

reserved for the critics. The first hearing had emphasized the delicacy inherent in the music; the second, close hearing was simply too loud to be delicate. It was also too harsh; this was probably due not entirely to amplitude, but to the fact that the Goldman Band plays in a concrete shell rather than in a sympathetic old-fashioned wooden one. This loudness and harshness is not objectionable in the case of the standard band repertory (e.g., Goldman's *Hail Brooklyn*), for it mobilizes the attendant ears, and the sedentary character of both band and audience is, for the music's duration, disregarded.

*John Cage*

### MRS. COOLIDGE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

**T**HIS is an account of Mrs. Coolidge's eightieth Birthday Party. It lasted three days and ended in the presentation, by Archibald Mac Leish, of an impressive document expressing the gratitude of the President, the Cabinet and the Library of Congress for the gift of the Coolidge Auditorium and for the endowment to sustain it and to commission new works and to send the best chamber music into the farthest ends of our country, and for Mrs. Coolidge's enlightened and persevering care.

Saturday evening, October 28, offered no new works – two Bach sonatas, two Mozart sonatas, and a *concert, Ritratto dell'Amore*, by Couperin – but it did offer the technical highspot of the festival, with Ralph Kirkpatrick at the harpsichord, and Alexander Schneider, lately first violin of the Budapest quartet. Their ensemble was impeccable.

The afternoon of the second day brought forth a Mozart quintet (D major) – played by the Stradivarius Quartet and Mr. Albert S. Coolidge – and three works for two pianos, played by Messrs. Dougherty and Ruzicka. That noble work, Schubert's *Fantasy in F minor*, Opus 103, was played with transparent tone, solid rhythm, and the proper fervor.

There followed two "first performances in public:" Stravinsky's *Sonata* and Rieti's *Second Avenue Waltzes*. These last were the original compositions which Rieti turned into his ballet *Waltz Academy*, and they have about the intrinsic merit of a Godowsky arrangement of Mascagni. They slip by, like sulphur and molasses, in the trappings of three-four time; undoubtedly fun to play; totally without that decent vulgarity which alone would make them tolerable.

Whereas these waltzes were contrived, Stravinsky's *Sonata* was composed (1943-44) in the master's most knowing and searching style of

intellectual polyphony. The thematic material is simple but apt; the deployment of harmony almost accidental; the real elaboration occurs in the rhythms, in the juxtaposition of accents, in the pauses and rests, in the metrical strata. Throughout the three movements – Moderato, Largo (Theme with variations), Allegretto – the preoccupation with Poly-rhythmos is exclusive, but its economy is so various and its vitality so great that, at a first hearing, the audience was both moved and delighted.

The second evening opened with E. Power Biggs playing Bach's *G Major Prelude and Fugue* on the organ. Allowing for a poor instrument and a hall far too small, I was more than ever sure that the organ is a "context" music-maker – the context including dark vaults where the tones can rumble and return, stained-glass, and the varied smells of religions. Biggs also played a *Sonata in C minor* of Julius Reubke and variations on a *Noël* (1923) by Marcel Dupré.

After a fair performance by the Stradivarius Quartet of the Beethoven *E♭ major*, Opus 127, the novelty of the evening was produced, and, like the Stravinsky in the afternoon, ran off with the show. This was Walter Piston's *Partita* for violin (Wolfensohn), viola (Lehner), and organ (Biggs), commissioned for this concert. There are four movements: Prelude (Maestoso – Allegro Vivo,) Sarabande (Adagio), Variations, (Allegretto), and Burlesca (Allegro). This *Partita* is an admirable and agreeable work. On one hearing, the first two movements seemed far the meatiest and most creative. The Variations were too brief and meaningless, if clever, to pull their oar with the others; but the freshness and vitality of the work as a whole were obvious.

In two instances, the nefarious itch for literary connotations – as though contemporary music needed a crutch – broke out in the program. So absurd was one instance that the notes, artfully written by Archibald MacLeish, backed water into the phrase, "Mr. Piston was asked to direct himself to the theme of (certain) passages in Carl Sandburg's *The People, Yes*." Unfortunately, there was a five-page leaflet, with the words – "Wedlock is Padlock" – "Some kill with a feather" – "The people sleep." Ninety-one lines for the little allegretto! Fortunately, the Sarabande, with its lovely phrases for the viola, and its tender evocation of a Ryder-like American scene, discarded entirely "Blue eyes say love me or I die" and the other gems of our Chicagooan Ecclesiasticus. Such literary upholstery is disquieting. Piston quite properly refused to sit in it.

The second instance of encroaching literature occurred in the dance

program, on the last evening, when Martha Graham presented *Mirror Before Me*, with music by Paul Hindemith – subtitled: *Hérodiade, de Stéphane Mallarmé, recitation orchestrale, 1944*. Now, even if Graham totally discards the poem, the harm has been done, for the very word *Hérodiade* evokes justifiable images and personalities in the mind of the audience. Actually, the poem is a dialogue between Hérodiades, *belle affreusement*, and her maid. The Queen waits before her mirror, the incubus of her own personality, expecting only the realization of herself. And Graham has bravely adhered to the central meaning, discarding only the jewelled Narcissism. Her own notes explain that a woman waits, she knows not what for; but the enlargement of time is on her; in a mirror she describes the anguish of her expectancy; the moment comes, and (adorned in a vinylite robe) she moves to meet her unknown destiny.

The score is fine – various, integrated, deeply conceived. The grave emotion is continuously sustained, as it was also sustained by Martha Graham. Indeed, the tension and projection of her performance is always something of a wonder. It has the anguish and oddness of our dreams. Often, as in a dream, I am lost and unhappy, observing that tenseness; often, as in this dance, I wonder why the mirror, in order that it should not look like an ordinary pedestrian pier-glass (what Mallarmé calls “*ta glace au trou profond*”) should look like the bones of a brontosaurus. But I cannot rationalize Miss Graham, only admire her.

The first of the three commissioned ballets was *Imagined Wing* (*Jeux de Printemps*), 1944, with music by Darius Milhaud. It was a meaningless charade, a curtain-raiser, in which Martha Graham did not appear. The music, half-heard by people also watching a new dance, seemed expert, the lightly acidulous child of *L'Arlésienne*, charming.

The real exhilaration of the evening was in *Appalachian Spring*, music by Aaron Copland. Here were the tart herbs of plain American speech, the pasture, without the flowers of elocution. Here were the clean rhythms and the irony and the homespun tenderness that, in a fine peroration, reached a sustained exaltation. Surely, it is one of Copland's most lovable scores, limpid and yet moving, sparkling yet never brittle; and, while rhythmically diversified, more solidly built, more solidly engineered, than some of his other ballets.

May O'Donnell was the pioneering woman, a dour foil to the Revivalist, Merce Cunningham, whose dance of morbid, Freudian release was astonishing in its virtuosity. Martha Graham, as the bride of The

Husbandman, Eric Hawkins, concentrated in herself the rigors and relieves of the frontier woman, whose life vacillates between the awfulness and the wonder of nature, the threats of Hell and her love for her man. The score was more serene and relaxed than the dancing, but on the whole the music and choreography were felicitously mated.

In all three ballets it was a joy to find Martha Graham finally sustained by good music. And the music itself was well performed by a small orchestra of nine strings, flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, bassoon, trumpet, and piano. Altogether, it was a very pleasant birthday-party.

S. L. M. Barlow

## BOSTON OPENS AN EXCITING SEASON

WITHIN the first three weeks of the current orchestral season in Boston, we have heard performances of William Schuman's *Prayer in Time of War*, David Diamond's *Second Symphony*, Arnold Schönberg's *Theme and Variations for Orchestra*, Opus 43b, and Bohuslav Martinu's *Concerto for Two Pianos*. The scope of the first programs and the announcements and rumors of future events would seem to indicate that we are in for an exciting year.

Schuman's music is by this time fairly familiar to Boston audiences. Its virtues — its undoubted originality, urgency, and sincerity — were apparent enough in his *Prayer*. On the whole, the music was relatively restrained, but it seems to me that the composer could do with a few more stylistic inhibitions. The present work was marred by the recurrence of clichés which a more self-conscious composer would have shunned or at least handled with more tact. Even more than in the earlier works, one has the impression that the composition is a compilation of devices, effects and formulae rather than the product of a unified style. It is not that the formulae are in themselves objectionable — that, of course, is a matter of taste — but when they are employed one by one, section by section, they tend to emphasize the periodic nature of the music.

The Diamond symphony, which was having its premiere performance, achieves greater synthesis. This is the first time that Boston has had a chance to hear any of Diamond's music, and some members of the audience noted with obvious relief that the piece was not overly modern. This bespeaks a limited understanding of modernism, for the conservatism of the symphony was more apparent than real. On the whole, I was