

language and weaving melodic line has given us more of the essence of Schönberg than there is in all of his "Schönbergian" atonalities.

Israel Citkowitz

COMPOSERS AS LECTURERS AND IN CONCERTS

I TAKE it composers are no longer viewed as ineffable angelic nitwits who populate a mythology invented by lady novelists. Persons who write music are not necessarily incapable of human speech. As a matter of fact, composers are fairly articulate. They can also perform and conduct music rather well, even some one else's music. It is still something of a gamble to take on faith what a composer has to say regarding his own work; barring that subject, there are a number of sound and stimulating ideas in circulation thanks to the composer-turned-lecturer and -critic. I cite Copland, Eisler, Sands.

Copland's lecturing, like his written criticism, is notable for a flat undecorated honesty. He is no felicitous phraser, he has little grace of speech, few quips; and sometimes one stops listening. Almost always something important is missed. Copland is that rare musician who believes his ears, which is to say his instinct; and his ears and his instinct tell him much that is penetrating and truthful. The survey he is making at the New School of music of the last ten years—presenting recordings, talk and piano-illustration—constitutes a large undertaking. It is too large if it is really necessary to lump Stravinsky, Shostakovitch and Prokofieff together in one evening's analysis (Oct.4). All of Stravinsky's important first period was missing; Prokofieff was represented by the piffling *Pas d'Acier*; one aspect of Shostakovitch's gift was caught. Copland put forth the tempting theory that the Russian revolution, to which Stravinsky was and is opposed, split his career into "Russian" and "non-Russian" periods, and that this is the large distinction between his early and his recent music. I think the first idea partly right, as it concerns the conscious Stravinsky; although Tiresias' aria, the whole *Symphonie des Psaumes* and pages of the Baiser are as Russian as borscht. But the "change" in Stravinsky—it is really a sloughing-off and

gradual emergence—is deeper and less pat than the elimination of nationalist elements in his music. Copland's curious notion that the accident of *Pulcinella* is indirectly responsible (because of its effect on Stravinsky) for the entire "neo-classic" phase in modern music is also much too neat. If this were so, then we might as well pull the works of Max Reger, the G-minor *Concerto* of Saint-Saëns, the Kreisler fakes and the Godowsky transcriptions on to the same bandwagon. *Pulcinella*, lovely as it is, is only a pastiche, an adaptation (as Copland himself pointed out later); and "neo-classicism", which is the wrong term, was born out of a musico-historic need, which finds its first answer in the *Octuor*.

Copland's subject is voluminous; Hanns Eisler's, subject "Music and the Crisis" is considerably larger in scope. He holds what seems to me the only tenable point of view: that you can't talk about music unless you reveal and analyze its inescapable ties with the conditions in which music is made. (Copland's one attempt at this was superficial.) Eisler is blunt, forthright, what the Germans call *derb*. His knowledge is brilliantly documented; listening to him one feels his authentic experience and fire. The substance of his first talk (Oct. 5) is that the means for spreading music are today steadily increasing, while the conditions for understanding music are just as steadily decreasing; and since music in our day makes constantly larger demands upon the understanding, it turns out that practically everybody now has a chance not to understand music.

Interesting data from Carl Sands' original talk on Colonial music (Music Vanguard, Oct. 27): (1) The music-business of ten years ago in America was worth \$500,000,000; (2) in a backward country, the insurgent youth will attack indigenous music as feudal, and will attempt to substitute occidental "revolutionary" music; but where invasion has taken place, the same insurgent youth will ban the same occidental idiom as reactionary and imperialistic, and will cling to the native music as a gesture of independence; (3) the treacly Moody-Sankey harmonies have been dropped like birdseed all over the Pacific and the East, cropping out unexpectedly in the religious and martial music of Java, Hawaii, Tahiti, North Africa, *et al*; but since recording

music dates only from 1900, any accurate analysis of influences is impossible. (McPhee, returned from the East, says Javanese music has practically died out because of the phonograph, but that the Balinese do not cotton to canned music, preferring still to make their own; Sands says give them five or ten more years.) Sands played some extraordinary records; I liked best an Albanian number, one from deep Africa, and the *Mississippi Jailhouse Groan*, the last a singularly appropriate illustration of imperialist expansion.

Composers also compose. The one-man concerts at the New School, designed to display larger chunks of a man's work than the rare and lonely exhibits our orchestras afford, are at the same time a pretty stiff test of variety, sustaining power, and coherence. Copland (Oct. 11) came off well. First, the program had power; also maturity (except in some inconsequential songs, which at one point threatened to invite leniency for a "retrospective" show). The big conceptions that underlie his works, embodied in an intense and straining projection, set up an excitement and drama unique in today's music. A quality I had not suspected in his talent is delicacy, grace; it is a shy animal, which is perceived only after many minutes of listening. The more obvious traits are the passion for introspection, the de-sentimentalized emotional drive, the bitter savor; technically, the solidity and detailed workmanship of his structures and a sameness of form which becomes a little alarming. His program began with the astounding *Variations*, an introduction likely to dim a whole series of one-man concerts. The *Symphonic Ode* is strangely richer in the two-piano transcription than in its original form. I prefer the orchestra-version; he is best represented in his symphonic works anyway. *El Salon Mexico* disappointed me; a good chance for terse musical reportage was wasted in up-to-the-minute travel-slumming music.

What am I to say of the Roy Harris concert (Oct. 25)? I have liked certain of his individual works so well (the *Piano Sonata*, and the *Quartet Variations*, here programmed) that I am appalled to find that pretentious and dull are the words I think of on hearing a row of them; I feel each adjective wants clarification. My point in regard to Harris' music heretofore has been

that it is the "diamond in the rough"—that he has breath but not finish, content but not grasp of form. I see now that he is full of ideas about form: schemes of rhythm-displacement, phrase and passage-length, section-contrast. But the ideas stay theoretical, manipulated, for the most part recalcitrant to the stuff. Instead of a fusion of materials and means, the theorizing in recent years has got sharper, and its imposition more eccentric. Each work becomes a chaotic compilation; some sections satisfy perfectly, others seem the most inadmissible student-blundering; little gets fully realized. Even the breath, the long flowingness, the "go" of his music—and Harris still has them somewhere, in proportions unpossessed by any other American I can think of—have got clogged by misled and didactic ratiocination. Can Harris do nothing about it? And can he do nothing about the insistent mood of "Olympian" ostentation which has crept in? How often, when a real contour and "face" begins to appear in a movement, it becomes dimmed and blotted out by vague rhetorical repetitiousness and posturing, gloomy-grand, or American-sinewy, or what-not! Then there is his instrumentation; baffling. He seems not able to exteriorize his thought; it remains in an unknown limbo, defying any instrument or instruments to cope with it, except literally. This trio was never conceived for violin, cello and piano, this chorus never had actual voices as the basis of its creation; and yet one can find no other combination for these pieces . . . Harris' orchestral overture, *Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Philharmonic, Nov. 1) is at once more adept in its orchestration, and more trivial in its approach than his other music. There is even the smell about it of capitulation, of the "Olympian" striving for popular appeal. Nothing else can explain the latter-day Dvorák evocations.

Marc Blitzstein

A THOMSON SOIREE

VIRGIL THOMSON's music is written for an intimate theatre: the salon. Often it seems pretentious and frivolous, although it is intrinsically honest and serious. The false impression is created by its untimeliness and minuteness (the very