

MANIFESTOES OF THE MODERN DANCE

“MODERN DANCE” a book of the German and American dance newly compiled by Virginia Stewart, should have been better than it is. There are articles by Wigman, Palucca, Kreutzberg, Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, Holm, Hasting, Love, Micheal, Virginia Stewart, and Merle Armitage. Best of all are the two dozen excellent photographs which have been very well reproduced. The articles are interesting chiefly because they reveal the personalities of their dancer-authors. Palucca’s egocentricity is amusing. Kreutzberg becomes a bit confused in a most mixed metaphor. Hanya Holm holds forth very well on distinctions between the German and American dances. Paul Love gives a scholarly history of American dancing. The introduction is badly done and inaccurate as to information. Since the world knows of Isadora Duncan and the Denishawns as path-breakers for the whole modern dance movement it is not altogether congruous to read that the movement had its genesis in Germany.

L. E.

FOR THE LAYMAN

MADAME OLGA SAMAROFF’S *The Layman’s Music Book* (W. W. Norton and Company) is exactly what its title implies, and the professional musician must, therefore, feel a certain trepidation in attempting to review it. It should not surprise him if such a book seems to oversimplify many problems and even facts. Oversimplification is in the very nature of the problems involved; the higher complexities of music and of esthetics are not the layman’s affair. The professional musician must make a decided readjustment in his habitual and necessary modes of thought if he is fully to grasp the nature of the problem involved or do justice to its solution.

Though not entirely in agreement with all the features and conclusions of Madame Samaroff’s book, the present reviewer nevertheless finds it admirable for its purpose. The problem of the “layman” is, for quite familiar reasons, a comparatively new one, of vital importance not only to the future of musical art but

in the most personal sense to all musicians and music lovers living at the present time. The active and vital majority of the musical public has in former times and above all in Europe, consisted largely of individuals who were, even though generally in the humblest manner, practical musicians. "House music" was cultivated with assiduity and formed the basis of a knowledge of music which was essentially non-platonic; and this in turn formed the basis of a greater musical culture of sometimes extraordinary depth in which the people themselves had not a passive but a participating share. Coming into active contact with musical materials and being forced to make terms with them, yielded not only a knowledge of musical literature but a greater perception of its subtleties both in composition and performance. Undoubtedly the musical culture of Germany and Austria reached its heights in great part because the public gained a knowledge of music not through hearing it alone but by actually playing and singing.

Today this playing and singing public has almost disappeared and is being replaced by a public of "laymen." In the gramophone and radio the layman of course has means for the hearing and rehearing of music previously accessible to him only in the form of four-hand arrangements, etc; but it remains a real problem how listening alone can make up for the concentration of actually molding the phrases of a musical work and facing the problem of its reproduction.

It is precisely for this reason that books like Mme. Samaroff's have become necessary, and it is a hopeful sign that such work should be undertaken by a practical musician of her ability. Those who have had some experience in the world of general education will recognize the necessity of her empirical approach and will see a notable advance over previous works of this nature. She deals briefly and clearly with the elementary technical facts of music and shows with praiseworthy insistence the so much misunderstood relation of "technic" and "inspiration"—two of the layman's favorite but generally hazy conceptions—in creative work of any kind. The general plan of the book, as she explains in the preface, is based on actual experiences with her pupils and laymen "subjects;" hence its actuality and vividness.

Having said all this the reviewer begs leave to quarrel mildly with the author on two points. It seems to him first of all that the book contains an overemphasis on historical detail. The historical approach to artistic problems, while specifically not devoid of interest, tends, in his opinion, to substitute knowledge and speculation for direct musical experience, and thus in some degree to atrophy the delicate sense of values which is at the basis of any living art. Secondly he would have liked a more extended discussion of musical form, its essential nature and psychological requirements, as opposed to the *forms* of the fugue, sonata, etc. Or the acoustical and psychological needs that led to tonality and are constantly modifying that phenomenon and developing it, so to speak, beyond itself. However the reviewer is quite conscious of his limitations as a musician primarily pre-occupied with problems other than those which Mme. Samaroff's book attempts to meet, and is very glad to pay his respects to its sincerity, clearness and concrete musical knowledge.

Roger Sessions