

## REFLECTIONS ON THE EUROPEAN SEASON

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**D**ESPITE economic troubles, admittedly a more serious problem in the Old World than in the New, Europe's musical activities today are, one may safely say, more flourishing than before the war. Theatres presenting musical works for the stage are in full swing, though there is much talk of a "crisis" in the operatic field. Orchestras seem more numerous than in 1914 and concerts by soloists of every description are practically countless. One might well describe the state of affairs as most prosperous.

But to form an esthetic opinion from these impressive statistics would be misleading. The programs of recent years reveal no notable change in the taste of the European public since the end of the war. At the opera, Wagner, Verdi and Puccini (Mozart in Germany) remain the gods of the crowd. Beethoven and Wagner continue to lead in the field of symphonic concerts with Tchaikovsky and Brahms drawing ever closer (in France, César Frank has a place in the first rank.) Chopin, Schumann and Liszt are still the indispensable support of any piano concert, while violinists and cellists have not yet had the courage to renounce the *Kreisleriana* or Popper's *Tarantelle*.

Nevertheless, from behind this massive facade of conservatism and spiritual inertia, signs of evolution and of progress have made their appearance in the last few years, especially during the 1927-1928 season. I will discuss these briefly.

In technique, the change which is most prominent in the aspect of contemporary music in Europe, is the impressive decrease of "atonal" works. Any diligent frequenter of modern concerts recognizes that atonal music loses important ground every year which will never be regained. As a member of the jury that selected the program last March for the coming festival of the

International Society for Contemporary Music, I was able to compute that the atonal works submitted, formerly making a quarter or even a third of the total, had fallen off this year to five per cent of the entries. An infinitely pleasing discovery, and the consolation for many depressing days spent in Zurich learning that talent (not to mention genius) is rare.

In Germany we find another characteristic sign of the times—one which would have defied credence twenty years ago, namely an ever growing appreciation of Verdi, both by the public and the young musicians, as against a general boredom with Wagner. There is nothing startling in this development if we recognize the prevalent temper of the European public which increasingly demands art that is above all, dynamic, synthetic and amusing and now shuns everything that is or seems tedious.

Still another illuminating proof of the public's desire for a change of fashion in musical performances for the theatre (of which, I repeat, the present renaissance of Verdi in Germany is a sign), was the overwhelming success, without precedent in the post-war period, of Krenek's *Johnny Spielt Auf*. It is difficult to say that the work is of superior rank; far from it. But that matters little. What is significant about this extraordinary piece is the richness of its fantasy, its dynamic movement and the composer's complete freedom from prejudices of theory, a freedom which has enabled him to demonstrate that with a real sense of the theatre one may combine in the same work a *concertato* of the opera bouffe with the last word in American jazz. I do not know whether Krenek's opera will endure. But in any case, after so many abortive dramatic attempts in recent years, the complete success of his joyous opera buffoonery has re-established confidence in our musico-dramatic future.

Another much discussed theatrical event was the production in several cities (including Berlin and Vienna) of Stravinsky's opera-oratorio, *Oedipus Rex*. The career of Stravinsky is familiar to all. Formerly the most personal and national composer of his country, the metamorphosis of the past eight years has finally made him European and impersonal. As my own sympathies have developed in exactly the opposite direction, I am not in a position to enjoy this *Oedipus*, strange mixture of disparate mu-

sical styles permeated by the insolent and irritating Parisian spirit of Jean Cocteau, in which the Latin is always inaccurately scanned. I fear that in the attempt to abjure his Slavic origin and to destroy his powerful personality, Stravinsky has succeeded only in boring us. This strange evolution seems to me more tragic than anything else. I hope I will prove to have been mistaken.

Among other European events worthy of mention is the warm reception Munich gave John Alden Carpenter's ballet, *Sky-scrapers*, the first Continental success in this field by an American. Germany, on the whole, is very hospitable to foreign theatrical productions, as witness many modern Italian works which have been received with great favor both by the public and the press, for example *Die Versunkene Glocke* of Respighi, at Hamburg; *La Mandragola* by Castelnuovo-Tedesco and *Madonna Imperia* by Alfano, at Wiesbaden; and *Il Finto Arlecchino* by Malipiero, at Mainz. Productions of Malipiero's *Filomelo e L'Infatuato* were also given in Prague. In Paris the season is just beginning; a very interesting de Falla festival at the Opéra Comique, with the dramatic productions of the Spanish master presented authentically, aroused a deserved enthusiasm.

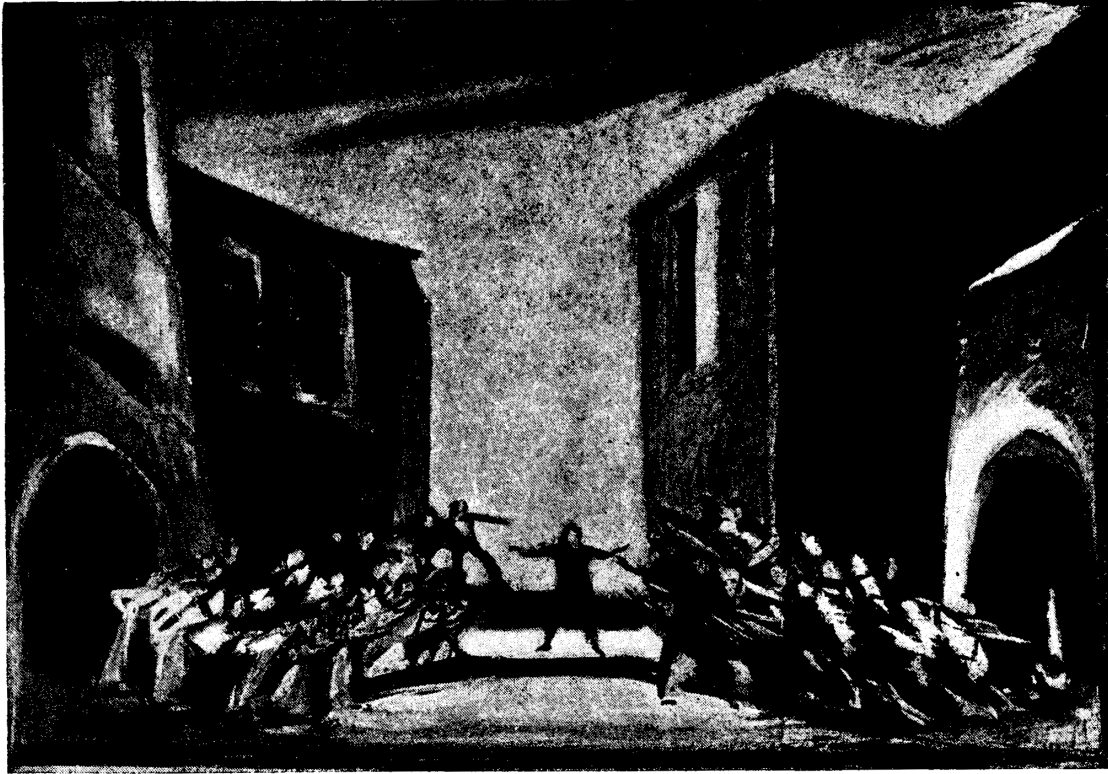
In Vienna, as usual, there has been no outstanding musical production. Its fundamentally conservative spirit becomes daily more apparent. Richard Strauss directed his own works for two weeks in Italy at the Scala in Milan, creating a triumph for *Rosenkavalier* and *Salomé*. At present the public is eagerly awaiting the production by Toscanini of Pizzetti's *Fra Gerardo*. So far the outstanding event of the Italian winter has been, of course, the opening of the Royal Opera at Rome.

Reviewing the season of 1927-1928 in Europe, the most significant features seem to me to have been the steady decline of atonal music, and, in the theatre, Wagner's yielding of place not only to Verdi but even to *Johnny Spielt Auf*.



### CARDILLAC, ACT 2

This design for the Munich production of Paul Hindemith's opera was made by Leo Pasetti. It represents the home of Cardillac, a jeweler whose avarice for treasure leads him to murder the customers lured to this hoarding place. His final victim is his daughter's lover.



### CARDILLAC, ACT 3

Pasetti's projection of the scene in the street, after the jeweler has been unmasked. Despite the violently dramatic libretto, Hindemith austerey refrained from realism in his music, having introduced strict contrapuntal forms into this score and departed in many other notable respects from the opera of tradition.