

up to the Saint Regis Roof and, if he has the price, crash a High-Low Concert; or go down on Broadway to a radical meeting. The distinctions of upper-class public from academic modern music public or proletarian public are only valid for the listener not primarily interested in music, who wants corroboration of his private beliefs. They make little sense to the person out to discover what is happening in the musical world regardless of his own position in the class struggle.

*Elliott Carter*

## ELECTRIC MARVELS IN PITTSBURGH

AT the recent Pittsburgh convention of the National Association of Music Teachers, which this writer was invited to address, he found a number of sessions surprising both for their advanced and profoundly inquiring nature. Under the direction of its leaders, Drs. Howard Hanson and Earl Moore, the convention added to the general proceedings a seance of the American Musicological Society on "Music in the Changing World." There was also a demonstration of primeval and medieval music—early Greek Byzantine, ancient Hebrew and Roman—which engages so much of the attention of our radical composers today.

But to my mind by far the most striking event, and one that evoked the strongest response from the creative musicians present, was the demonstration of unusual electronic instruments by Dr. Benjamin Miessner, young inventor from Milburn, New Jersey. Listening to his remarkable address and presentation, I made an effort to keep from losing myself in the purely scientific, acoustical vistas opened by these experiments, and to cling to the indicated esthetic possibilities. That is, I tried to grasp and define which of these new dynamics and sonorities a composer of our day might best utilize to convey his ideas with more precision and emphasis.

What, after all, do we composers want from the new instruments? Would new sonorities and a grandiose increase in intensity of sound alone answer our needs?

Indeed not! The musical world-at-large might be satisfied with this achievement, especially if it is accompanied with maxi-

num ease of control and action in the existing instruments, plus the elimination of bulk and of such elephantine volumes as those of our organs, grand pianos, bull fiddles, bass tubas—everything that blocks the easy access to music-making.

But the needs of the new composer and of new music itself are far larger. What we must have first, is clarity of effect and a better articulation in nearly all instruments, particularly in the many registers blared or muddled or enfeebled by the antediluvian mechanism of those tone producers which centuries of use have hardly advanced.

The new composer demands more power and condensation for the strings whose feeble tone and restricted range necessitate the accumulation of huge, unmanageable string choirs. The new composer wants to see woodwinds of a more flexible and agile tone, to do away with the prosaic reediness of the clarinet's middle register, the useless, rigid ugliness of lower oboe notes etc. Some day he hopes to hear a trombone without the glaring, shrill forte of its upper notes, to hear brass enriched with a warmth of tone and delicacy of timbre that seems to be denied to the heavy instruments.

By now there are, indeed, hundreds of electronic, that is, electrically driven keyboard instruments. Every inventor has one of his own. But Miessner's electronic piano seems not only superior to anything we know, in its clarity of pitch and high articulation in both timbre and phrasing, but also, in its new sectors of most attractive, novel sonorities. The percussive qualities of the piano, which are so valuable in orchestral scoring, reach a high degree of intensity and individuality. The low registers of Miessner's electronic piano acquire the sonority of enchanting bells. Yet these beautiful sonorities are amazingly articulate; they allow phrasing heretofore impossible to any percussive instrument.

The Miessner instruments include also an electronic mouth-harmonica that can approximate the sound-volume of a cathedral organ, and a guitar which is like a gigantic music-box but with a far greater range of sound-color.

What is the immediate use of these new instruments to the composer stifled by the limited and stale tonal means at his disposal, with the performance of his music crippled by poor control of

our antiquated instruments, the very frames of which were created hundreds, even thousands of years ago—the fiddles, the pipes, and drums?

What is the immediate use of these new instruments to the composer who would like to break through and beyond this finite, petrified world of sound left to him, the world of tonal growth by chance and of a stone-deaf tradition?

The immediate exploiting of these new fields may benefit him in three ways. First. A more precise and qualified use of everything lying beyond the upper and lower borders of the sound-scale employed now; the purposeful and distinct, not haphazard, exploiting of the ultra-red and ultra-violet timbres, so to speak. Second. The liberating of orchestral scoring from the deadening interference of the orchestral and human choirs. I mean those calamitous effects of doubling, when the layer of wood-wind harmony dulls the stringed chords, eats away the fresh lustre of the human voice or the glow of the brass. The new instruments adumbrate a coming of orchestral *tutti* where all the qualities of the individual instrumental choirs will remain unimpaired by the interference. The blot on the performance of present day instrumentation will be thus overcome. Third. By the same token the art of orchestral accompaniment of voices or solo instruments may achieve a unique clarity and articulation. Stravinsky's combination in *Noces*, human voices plus a percussion choir, is an effect-concept and a chance-concept, a hit-and-miss scheme that ended well, but might have ended badly. The new instruments will permit an unheard of precision in distributing the sonorities of voice or solo instrument and the accompanying sound-mass, be it percussion or brass. An unimagined clarity of compound will be reached.

There are still broader and more magnificent prospects suggested by these new instrumentalities of tonal creation. This writer is not an organist and formerly had no interest in the instrument. But during the last years he was enabled to observe the possibilities in the playing of an organ of extraordinary fluidity of action, variety and richness of tone and color, an organ capable of producing hundreds of color blends unknown to the orchestra.

The orchestra had begun then to seem crude and limited to me. From my observation it has become clear that potentially the organ, even in some of its present aspects, is an instrument of a far greater scope of tone-color, and of an infinitely subtler palette than the orchestra, to say nothing of the possibilities of color and dynamics control which can easily reach the ideal.

The future of the orchestra can already be read with precision. One musician sitting at a small, portable electronic organ brought up to the richest imaginable orchestral palette and the highest possible control of color and dynamics; a musician who is an improviser, composer and performer, will be *the orchestra*.

*Lazare Saminsky*

## SHOSTAKOVITCH REHABILITATED

ON January 21st of this year Shostakovitch's *Fifth Symphony* was given its premiere in Moscow. This event had important significance for the musical life of Russia. A few years ago there appeared the now famous series of articles in the newspaper *Pravda* which were followed by the highly publicized discussion in the Composers' Union, condemning the "formalistic" tendencies as well as the vulgar realism of *Lady Macbeth*. Both within and beyond the boundaries of Russia, admirers of that composer's remarkable gifts heard this censure as a thunder-clap from a clear sky. Shostakovitch—synonym of young Soviet musical creation, its most outstanding representative, with a world reputation to boot—was hurled from his pedestal!

Not many at that time understood the meaning, the purpose of the *Pravda* criticism. With courageous directness the paper raised the problem of "ultimate truth in art," and, more specifically of folk-consciousness in the composer, as against an indulgence in fruitless devices to enrapture the "art-gourmands." The articles were intended as a clarion call to artists to create as for a great epoch.

In the Western world the object of the avant-garde is presumably the overthrow of old artistic foundations, the breaking out of "new paths," however meaningless, at any cost. For us in the Soviet, however, the avant-garde is held to express progres-