

## FORECAST AND REVIEW

### DAWN IN SWEDEN

**I**T has taken Sweden long to yield to new musical currents. Years ago, on those remote shores, Grieg started the impressionistic movement, a fact that future historians will duly credit when they come to weigh this composer's influence on Debussy. But though Finland, the neighboring and younger nationality, proved responsive to modern musical conceptions, Sweden retired peacefully to the safe harbor of German academism and lingered in that shadow many years.

Gösta Nyström, a graduate of the Stockholm conservatory, is one of the first bright rays to penetrate this sombre atmosphere. His music is notably indigenous and racial; it communicates something of the soil's perennial freshness. As in Bartok, the composer to whom he is most akin, we find an absorption of the folk-melos by a modern tonal consciousness.

Nyström's work is primarily and unselfconsciously melodic. It breathes a rural naïveté and a rhythmic freshness that emanate directly from the Scandinavian folk-dance. Whether his emotion be simple or complex the appeal of his music is universal.

His tonal equipment is definitely not simple. He employs modern harmonic and rhythmic means, materials that can prove on occasion to have an acid bitterness. But he does not seem to use them with deliberation. A spontaneous, careless atmosphere seems to surround his whole musical gift. He strikes out along his new harmonic road, relying on instinct rather than judgment, and the impression he makes is similar to that of the "harshness"

formerly associated with Moussorgsky. Primitive and free of tradition though his harmonies appear, they are not the expression of a man firmly determined to be unusual.

In general his music, like that of Bartok, is direct and of elemental simplicity. Yet by the side of invention and remarkably fresh devices we encounter commonplace banalities, decided lapses in style. Nor is he even completely emancipated from impressionistic tendencies. But then his talent is so vigorous that it seems to revive what appeared to be dead. His colors have the intensity that is so absent from the dull shadows of Debussy's imitators. Thus the essential vitality, the strength of his nature, which is in no sense visionary or dreamy, throws off with ease the drugging poisons of impressionism.

In the *Rondo* for violin, an early work, one can already observe individual qualities. The harmonic harshness, the clear-cut melody, the rhythm, the homophonic structure, are characteristic and at the same time quite Scandinavian. In later works the influences of Stravinsky and Hindemith make themselves felt in linear and polyphonic emphasis.

The symphonic poem, *Ischavet*, which breathes the spirit of the Scandinavian landscape, reveals Nyström as a colorist of resource, who gives us new shades of orchestral writing without abandoning the palette of the naturalistic school. The chief merit of this work, however, is that it springs indigenously from a definite locale. Like the music of Tchaikovsky and Grieg, it is the work of a man who is not deliberately striving for innovation although he has genuine creative ability and the power to break new paths.

*Regrets*, his small pieces for orchestra, give us a highly individual kind of orchestral miniature, elegant and intimate. There is a direct musical perception of great value in these pieces; they have a sharp piquancy, at times a certain extravagance, restrained, however, by taste and instinct.

Though his career has just begun, Nyström has already proved himself a prolific writer. In addition to the works mentioned he has written a *Symphony* for orchestra; a symphonic tableau, *The Tower of Babylon*; two ballets; a string quartet, and a number of songs and piano pieces. This large output, like the work of all

intuitive talents, is marked by unevenness; yet, despite its flaws, it can leave us in no doubt that we have here an unusual creative gift which deserves sustained and careful appraisal.

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### MAKING THE GRAND TOUR

WHATEVER the ultimate appraisal of contemporary composers may be (if such a thing as an ultimate appraisal were possible!), there is no denying their industrious activity. So eagerly do they work, so readily do they adopt a banner, whether it be "True tones are quarter tones" or "Back to Bach," so open-minded are they in most cases about changing their ways as the spirit willeth that non-composers are likely to find themselves several laps behind in the business of keeping up with the motley and racing procession. André Coeuroy in his *Panorama de la Musique Contemporaine* (Les Documentaires, Simon Kra, Paris), proves immediately and vividly serviceable because, without hesitation, he defines, assesses, and labels the modern composer as he believes him at the moment to be. It is refreshing to find a writer who indulges thus, without apology, in the courage of the moment, and it is helpful to readers who are less sure of their bearings in the swift and shifting stream of present-day musical life. In characterizing a composer, a tendency, a school, M. Coeuroy discloses a typically Gallic talent for the concise and epigrammatic phrase. Whether or not one agrees with this or that dictum, quotation becomes both a duty and a delight.

"Now the Five, who were not at all revolutionary, with the sole exception of Moussorgsky saw no salvation outside the forms of European music. It was the genius in Moussorgsky who divined that these forms were inharmonious with the original spirit of the Russian popular treasure."

What M. Coeuroy thinks of Stravinsky is indicated in this passage. "He gives us today the unique example of a musician who through his fame, his influence, and his spirit is of the whole world. One can no longer say that he is Russian: he has been repudiated by the young Bolsheviks. His youth belonged to Asia,