

FORECAST AND REVIEW

NEW MUSIC HEARD BEFORE CHRISTMAS

WHEN Bela Bartok substituted his *Rhapsody*, opus 1, for his new and as yet unperformed *Piano Concerto*, he unwittingly gave two New York Philharmonic audiences perhaps the greatest disappointment of a season of disappointments in new music, so far as that season has, at this writing, progressed. Moreover, in turning from the new to the old, or at least the not-so-new, he placed his individual emphasis upon what has been the salient characteristic of the succession of novelties heard between October and Christmas in the New York concert halls. Old music, in transcriptions and adaptations, has had its customary place among numbers listed as played for the first time. But it was not Bach or Cimarosa whose music made the term "contemporary" seem as inapplicable as its sorely misused and sadly maligned sister, "modern."

Contemporaneous only in time, are such works as the Adolf Busch *Symphony*, the Delius *Cello Concerto*, Ferroud's *Foules* and the four Reger *Tone-Poems* "after Böcklin," which have come and gone on our orchestral programs, with the probability that now their sleep will be deep. Nor did Ernest Schelling's tone-poem, *Morocco*, suggest that the world had moved appreciably since the dimming days of Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakoff. In spite of its more recent lucubration, it is music decidedly older than *The Victory Ball*.

For all its diffuseness, there is perhaps more musical quality in a throw-back to the past such as the Schelling tone-poem than there is in a trifle of unquestioned currency, like Bodeslav Martinu's *La Bagarre*. Properly tumultuous, since it portrays the tension of the spectators at a football game, the young Czech composer's rondo fell short of engendering the excitement which palpably was its goal. But it is one of the few works of the

season that were not more representative of other periods in composition than the one we struggle to grasp and clarify today.

Since disappointments have been given first place in this review, still another is to be chronicled, yet one in which the composer wrote more than ordinarily effective music. Ildebrando Pizzetti had moments of genuine inspiration, as well as a deft and practised hand, in writing his all too slender score for *Abramo ed Isaac*. In its dependence on modal devices, his species of modernity may seem in strange contrast with that of more aggressive contemporaries, for this is, indeed, conservative writing. But it is alive and—desire it or not—on speaking terms with beauty. However, the sense of disappointment remains when the work is presented as it was by the Friends of Music. There is altogether too much narration; the music becomes too modestly incidental.

Surface indices of what the auditor of ordinary experience terms "modern," were more easily recognized in two works by Pizzetti's compatriot, Vittorio Rieti, the *Lord Berners*, if not quite the Eric Satie, of the group that owns Alfredo Casella as its solar eye. Rieti's *Concerto for Wind Instruments and Orchestra* has more than a suggestion of burlesque; and fortunately so, for without its ironical implications it might be regarded as an illustration of an amazing cleverness in surrounding banality with an obfuscation of arresting effects. It is a good parody, both of the old *concerto grosso* form and of much Italian writing—if a parody it is. The same composer's *Noah's Ark* suite has its share of humorous jugglery, with its flood, the entrance of the animals into the ark and their departure.

Bartok's early *Rhapsody* need not detain us. It is good work but not very good Bartok. The presence of the composer to play it was plainly of more importance than any revelations of a work written twenty-three years ago by a man once enamored of Liszt. So, if it is out of Hungary that the torch is to come, we turn to Zoltan Kodaly. But the suite extracted from the comic opera, *Háry Janos*, though refreshing in spirit and distinctly well written, is of that theatrical cast which pleases easily on first hearing and might readily become both popular and obnoxious if it caught the fancy of Sunday afternoon audiences. The much bruited *Psalmus Hungaricus*, impressive as is some of its choral

writing, leaves us unconvinced that here is more than what may be described as solid and substantial good workmanship. As a setting of the Fifty-Fifth Psalm, with various interpolations which presumably give to the work a nationalist aspect, the music is not without emotional poignancy in its larger moments, but it all sounds conventional, despite its liberal use of the most modern harmonic devices; and it ends cheaply, even in such a way as to suggest the starry choirs of Boito. Written to help Budapest celebrate an anniversary, it remains celebrational music.

Heinrich Kaminsky's *Magnificat*, introduced on the same program with the *Psalmus Hungaricus*, had a similar effect. True, it sustains its level until the close, but that level is not an altitudinous one. It is difficult not to regard this work as one both imitative and derivative, though of imposing structure and presenting choral harmonies not the property of the quantity-producers of music for the church. And yet he leaves, like Kodaly, the impression of having aimed much higher than he hit.

There is much less discrepancy between the mark and where the arrow struck in two works of the American, Aaron Copland. That may be only another way of saying that he has hitched his wagon to something considerably less remote and glamorous than the star. His re-stated *Scherzo for Orchestra*, originally the middle movement of a symphony for organ and orchestra, and his *Cortège Macabre*, as played respectively by the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Beethoven Symphony, ring true. Neither approaches the abandon of his later *Jazz Concerto*, which not only is far more daring but represents a distinct advance in craftsmanship. The *Cortège* has details that remain in the memory, yet the net result is that of a mood emphasized to the point of monotony. It is possible to believe that Copland has not yet found his true gods, and still recognize in these works—inferior as they are to his *Concerto*—a personality that (for the time being, at least) is emphatically “modern.”

Of Emerson Whithorne's orchestral arrangement of the *New York Days and Nights* one may doubt whether these attractive piano morceaux profit through the use of a multiplicity of instruments and colors. But in any form, they are the best example of tonal pictures of this genre the young Americans have given us.

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 burliness 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 Stransky 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

I**N** *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