

a rousing discussion of concepts and feelings. Another year the conference (or, better still, a group of conferences) might well be devoted to these highly important considerations. In view of the curious esthetics revealed by much of the music which was played, the tendency on the part of some to stress the idea of uniting to push our music to the fore was regrettable. In the long run, organization for high-powered salesmanship not backed up with the genuine article can be little more productive than scattered efforts and cut-throat competition. Obviously, as one of the participants remarked with melodramatic effect, the first duty of the composer is to write good music.

Randall Thompson

PARIS NEWS

THE spring season this year was principally the ballets. Never in my time has Paris been so ballet-conscious. But before going into that I had better recount the purely musical events, such as they were. Aside from the galas of repertory, such as the usual *Tristan* at the Opéra with German stars and Furtwängler and two hundred franc seats, the activities of Madame Homberg's admirable Société Mozart and Landowska's classical Sunday afternoons at Saint-Leu-la-Forêt, the musical season consisted of exactly three concerts; namely, two Sérénades and a Markevitch. The ballets, as I say, are a story in themselves. So is Kurt Weill. The performance of an operetta by Franz Léhar (a piece called *Frasquita*) is worth noting here only for the fact.

I may as well remark, however, a movement that has been going on for several years and that has just become general news because it is now possible for everybody to recognize it. Mozart has taken the place of Bach as the Great Master of Music and Bach has become an Emeritus like Palestrina. Nobody plays much Bach any more. Everybody plays Mozart. This is going to continue, as the Bach movement did, until everything has been heard and until a satisfactory modern style of performance for Mozart has been put on the market, as it was for Bach in the decade of 1910-20. After that, another master will have his inning. For the moment, how to play Mozart is the thing that

really bothers the musical world, and there are already several schools. There is the tinkling-school, which avoids noise and puts all its effort on precision and gentility and which succeeds in creating at best a sort of grave poetry. There is also the neo-Romantic school, which is for an easy-going Viennese Schubert-waltzy way of rendering. This is more lively than the first but not really satisfactory. Both lack grandeur. The eventual solution, certainly, will be found on the architectural side. Keeping the music from falling apart at phrase-ends is the difficulty. The nineteenth century Mozart tradition, which consisted chiefly in *molto affetuoso* for the slow movements, *diminuendo* for all feminine phrase-endings and a general air of daintiness over the whole, must obviously be scrapped *in toto* if the works are to be considered as serious first-class music.

To my muttons. The *Sérénade* brought out a *Septuor* by a young Soviet composer named Popov. It has the usual abundance of talent. It is very long. It is not appreciably different from that piece for small wind combination that everybody has written at least once and that no modern-music society program is complete without. Rieti's *Suite* from a film, for a similar but slightly larger group of instruments, is more ingenious, more varied, more up-to-date, more skillful, more melodious. It is pretty long, too. Milhaud's *Mort d'un Tyran* for mixed chorus and six percussion players was danced by Madame Alanova in the German fascist-athletic style. Sauguet wickedly called her "la Zambelli du bras." Certainly her feet never left the ground. The choral parts are largely spoken or shouted, and quite effectively unless one wants to know what it is all about, as in the *Choëphori*. Françaix's *Trio* is talented early-Poulenc. Nabokov's *Fanfare* lasts one minute and is in no way objectionable. Massimo's *Chansonnettes* for soprano and string quartet are delicious. Satie's *Socrate* was given with orchestra for the first time in nearly ten years and was a complete flop. It was played and sung so badly that nobody but a half dozen people who knew it by heart anyway could make the slightest sense, musical or verbal, out of it. On the other hand, profiting by the presence in Paris for the ballets of Madame Lotte Lenja and other interpreters of Kurt Weill, the *Sérénade* gave a second perform-

ance of *Mahogonny*, a work derived almost entirely from the esthetic of Satie, and it had a success such as one rarely witnesses in this on the whole fairly unmusical city.

The Markevitch festival was free to all, paid for by the Princesse Edmond de Polignac and ballyhooed by *La Revue Musicale*. The director of same even made us a speech in which we were told that in future years we could boast of having been present at an Event in the History of Music. The program included a symphonic piece in four movements called *Les Hymnes* and an unperformed ballet written for Lifar, *La Chute d'Icare*. Markevitch's position as the Young Genius is now completely official. Both musically and professionally, the Antheil comparison proves to be a close one.

The ballets were more fun. Disputes between Boris Kochno and René Blum, director of the Monte Carlo theater, had already last year produced one of those schisms in White Russia which we all know so well and comprehend not at all. England, both Russo-and choreophile as always, came to the aid of the seceding wing in the form of one Edward James, very rich, very young, and the eager husband of a Viennese contortionist-dancer named Tilly Losch. The seceders included Kochno, organizer, Balanchine, choreographer, and Tamara Toumanova, a very young and brilliant female dancer. The Monte Carlo group kept de Basil as organizer, Massine as choreographer and nearly all the older dancers. Age and tradition were on their side. Youth and new ideas on the other. James' money enabled Kochno and Balanchine to order six new ballets and to hire a few dancers, not very good ones for the most part, because the good ones were already engaged at Monte Carlo, excepting Toumanova and a young man named Djerzinsky. Tilly Losch, naturally, was asked to lend her talent too.

The new ballets were:

Mozartiana, orchestration of Tchaikovsky, décors and costumes by Christian Bérard.

Errante, Schubert's *Wanderer-Fantasia* orchestrated by Köchlin, décors by Tchelicheff.

Les Songes, music by Milhaud, décors by Derain.

Fastes, music by Sauguet, décors again by Derain.

Les Sept Péchés Capitaux (in London it was called *Anna-Anna*) a sort of mimed cantata to words of Bert Brecht, music of Kurt Weill and décors of Neher.

Also, given once or twice at the end of the run, were *Les Valses de Beethoven* with décors by Emilio Terry, and *Job*, oratorio by Nabokov, a purely musical work.

The décors of Derain were universally condemned. The Terry was given too late to make much effect, but it had some rather sumptuous interior-decorating. The Neher was sombre and ugly and German but not without its elegance. The sets of Bérard and Tchelicheff were the sensational bits. The public divided itself as for battle on the issue of their respective merits, the theatrical, esthetic and foreign groups preferring *Errante*, the fashionable world ecstatic over *Mozartiana*. Both were novel and beautiful. If one must vote, and of course one must, I vote for Bérard, all the while recognizing splendid qualities in the opposing candidate.

Musically, the scandal was Weill. Milhaud's ballet is good Milhaud, no more. Sauguet's contains delicious music, rich and gay, but unfortunately it is orchestrated for the chamber rather than for the theater. The material, however, is fine, the fabrication ingenious. The Weill, of course, was completely striking, especially to the general public that had never heard any. I have gone into the Kurt Weill matter elsewhere in this issue. So it is not necessary to say any more here than that his wife Lotte Lenja is completely effective anywhere and that Tilly Losch has a few defenders.

On the whole, the Paris season of James' Ballets 1933 was memorable for two extraordinary décors, for some radically ugly but by no means ineffective choreography of Balanchine and for Köchlin's scoring of the Schubert, which is nothing short of a chef-d'oeuvre. He has made a small orchestra sound like a very large one. He has made the *Wanderer* sound as if Schubert had orchestrated it himself, and without at all limiting himself to Schubert's procedures. Particularly effective was the consistent massing of his fiddles on one line, regularly using the trumpet where second violins would ordinarily be employed in a romantic piece.

The 1933 and the Monte Carlo companies played at the same time. Both theatres were jammed. At the Champs-Élysées, youth and elegance. At the Châtelet, lovers of sound ballet-tradition and connoisseurs of good dancing. André Masson made a hideous and senseless décors for Tchaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony*, called *Les Présages*. Massine made for the same work a choreography that in splendor of effect can only be compared this year to the Köchlin score I have just been talking about. Françaix's *Beach*, their only musical novelty, was gay and pretty and sort of cheap. Etienne de Beaumont did some tame sets for *Scuola di Ballo* to music of Boccherini. The old Diaghilev repertory was handsomely performed and also the post-Diaghilev successes *Jeux d'Enfant* (Bizet and Miro) and *Cotillon* (Chabrier-Bérard).

Virgil Thomson

PREPARATIONS IN MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD

OPERA

THE *Mujik from Komarinsk* (Komarinskij Mujik) is a term that was used in Czaristic Russia to express contempt for the revolutionary peasant. Komarinskij Mujik was the personally vital force in a great peasant uprising whose importance to the development of Russia official historians intentionally slighted. He became the subject of satirical presentations and no scientific investigator or poet attempted to clear up the historical significance of this upsurge of revolutionary forces of the eighteenth century.

The twenty-year old composer, Victor Shelobinsky, and a famous poet of the older generation, Ossip Brick, have undertaken to create a music drama from this historical material. Ivan Bolotnikoff, the peasant leader, is the central figure. Destiny leads him from Moscow to Venice, to Lithuania, and finally, as head of the rebellious masses, to the Kremlin in Moscow. The text offers a vivid picture of social conditions and struggles in eighteenth century Russia, and the music to some extent leans on the most significant Russian opera, Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunoff*, whose subject is similar. Shelobinsky promises to become an important composer of historic mass scenes. His gift for austere, dramatically convincing melody is noteworthy.