

Blitzstein, Alex North, Goddard Lieberson and others seem more at home in a cabaret than in Town Hall where Bauman sang them. For one thing the cabaret provides a better "dramatic" setting for the interpretation that such songs need. Also it brings audience and performer into more intimate conspiracy. In Town Hall the music sounds a little overdone, and even, insincere. Its essence is theatre, left-wing theatre, with the intellectuals not togged out in evening dress.

E. C.

FURTHER SEASONAL NOTE

The choir festival directed by Lazare Saminsky at Temple Emanuel, gave three programs of definite interest devoted purely to American music, colonial and modern. The early American hymns were surprisingly good, rather in the Purcell style, with none of the relished sanctimoniousness of the nineteenth century hymn. New choral music included works by Douglas Moore, Elliott Carter, Arthur Shepherd, Mabel Daniels, Mark Silver and Dorothy Westra. Unfortunately, the music of the last two was included in the service, together with much else that was unfamiliar, and it was impossible to tell just where they came in. Of the rest we need only mention Moore and Carter, whose choruses certainly deserve publication by the Arrow Press. Carter's *Heart not so heavy as mine* was especially fine in its effective and finished writing and the sincere, deeply felt mood of the music.

C. Mc Phee

BLOCH REVISITS BOSTON

THE musical spring in Boston uncovered a "first performance" worthy of remark: two interludes from Ernest Bloch's *Macbeth*, newly extracted from his opera for concert purposes, and conducted by himself. (*The Three Jewish Poems*, *Schelomo*, *Helvetia*, and *America* otherwise filled two programs on March 17-21.) Mr. Bloch had gone a long way since, in March, 1917, twenty-two years before almost to a day, he had come to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the "discovery"

of a few discerning musicians, to conduct his *Three Jewish Poems*. He has been in and out of fame, has composed music Hebrew, Swiss, American, Abstract, and Hebrew again, made America his country, dwelt in Europe and returned, grown the swarthy beard of the prophet and abandoned it (though not the prophetic word). Just now his music is more praised than played, save in England, where a cult has raised its head.

The opera *Macbeth* had been produced in Paris seven years before Mr. Bloch's first Boston visit; its successful revival in Naples had happened one year before his return to Boston. The first interlude links the two scenes of the first act, is music darkly exultant, suggesting the "ambition drunk" Macbeth and his lady. The second, leading from the Witches' Cavern to the final scene of the drama, is still more intense and fateful. The young man who composed these pages was exuberant in his art; he spoke with a daring induced by the resourcefulness of one who had made music the natural language of his own emotions, at a period of his life when another would be watching and copying, finding himself. There is much of the skill in coloring which was shortly afterward to suffuse his two outstanding orchestral works—*Three Jewish Poems* and *Schelomo*. *Macbeth*, as here briefly sampled, is graced by youthful ardor. The early century's afterglow of romanticism sat becomingly upon the shoulders of a composer who has since remained a romanticist at heart (as probably any composer worth hearing should be). In its time it was music to incite a Romain Rolland to more than warm predictions about its young author. The excerpts as now heard arouse a strong desire to hear an opera which, whatever its other points may be, must have a fine-grained, dramatic, orchestral score.

Helvetia was a work unknown except by its existence in print and the chronicler's record of a few scattered performances when it came out. The lack of interest among conductors can be understood. As in the case of that other rhapsody, *America*, the composer tried to save by his skillful contrivance an assemblage of tunes which, even before he had begun, had defeated him. Still, the contrivance in *America* was far superior. Its rich orchestral interweaving, its assimilation of the unassimilable, remains musicianship of the highest order. *America* last March was

decidedly in the nature of a resurrection. It had been over-promoted in 1928, talked into a too blinding light of public attention—and at the same time talked into oblivion. The piece had deserved something better than it got.

Reviving it, the composer combined able leadership with an inflammatory zeal and obvious conviction that were irresistible. The orchestra responded with eloquence, the audience with cheers. The savants, holding their post-mortem, defended Mr. Bloch as an uncanny craftsman, but rejected with distaste his choice of material. He quite forfeited their approval when, at the end, after building up his sound structure and his theme to an expected apotheosis, he revealed instead what was merely a good pedestrian tune. Perhaps Mr. Bloch would have stood more chance with the knowing ones, if he had not misled them by putting "Epic" on the cover, and sprinkling every page with ringing quotations from Whitman. Literal people (and most people are too literal) looked for a corresponding nobility in the music, and were let down. If he had let it pass as just a rhapsody, *America* would probably not have been cut off in its infancy. As a stirring rhapsody, with no more pretensions than that modest term implies, it might have had a healthy life span, as rhapsodies go.

John N. Burk

CHICAGO MOVES FORWARD

THE season of 1938-39 has provided Chicago audiences with the most varied experience in contemporary music of past years. Already there is much new curiosity about the cross-currents of modern music. Criticism for their stereotyped programs is now being directed at the firmly intrenched annual North-Western Festival and other less important but equally unprogressive musical institutions. On the other hand the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, formerly the city's principal stronghold of conservatism, has this year broadened its horizon enormously. It is obviously making a serious attempt to keep abreast of the times.

No less than seven new works in concerto form received Chicago premieres. One of these, the second piano concerto of Bela