

But even in other respects the music, from start to finish, bears the characteristic stamp of Milhaud's art. Stylistically it is developed in polytonal sections, yielding at times to absolute tonality. The thematic development is diatonic practically throughout and is broken up with the greatest rhythmic delicacy. Once again Milhaud reveals that altogether personal rhythmic gift, whose great originality lies in his individual use of percussion. The percussion, often the sole accompaniment of the chorus, has an incomparable intricacy of rhythmic line, a chiseled perfection. The rhythmic-melodic treatment of the chorus, ranging from simple speech forms to the most complex polyphony, reveals Milhaud as a great master of his craft.

If, despite all this, the strong impression made by the work is not entirely satisfying, it is because of a certain lack of unity. The attempt to balance poetry and music demonstrates an impulse to shun the traditions of the grand opera stage, but, in contradistinction, the use of films, at least as they are employed here, places too much stress on the new scenic technic. Thus the attainment of a simplicity which would have been of great benefit to the work as a whole was impaired.

Apart from this, the Staatsoper Unter den Linden achieved an esthetic production of the greatest value. Unfortunately it will be unparalleled for a long time, for no other stage has the apparatus to handle such scenic problems. Kleiber as director again demonstrated his great virtuosity in overcoming all the score's difficulties, and led the ensemble impressively. The reactions of the audience were conflicting. At the end of the performance there was a "battle" between proponents and opponents which lasted for fifteen minutes. But this is just another indication that we are dealing with one of the most remarkable works of the new opera stage.

*Nikolai Lopatnikoff*

## TRANSATLANTIC

**I**T is indeed a cause for rejoicing that a young American composer should concern himself about the problem of opera today. It is to be hailed hopefully and sympathetically by Europe as a sign of young America's cultural development. But if this

labor is to bear fruit it must be honestly appraised. More than a beginning and an active purpose are necessary. Representative works of the younger generation should be judged by the severest standards so that no loophole remains for the criticism of die-hard reactionaries. It is to the advantage of George Antheil that a strict judgment be passed on his newest work, *Transatlantic*, as well as of the future of American music.

If America considers Antheil today as a representative of the extreme left wing in music, it is mistaken. His latest opera is modern in its choice of subject matter but not, from a European viewpoint, in actual content of the dramatic episodes, in character drawing or even in the music. It is really a romantic opera, with all its effects and technic serving a romantic illusion. Elevator and Brooklyn Bridge, night club and ocean steamer are the wings, the scenic décor for an affair which completely fulfills the usual opera scheme, with lovers, a villain and a secondary couple. One does not approach this work with the attitude suitable to an *avant-garde* production but should rather attempt to discover whether it meets the challenge raised by its own special style.

It is contemporary enough in its superficial aspect. An oil magnate manipulates a presidential election. He holds a candidate in his power by means of a beautiful woman, one of his retainers. But the candidate and the woman fall in love and endanger the plans of the villain. He abandons the hero and involves the woman with another man. Despite all, the candidate is elected, wins back his beloved and, in the "happy ending," beholds the arrest of his scheming and faithless protector.

Obviously we are dealing here with present-day problems; the relations of capital and politics. But these remain abstract and are relegated to the background in favor of the hero's personal psychology. The magnate's financial interests are not emphasized; he remains a sort of stock villain who could spin his web just as well on the basis of a pact with the devil. It is significant that the conflicts of this kind of social drama are not drawn from economic conditions but arise from human weaknesses and desires. It is thus immaterial whether the people live in the present or any other age. Antheil apparently intended to write an "American"

opera; the result is really a romantic opera of intrigue which exploits the milieu of present day America, its vastness, tempo, scenes and technic, replacing with these effects the oldtime theatrical moonlight sorcery and fairy fantasies.

One should remember of course that the goal of an art-form like opera is not the naturalistic reflection of reality but rather the capture of its very essence. Such an objective in fact is indicated in Antheil's opera by his observance of Cocteau's formula to name the personages according to classical mythology. They are called Hector, Ajax, Helena, Jason; it is only by accident that a Gladys and a Leo find their way into this company. But can one discover the spirit of an age in those of its aspects which are eternal? If "eternal" forces are presented, by their very abstractness they would possess little timely significance. In Antheil's opera we have not the mythos of America, but a series of non-historical episodes seen in the guise of modern life; there is but the façade of modernity. The capitalists are concerned with champagne and dancing, not with production and sales, the candidate forgets his political career in his love affair. The "eternal" features of love and hate appear in the most primitive and accustomed form. We had indeed imagined an America more "American" than is conjured up here despite the parade of its accessories.

Nevertheless the scenic invention of this work reveals a gift for the theatre and a certain free and fresh conception which arouse expectation of promise in Antheil's future stage productions, especially if he ever sets himself to unravel rather than to manipulate the clichés of civilization.

Musically the score can make little claim to modernity. It derives primarily from jazz which, it must be confessed, we have known through its best American interpreters in a more original rhythmic and melodic form. But there is a certain marked tendency toward an American folk-lore, in which direction Antheil's true musical gift may lie. Some of the simple melodies make a real impression and are well conceived. Harmonically the work leans toward the modern French school, rhythmically it echoes a rather tame Stravinsky, and there are certain modest attempts at polytonality that point toward Milhaud. A uniform and orig-

inal style has not yet crystallized, for complete command over technical resources is lacking. Especially is the structural form uncertain and tentative. The score is given no great contrapuntal or logical harmonic development, employing easy and rather monotonous devices. It relies entirely on tonality. The instrumentation however is sure, plastic and transparent though quite primitive; it is doubtful whether it would have served as well on a more polyphonal foundation.

But the work as a whole is an undeniable indication of musical and dramatic talent, in its sure grasp of the theatre, in a certain musical élan and in its direct, naive pursuit not of fine-spun, transcendental combinations, but of an objective. It is exactly this crudity in following his goal which arouses the hope that in Antheil there is enough original matter to develop an eventually mature, completely formed and unconventional creation. From the European point of view the sternest self-discipline in the spiritual as well as in the musical field seems necessary for this ultimate achievement.

The Frankfurt premiere was extraordinarily fine. Despite the limited scenic facilities enjoined by the present theatre crisis, the talented stage director, Dr. Herbert Graf, succeeded in enchanting us with the illusions of a New York of fantasy, at least as we Europeans imagine the land of skyscrapers and giant bridges. Even the revue parts were gay and characteristic. The conductor, Hans Steinberg, got everything possible out of the music.

*Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno*