

Style in Modern Music is rapidly drying up. Everyone is beginning to see the advantages of melodious and harmonious-sounding music. That old gag about the Modern Music Style is in for some serious revision.

One thing is sure. It will be a long time before there is another book on music as fascinating as this one. Unless Thomson himself can be persuaded to write it.

Aaron Copland

SAMINSKY REVISES MUSIC OF OUR DAY

IN a new and enlarged edition of *Music of Our Day* (Thomas Y. Crowell 1939), Lazare Saminsky maintains the advanced position that he held seven years ago and strengthens it with five more batteries of argument. The additions are an introductory essay, *A Prelude to Resurrection*; a survey of *America (Celtic and Latin)*; an appraisal of *Sibelius*, an *aperçu* of contemporary qualities in English and French music, *Saxon Versus Gaul*; and a postlude on *The Composer and the Critic*. Far from retracting anything that he has said, he reaffirms every heterodoxy and utters many more. His book will afford pleasure to readers who appreciate straight and cogent thinking, sensitiveness, catholic culture, and a polemical spirit.

Being a critic myself, let me consider first Mr. Saminsky's discussion of the relation between his craft and mine. The gist of it is this: "The composer and the critic have nothing in common as to either mental position or stage of action. The composer is a creative and dionysian power. Instinct, invisible promptings of his peculiar esthetics, contradicting emotional truths living in the same soul, are his law. The critic is mainly a reasoning force. As such he is bound to seek yardsticks in judgment, consistency, a clear and centered source of the creator's vision." No pointless jibes at criticism

as the refuge of artistic failure, but a fair statement, and the one omission (the critic's occasional flash of intuition which enables him to see the essential meaning of a work) is rectified in another passage: "Criticism is, indeed, science when it means dissection, but it is art, and one of deep human nature, where intuition and enthusiasm come in. The critic is, or should be, an ecstatic doctor as well as a warrior."

His estimate of Sibelius, "the revered artist with his deep emotional nobility," offers a penetrating explanation for the gray color which has been so often eulogized as Nordic atmosphere and bardic brooding. His verdict on the composer is: "an inspirational genius with a two-dimensional mind." "The case of Sibelius is precisely that of Grieg and Rachmaninov, even if the nature of his material, and particularly the tone of it, is different; even if the size of his spiritual self is larger. He is a natural flame, of the same kind in some respects as Schubert and Mussorgsky but with this variance: nothing emanates that may infuse itself in the new art. His song has something of the same immediate potency, but surely not the same germinal power."

Of the French and English he has this to say. "The French tonal mind is restrained, concise, centripetal, and the English expansive, catholic and centri-

fugal." In the chapter on composers of the Americas, he asserts that "incompleteness of type and artistry is present in each of the five creators who together form our musical landscape: Roy Harris, its finest, most natural and original creative gift; Charles Ives, its sharpest instinct for newness arising from the soil; Howard Hanson, bearer of various basic life-traits here, our practical energy and efficiency; Louis Gruenberg, conveyer of the highest of our artistry and technical finesse; Roger Sessions, its sturdiest paladin of culture as opposed to the sterile froth of 'international' art which American youth is taking in so piously." Of Latin-American composers, Carlos Chavez and Hector Villa-Lobos naturally receive the most consideration.

The introductory essay is filled with acute observations of the present scene. We are told that "the musical map before us is very much like a photograph of the moon. A glazed, seared surface dotted with extinct volcanoes. . . . Strauss, Schönberg, Stravinsky! A rumbling is still heard in semi-cold craters; a queer piece is flung out now and then, and rolls down the slope. Nothing can be found in *Arabella* or the rest of Strauss' melli-

fluous inanities save tricks of a formerly glamorous craft. It is clear that Schönberg has died from carrying beyond art's endurance a perverse structural obsession, a technical strategy cruelly alien to the native order of song. As for Stravinsky, the greatest tactician of them all, his exit marked the exhaustion of a limited creative gift drawn out into a semblance of genius by studied invention."

Saminsky believes that the movement to de-humanize music, to divorce it from all extra-musical connotations, was motivated by a true instinct but led astray on the wrong route of what may be called scientific mysticism. This is open to question. Music has always possessed precision, and so been qualified as a science, but the secret of musical vitality is the inveterate and incurable romanticism of man. His more general admonition however will hold for most of us: "Let us cease banal shooting at the ivory tower. So much of the immortal music of our race has been born in ivory towers. So much of it seemed alien to the then living men, and has become an expression of the ages. So much of it responds to the deepest craving of the human soul."

Ray Brown