive structure, conservative rather than extremist in its employment of the modern orchestra. In the skill of its facture, it is perhaps the composer's best work. A characteristic detail is the use of a similar coda at the close of each of the two sections, serving to unify the parts, as does a community of themes. In each instance the coda is built upon the chief theme, a melodic idea of distinct charm. There is an individuality in this work that is manifest chiefly in its treatment of the sonata form and the manner in which the chief theme and its two subsidiaries are developed.

To conclude this summary, a word is due three outstanding instances of the old made new. G. F. Malipiero's suite, *La Cimorosiana*, deftly compounded of small pieces by Cimarosa found in the Naples conservatory, is music very much alive and of heartsome gaiety. There remain, for similarly brief mention, Leo Weiner's transcription for orchestra of the Bach *Organ Toccata* in C, and Arnold Schönberg's restatements for symphonic ensemble of two of Bach's choral preludes, *Schmücke dich* and *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, heiliger Geist*. Weiner contented himself with a sturdy, workmanlike arrangement, whose tendency toward burlesqueness was emphasized and cheapened by the performance. Schönberg is another story. There is a subtlety in his transcriptions that contributes to an impression of dual personality, of a double image, throughout this music, and this is not without its own fascination. When the reviewer heard the first performance of the *Chorale Preludes* under Strinsky five or six years ago he liked them not at all. They seemed a perversion and altogether earth-earthy. Koussevitzky made them sound otherwise—the spell of mystery had entered in.

Oscar Thompson.

RUSSIAN COMPOSERS IN REVIEW

IN *Modern Russian Composers*, recently gotten out by the International Publishers, Leonid Sabaneyeff, one of Russia's leading critics, has given us a brilliant and subtle book. His

gallery of portraits is extensive—it ranges from Alexander Scriabin to Alexander Krein, an outstanding figure in his country to-day. The strength of this portraiture rests on the excellent and thorough information of a musician who vivisects with a sure hand. Its weakness can also be traced to the fact that Sabaneyeff is a musician, and as such, too keen, too interested, too active a protagonist in Russia's musical life.

He is of course a partisan, in fact an apostle, and perhaps even—*horribile dictu*—the originator of the Scriabin doctrine. He is a defender of the Moscow “old believers” (Taneyev, Rachmaninoff) against the Petrograd group of aggressive modernists (Stravinsky, Miascovsky, Prokofieff). In all fairness, however, one must concede that he tries hard to suppress his prejudices, and to give as impartial an appraisal as his fighting temperament permits. So obvious is this that in the chapters on Miascovsky and Prokofieff one can almost feel the strain of self-repression.

The most important parts of Sabaneyeff's book are naturally taken up with Scriabin and Stravinsky, the creators of the two channels along which the main streams of modern Russian music flow. The Scriabin chapter opens with the penetrating remark that in the world of music that composer played the role of “drawing-room demon,” a man of maniacal self-adoration and pose, a re-incarnated Childe Harold, but with more intensified neurotic and philosophic traits.

With this picture Sabaneyeff strikes at the real root of Scriabin's creative disabilities, to the lack of elemental virility which somehow diminishes Scriabin's human stature. Aesthetically the image is a misrepresentation. All the themes of Scriabin's *Third Symphony*, for instance, and of the *Divine Poem*, particularly those of the introduction and first allegro, are Titanesque; they are magnificent thoughts capable of limitless development. Scriabin failed to fulfill their broad range, not because of his philosophic and poetic *remplissage* but because of the schematic quality of his technical imagination. That is why in his otherwise fresh sonata forms with their extraordinary whirlpool codas the development is never organic. It does not spring from the theme spontaneously, naturally, as the tree from the seed, in the fashion of the Beethoven and Tchaikovsky symphonies. His develop-

ment is often pedantic clock-work whose little wheels whirl along, side by side, with toneless persistence. In almost all the Beethoven and Tchaikovsky symphonies the development is more vital and inspired than the themes themselves, while in Scriabin's larger forms, just the reverse is true.

Sabaneyeff's emphasis on Scriabin's harmonic innovations is another valuable critical contribution, for these are far more stringent and so more vitally important to European tonal conceptions than the harmony of Debussy and even Schönberg.

In his attitude toward Stravinsky, Sabaneyeff is again more just about the man and what one might call his musical ethics than in the appraisal of his creative gift. He is right in his general outlook, but wrong about the individual works. This reviewer, for example, subscribes to Sabaneyeff's assertion that "Stravinsky's fame rests chiefly on his virtuosity in making full use of musical conditions and taking full account of fashions and fads. . . . he is a deliberate innovator, deliberately glittering, sharp, shrill voiced, flickering and blinding like electric signs" and that "like Berlioz, he combines genius in the field of color with definite lack of talent in a number of other musical elements, and, like Meyerbeer . . . sells his music for the potage of fame and recognition in his lifetime."

And yet after all, one cannot very well pronounce such torrential music as the *Sacre*, that marvel of invention, color, architectonic unity, perhaps Stravinsky's most sincere and thoroughly felt creation, to be merely the production of a "commercial genius."

On the whole, Sabaneyeff's book is a negative one. Nevertheless it is admirable, lucid, abundant in vigorous and perspicacious analysis. Perhaps, after all, it is only when such negativeness is coupled with intelligence and musicianship that the very kernel of human and creative personalities can be seized. Surely indignation is a far stronger incitement to thought than the platitude of "constructive criticism."

Lazare Saminsky.