

## BREAKING TRAILS IN CHICAGO

FOR two or three years now this magazine might have done well to keep permanently in type a single sentence for use in each issue: "Not much of interest happened in Chicago."

It is the misfortune of the nation's second city to have become the victim of a reactionary orchestra management, an opera company inextricably involved in real estate dealings and a couple of energetically successful music promoters who have reduced our concert life to a score or so of huge events glorifying Lily Pons, Oscar Levant, or Nelson Eddy.

The only way for a Chicagoan to keep abreast of contemporary musical developments has been to leave town.

In a significant effort to change this state of affairs, the University of Chicago has initiated a series of Composers Concerts designed to rekindle interest in the work of living men. Although the University plans to identify itself with the forward march of musical art in an extensive way, this series was planned to win popular support for modern works by presenting some written by the most eminent practitioners. Three of the four concerts of the first year are given over to music by established composers. The April program will be devoted to works by young Americans.

Music by Darius Milhaud was heard on December 10. The program ranged from the lyrical pre-1914 *Sonata for two Violins and Piano* and the early *Suite for Violin, Clarinet and Piano*, to the blithe topicality of the familiar *Scaramouche* suite for two pianos. The composer took part in these performances. In between, Hans Lange conducted the University Chamber Orchestra in the first of the five little symphonies, and John Weicher played the violin part of the *Concertino de printemps*, a scintillating, vivid and concise work which must be rated one of Milhaud's best.

At the second Concert, in January, music by Igor Stravinsky will be played; the program will consist of the *Duo Concertante* and the *Concerto for Two Pianos*, both unknown to Chicago, and the *Suite from L'Histoire du soldat*. Stravinsky will appear both as pianist and conductor. The February concert, of works by Paul Hindemith, will include the world premiere of *Ludus Tonalis*, a large piano composition based on the model of Bach's *Well-tempered Clavichord*.

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Hindemith was responsible for the best new work heard this fall in the concerts of the Chicago Symphony orchestra, the ballet overture, *Cupid*

and *Psyche*, conducted by Lange. Despite its considerable severity of three-part form and wealth of contrapuntal device, the overture is notable for its lightness of spirit, and makes one wish that Georges Balanchine, for whom the ballet score was originally planned, had not given up the idea of choreographing it.

The other contemporary works in the orchestra's programs have been consistently of lesser caliber. Isaac Stern gave a brilliant performance of Karol Szymanowski's second violin concerto, but the musical idiom of the once admired Pole has come to seem far too elaborate, too rhapsodic, too obscured by externals of harmonic invention and orchestral lushness.

Among the new American works, the most distinguished in its craftsmanship and general musical outlook, if not in specific materials, is the second symphony of John Alden Carpenter. Its success was hampered by the thick and laborious performance it received at the hands of Désiré Defauw, the orchestra's new musical director. The following week Defauw, evidently eager to foster Chicago's established talents, gave a much clearer representation of Felix Borowski's unpretentiously attractive second symphony. Also heard in Orchestra Hall before the end of the year were Eugen Zador's *Biblical Triptych*, a Hollywoodish tone picture of Biblical personalities; Walter Helfer's energetic but monotonously scored and developed overture, *In Modo Giocosco*; Wald's symphonic poem, *The Dancer Dead*, fragmentary in construction but full of rich French post-impressionist harmonic devices and orchestral colors; Alan Schulman's rather glib *Theme and Variations* for viola and orchestra; and Boris Koutzen's *Valley Forge*, which was played too late for review in this article. All but one of these works, for better or for worse, were directed by Lange, who endeavors seriously in his limited number of concerts to let a few rays of novelty pierce the musical night of Chicago's concert life. Meanwhile Defauw seems to have decided that it will be the policy of wisdom to restore Dvorak's *New World Symphony* to the repertory, and to add an organ part to the finale of Sibelius' *Second*.

Cecil Smith

## MILHAUD'S "MIDIAN" IN ORCHESTRAL DEBUT

SO far as new music is concerned, the foremost event of the early season in San Francisco was the world premiere of Darius Milhaud's *Opus Americanum Number 2*, played, of course, by Pierre Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. This work was commissioned