

MORE FROM PARIS

NOT much going on, except for the war between visiting and resident Germans, and for all the novelty either group has to offer one might as well listen to NBC and the New York Philharmonic.

The Sérénade did give a program, with lots of Nabokoff, some other Russian exiles, the usual Milhaud and Poulenc, and a Fauré quartet. The Sérénade has obviously entered into its second period, that period in the life of modern-music societies when, the epoch they represent having passed away, they go on living their lives as if nothing were changed, although it is fairly obvious to everybody that there is something dead around. At the present moment, the Sérénade can still mobilize some public, and it still has access to some fairly disinterested subvention. Whether it has access to today's ideas remains to be seen.

Markevitch's *Le Nouvel Age*, a novelty of last season, was revived by the German exile conductor, Herman Scherchen. The piece was received in arctic silence by the composer's former friends. Since they had all heard the work last year and hadn't liked it then, it is to be presumed that they only came this time in order to show by the visible unanimity of their non-applause that they very firmly are not having any. What is behind this excessive bitterness I do not know.

The season's chief controversy so far, believe it or not, is the war between the supporters of two rival German conductors. Furtwängler, the official ambassador of Nazi culture, fills the big Salle Pleyel at a 150-franc top. Scherchen, the unofficial ambassador of emigré German culture, plays to a 40-franc top at the much smaller Salle Gaveau and doesn't always fill it. Bruno Walter, now a French citizen, is completely successful and quite outside the controversy. So is Munch, the new Alsatian conductor at the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire.

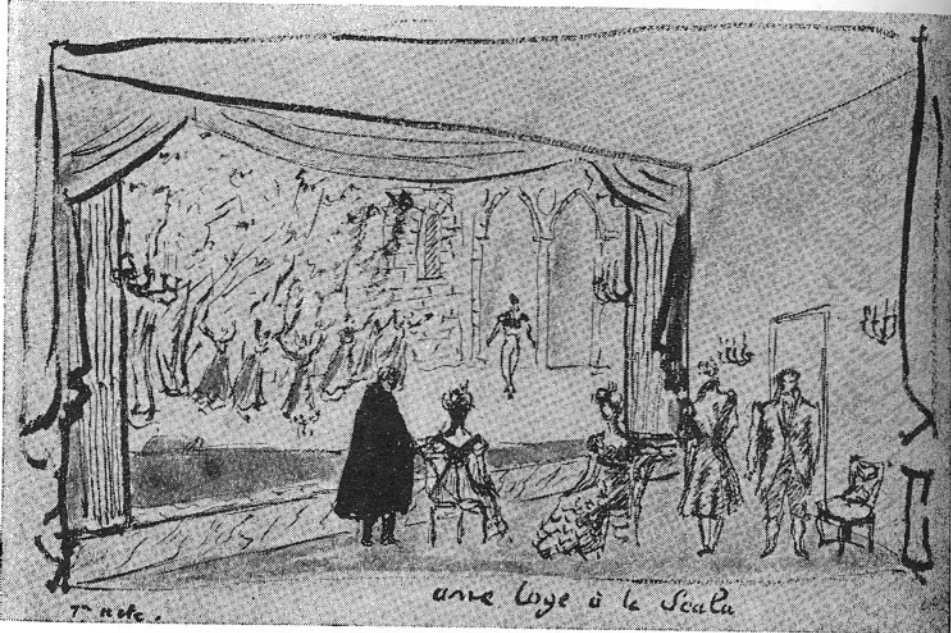
The Furtwängler audience is rich and fashionable. Lots of chinchilla. He plays sure-fire stuff and stream-lines à la Toscanini. Beethoven, Brahms (yes, I said Brahms), Wagner, Strauss and Debussy are his oysters. His error was an overture by Pfitzner.

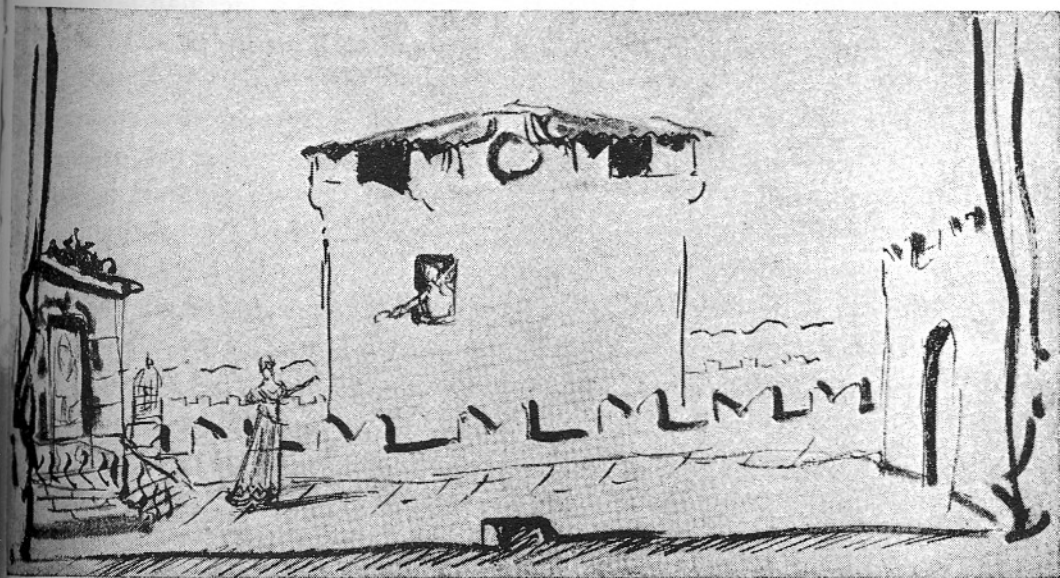
The Scherchen audience is mostly intellectual and definitely unfashionable, full of German exiles and the international-minded. He is himself an Aryan and, so far as I know, non-political, an exile however. He plays Bach, Mozart, Purcell, Lully and some moderns, sure-fire stuff for the liberals. His error was not Markevitch but the Beethoven *Grand Fugue*, opus 133, played by full string orchestra. (It sounded terrible.) His form of stream-lining is the sort of rhythmic inflexibility that has been accepted by most of the musically literate for the past twenty-five years as the proper way to perform all music written before 1800 or since 1912. A dampened sonority is used for old music, a harsh and biting one for new. The audience gets quite excited and applauds vociferously, especially for Bach and Mozart when he makes them sound like a music-box overheard from the next room in the pauses of a dim merry-go-round.

A good deal of the side-taking in this war is factitious, worked up for political reasons. A good deal of the enthusiasm at the Scherchen concerts is due to the presence, in a body, of intellectuals who really think they like that sort of concert. Just as the United States is going to have to absorb a goodly number of German composers in these next years, France is having already to absorb and educate a very considerable body of German listeners. This will be a long job, because there are thousands of them. A tedious job too, because they think they are so right about music, are so proud of their bad taste and so ostentatious in expressing it.

That it is bad taste there is no question, I think. Over-refinement in performance is just as decadent a style as over-dramatic dynamism, because both tend to produce nervous-shock or soul-states at the expense of communication. Both presuppose that creative activity in the present is a minor musical activity compared to the sensational or the luxury-trade or the "refeened" presentation of the classics. A French audience can get violently controversial about a new piece and it can stage a pitched battle about it and have in the police. It is not, however, the habit here either to get hysterical about the classics or to accept orchestral conducting as a major art. Both habits are quite common in Germany and in the United States, as we know.

Now hysteria about the classics is the product of high-powered





LA CHARTREUSE DE PARME

Opera on Stendhal's celebrated novel
by HENRI SAUGUET

DÉCORS by JACQUES DUPONT

For the production planned in Paris in the spring

conducting. And high-powered conducting is a German invention and principally a German cult. It was made up out of whole cloth a hundred years ago by Richard Wagner. It remains Wagner's cardinal treason to music. He lent the prestige of his genius to that systematic falsification of musical values that high-powered conducting demands. Its spread has everywhere been accompanied by the decay of the Great Tradition. It is the same old virtuoso-disease that killed Italy and that killed once upon a time in England the gayest, the liveliest, the sweetest, the gentlest and the most sophisticated musical civilization that Europe has ever known.

It is not the final execution of the Anschluss, nor racial and political persecution, that have killed music in Germany. German music has stunk for fifty years. Italian music has mostly stunk for over a century and English for over two. Russia never really existed musically. She only supplied great theatrical men (and few enough of them at that) to the German and French traditions. She couldn't even survive a political revolution. German music has survived several and will no doubt go on for a while even now, because it takes a long time for that much rotting vegetation to dry up and get blown away by the continental cross-currents.

Don't go on with this if you're fed up. But it's my story about Paris just now. That the music-listening French public has allowed itself to be mobilized on the pretended grounds of political sympathy in a war between two factions of a dispute that is not about anything the French music public is interested in.

The French music-listening public is interested principally in music, only incidentally in presentation. It is the only music-listening public in Europe that knows the difference between one good piece and another and that can distinguish design from execution in any given piece. For fifty years Paris has been the accepted world-capital of first performances. Today her concert halls are invaded by chorybantic troupes of classics-worshippers and seekers after soul-states. She will have to educate them all. It is doubtful if she can do or will be asked to do much about the exiled German composer. The real German-trained music-maker is too completely indigestible for Paris to be very patient

with, except when he is a voluntary visitor in search of musical health. Technical complexity unjustified by expression, emotional vagueness, most particularly that air of owning all Musical Truth that German composers so naively and so impregnably assume, all get short shrift here. Let America handle the composers if she can and she can probably handle quite a lot of them. France has all she can take on, I fancy, with sixty thousand unrestrained music-lovers to digest.

In the field of light music it is different. The town is full of Viennese *Wälzerkönige*, mostly doing well. Rudolf Révil, twenty-five, a German by birth but of French musical education (Boulanger), has written a half-dozen or more best-selling *javas* (French popular whirl-around waltzes). *Connaissez-vous les moules marinières?* and *On ouvre demain* are sung everywhere and they are charming. They have melodic grace and correct harmony, and they are astoundingly simple. He might easily have a career like Offenbach's.

Any visitors coming this way are recommended to attend Gluck's *Alceste* and Berlioz's *La Prise de Troie* at the Opéra, also Bizet's *Djamileh* at the Comique. See our next issue for further news of *La Chartreuse de Parme* and for a full description of Cliquet-Pleyel's *Espagne*. Not to be missed.

Virgil Thomson

IVES' CONCORD SONATA

THE scene was The Old House, an ancient lamp-lit mansion near the post-road at Cos Cob. There, before an intrigued, tense, somewhat puzzled little audience on November 28th, John Kirkpatrick gave what to all appearances was the first complete public performance of the work containing possibly the most intense and sensitive musical experience achieved by an American. It is *Concord, Mass., 1840-1860*, the second pianoforte sonata of Charles E. Ives.

Sonorities frequently unique in character and finely veiled, penetrating with a curious sensuous spirituality in which the secretive soul of Puritanism would seem again to have materialized itself, constitute much of its medium. The structure is