

valuable as well as harmful. Valuable in the setting of a high technical level and sharpening of the composer's craft, harmful in segregating the young creative forces into stifling pockets of highly specialized cults and chapels.

The earth, the wide fields of the far hinterland of France are coming into their musical own and French music will not long continue in its present process of drying up.

Lazare Saminsky

PARIS, 1937—THE I.S.C.M.

THE fifteenth festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music took place in Paris at the end of June, and it can be said that scarcely a ripple was created in the general music consciousness of the world at large or even in the festival city itself. Probably for the first time in the history of the society the concerts were not open to the general public and seats could be obtained, even at full price, only by applying to the secretary of the Paris section, hence saving money and advertising and, it was rumored, avoiding a government tax!

This exclusiveness would not deserve comment except that it frankly expresses a symptomatic condition of the International Society, and indeed one of the major problems of modern music. In Paris this time it seemed as if contemporary music, as sponsored by the Society, had become a completely specialized field, only to be understood by, and of interest to the few people immediately concerned in its creation and performance. The principle behind the founding of the I.S.C.M.—to build up a dynamic international group constantly exchanging contacts, ideas, musical works, etc., and to secure the widest possible public—has apparently fallen into abeyance.

That the consciousness of a new dawn should, in the course of fifteen years, have been supplanted by a more or less anarchical defensiveness can certainly not be held against it. In that it is only reflecting the tendency of most forms of human activity today.

More worthy of reproach and of importance to the life of the society, is the practical functioning of the jury. While the elected jurors are certainly all, all honorable men, they far too often lose sight of the more distant fundamental principle of absolute, not

relative, quality in the course of having to bargain with each other over the acceptance of works for perhaps nationalistic or personal reasons. The absence of any American work, too, must have been in part the result of the deplorable lack of activity of the American group in the International. Some of these defects are of course inevitable; the major blame cannot be put on five men of undoubted good will when the proverbial silk purse fails to appear. A new constitution which goes into effect in 1938 may remedy some of the mechanical failings of the Society by strengthening its executive. But the program this year contained such an appalling proportion of weak works that one cannot help feeling grave concern for the future of the organization.

The chamber music concerts opened with Honegger's *Second Quartet*, which seemed at first rather pleasant, serious music. It was only after some other compositions had been heard that it began to loom up in its relative greatness. A very pale, diaphanous work for voice and small ensemble of wood-winds and cello by Mitchiko Toyama, a Japanese woman composer, seemed in the beginning fresh and different, with its fondness for strange modes; but the material was so slight that after a few minutes it was exposed as completely unsubstantial. A pedantic, interminably chattering *Nonet* by Karel Reiner showed the Czech school at its weakest, and a duet for flute and clarinet by Joaquim Homs (Spain) seemed without any value or virtue whatsoever.

With the *Morceau de Concert* by Alan Bush we were again on solid ground. It is true that at times Bush's music, despite its vitality, seems somewhat desiccated; yet it is vital, firmly conceived and executed, far more in touch with the general stream of modern music and less insular than most of the English music that is being written today.

The first orchestral concert began badly with Szymanowski's *Fourth Symphony*. This is particularly old-fashioned music, romantic in the most tinselly, superficial manner, never contemporary in any sense. With Starokadomsky's *Concerto for Orchestra* (Soviet Russia), the festival suddenly reached its peak for this writer. It is again a relative matter, and one cannot claim greatness or profound originality for the work. The influence of Hindemith can be discerned at once, especially in the use of very

banal rhythmic clichés in the principal themes, and in the tendency to sudden tonal displacements. But perhaps it is just the contrast of Starokadomsky's absolute clarity and absence of all overloading, with Hindemith's fatal lack of restraint and self-criticism in piling up independent voices and rhythms that made the *Concerto* so refreshing. The orchestration is as clear and successful as the musical substance itself, and it was indeed good to enjoy one work rich and interesting in texture, and in no sense reactionary, without feeling any reservation as to incomprehensibility or unsolved problems.

Von Hannenheim's *Fantasia* for string orchestra, which followed, was also well above the average of the festival. The composer, though definitely belonging to the Central European school and much influenced by Schönberg, showed in this work a continuity and passionateness of thought surprisingly and satisfyingly human. Jerzy Fitelberg's *Second Violin Concerto* (Poland) proved a disappointment for those who, like the present writer, have cherished a belief in his talent. He seems completely to have lost himself. In earlier works there were always flashes of purposeful brilliance to compensate for the arid stretches. The incessant nervous motion of this work had no longer any inner significance. Its emptiness denies it all claim to being dynamic—it is only motorized. André Souris' *Hommage à Babeuf* (Belgium), for wind instruments, is supposed to be surrealist. Maybe it is. It sounded like a perfectly commonplace military march undistinguished in form or content. Why it was presented in a program of modern music must remain a mystery.

The *Symphony Concertante* of Rosenberg (Sweden) proved to be well-constructed, serious music of impeccable respectability, which profited by its juxtaposition to Souris' march. Malipiero's *Second Symphony* ended an unduly lengthy program. Despite the late hour and the mass of music already heard, it left a deep impression. It is marked *elegiaca*; and apparently the mood of restraint and sadness has brought out all that is best in this very sympathetic composer. There is a broadness of line and depth of feeling; above all its thematic material is much more concise and significant, less improvised in quality than is usually the case with Malipiero.

The only surprise of the second chamber music concert was the solidity and earnestness of three out of the four movements of Milhaud's *Ninth Quartet*. It may again be a question of relative values, but the slow movement, for instance, seemed noble in feeling, and there was little of his usual arbitrariness in the presentation of material. However the trademark of Milhaud was present in the scherzo, a music-hall sketch in the best manner. The quartet of Veress (Hungary), the trio of Badings (Holland), the songs of Apostel (Austria), were all worth hearing, well done and not very significant or original.

In the last orchestral and chamber music concerts, the bad finally so outweighed the good that one left the festival with a general feeling of distaste, certainly not deserved by many of the individual works. Haba's overture to the opera *The New World* is robust music, made especially enjoyable by the strains of the familiar *Internationale*. The feeble impudence of Jean Françaix's *Piano Concerto* is particularly repellent to this writer. That and the following *Passacaglia* by Juan Carlos Paz of Argentina, the only music written in the twelve-tone system to be given at the festival, represent the two extremes of modern music. It is difficult to decide which is essentially the more insignificant and bad: the undistinguished, unvital prettiness and grace of the one, or the horrible intellectual consistency of the other's ugliness and unreality.

A serenade of Conrad Beck (Switzerland) and a divertimento of Larsson (Sweden), as serious, carefully executed works profited greatly by contrast with the compositions between which they were sandwiched: Hanns Eisler's *Third Orchestral Suite* and Josef Valls' *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra*. Eisler's suite, composed a decade ago, showed all its composer's defects,—one is tempted to say almost all the defects of the musical life of Berlin of that time. There is plenty of vulgarity and the usual unfortunate Continental conception of American jazz. Valls' *Concerto* started out well with an earthy, Spanish peasant feeling for atmosphere, color and rhythm; but the composer soon lost his way hopelessly. The Jugoslav works, a *Toccata* by Zebré which terminated the last orchestral concert and the *Grimaces Rythmiques* for piano by Milojevitch which figured on the last

chamber music morning, have been referred to above. The *Hymnes* for three pianos of Dallapiccola was efficient if undistinguished music, the *Quartet* of Elizabeth Maconchy (Ireland) only undistinguished, while the *Variations on a Theme of Rameau* by Dukas would scarcely be considered music at all outside of France.

It is unfortunate that the impression made by the few good works at the Paris festival, was in danger of eclipse, through the deterioration in quality of the last concerts. But peter out it did; and the reviewer can only sorrowfully record the fact and mobilize his hopes for London in 1938.

Mark Brunswick

OPENING NOTES, NEW YORK

THE Philharmonic started the season off bravely with a first performance of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* and Gardner Read's *Symphony in A-minor* that won the Philharmonic prize contest last year. No two works could be more widely different in character. Bartok's work is the finest of his compositions to be heard in these parts for a long time. It has much greater clarity than his more recent quartets and is less choppy, with greater broadness than the *Dance Suite*. Recently Bartok has learned how to keep to a simple tonal pattern that organizes his counterpoint and gives it a sense of progression. This work has the very definite tonality of A and many reinforcements of that key throughout; it thus avoids the chromatic wandering that so many of his followers slip into when they begin to write in his style. The first movement, a beautiful fugue, has a simple grand plan and a continuity of expression which rank it with the best of recently composed music. The second movement in a lively, nervously rhythmic vein has almost the dignity and solidity of a Beethoven scherzo. The system of development is much more free and natural than in Stravinsky whose music it resembles. The other two movements sustain the general high level of quality. Throughout there is great beauty of sonority and a very elegant kind of writing that is as rare as it is delightful in modern music.