

FORECAST AND REVIEW

SIENA'S FESTIVAL

ONE might compare the sixth annual festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music held last summer at the Tuscan city of Siena, to a picture. The three performances of the Society were set in a framework consisting of a concert of ancient orchestral music, executed by L'Augusteo of Rome, a concert of ancient Italian choral music performed by Monsignor Casimiri's Polifonica Romana and the *Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche* concert which presented Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, conducted by myself, and my *Sonata* for piano and violoncello. At the last minute the frame was enriched by a reception given by the city of Siena in the Palazzo Comunale and by a special presentation of the Palio, the famous time-honored race of costumed horses. We should also add the morning performance at the Rozzi Theatre of *Façade*, the amusing work of William Walton, and a Czecho-Slovak matinee consisting of a lecture by Alois Haba on quarter tones and a presentation of jazz by Burian's "voice-band."

There were, of course, some spirits who protested that the frame was better than the picture. We may disregard these insinuations, as no comparison can be made between an ultra-modern musical "picture" and a frame which is historic or of an ancient art. In the following review however, we will discuss only the three official concerts of the Society.

This year's program in my opinion was infinitely superior to that of 1927 in Frankfurt. Fewer works of small dimensions, more well-known composers and an improvement in the general arrangement made this session more appealing and interesting than the preceding one. The rank of the performers was of a high

order. Seldom has the music in a festival been so well presented.

Three personalities dominated the concerts; Manuel de Falla, Ernest Bloch and Paul Hindemith. A strange oversight on the part of one of the sections deprived us at the last concert of Serge Prokofieff's *Quintet* which would undoubtedly have been one of the high spots of the festival. On the other hand Ravel, represented by his *Sonata* for piano and violin, because of the choice of a secondary work was not in a position to be compared with De Falla or Bloch who were each represented by a major piece.

The first concert opened with the *Second Quartet* of Vincenzo Tommasini. It is a work of fine technical merit and perfection of form, although somewhat cold. But this is music of a singular intellectual quality, quite independent of contemporary fashions. A *Sonata* for flute and piano by Karel Haba followed, a living and dynamic work. Hindemith was represented by his *Klaviermusik*, opus 37, a suite of piano pieces of medium dimension. Some of them are beautiful, of a more romantic beauty than one usually finds in Hindemith's work. Even in pieces like this the powerful energy, the incredible contrapuntal talent, the savage vigor of the young German musician are always apparent, gripping the hearer from beginning to end. After this music, so "twentieth century" and yet so much a part of the great Germanic tradition, Ravel's piano and violin *Sonata* seemed a trifle colorless. It is at all events too well known to be reviewed here. The first concert closed with a marvelous rendition by the Viennese Kolisch Quartet of Zemlinski's *Third String Quartet*, a work of great technical virtue, and, though music without a country, nevertheless personal, strongly conscious and never tedious.

The second concert began with a *Quartet*, the third, by Frank Bridge, made known in the United States by Mrs. Frederick Coolidge. It is therefore superfluous to discuss it here. It seems to me however, to be the best of the composer's works that I know. It had the good fortune to be played by a fine English ensemble, the Brosa Quartet, apparently one of Europe's best. A *Duo* by Heinz Tiessen was lively, amusing and personal. Atonality, formerly queen of the festivals, was represented by only one work, Von Webern's *String Trio*. This caused the inevitable commotion which follows the performance of any atonal work of its

kind. It would be unjust to say that Von Webern's *Trio* lacks talent or intelligence. But this music today seems as far away as the rebus pictures of the cubists of fifteen or twenty years ago. It is impossible to pretend that Latins can like such productions.

Then came a masterpiece—the *Concerto* for harpsichord and five instruments by Manuel de Falla. It is true that this work is not constructed so as to be easily grasped by those whom the old de Falla entranced with his surface Andalusian characteristics. It represents the fruit of all De Falla's analyses and self-criticism since *La Vida Breve*. He has definitely created a modern Iberian style; not one which has its roots in a too familiar, too exploited folk-lore but which springs from and is nourished in the ancient music of the court, in the painting of Greco, in the rude and mystic Gothic sculpture of the peninsula. The technical language of this music is most modern because of its polytonal audacities and the boldness and crude interpenetration of its timbres. But this modernity appears only after analysis. At first glance the work seems to be simply a structure of serene, noble and definitive simplicity. The music is the Spanish realization of a perfect model for national style. I cannot say that the audience at the festival entirely understood the great value of the work but de Falla himself received the triumph he deserved.

One morning between the two concerts we were given William Walton's fantasy, *Façade*. Written for the theatre it could not find a place on the regular programs, and was therefore presented at a separate hearing. Walton is a young man of talent and great musical possibilities. He is English—extremely English in his dry, malicious humor. This humor Italians who have not traveled or read much find it difficult to understand. They have quite a different idea of gaiety. *Façade*, though handicapped by its great length, is worthwhile because of its inherent musical quality. French influence is obvious, especially that of *Parade*. Undoubtedly London today is much nearer Paris than Rome. In these short pieces there is a trace of buffoonery, an atmosphere compounded of Shaw, the circus, Wilde and the variety house, which attracts and amuses us. *Façade* had a great success at Siena.

The last concert may be summed up in a few words. On the program were a remarkable *String Quartet* by Boguslav Mar-

tinu; a beautiful, impassioned *Sonata* for piano and violin by Franco Alfano which served to prove that romanticism and grandiloquence have not yet disappeared in Italy, and finally the splendid *Quintet* for piano and strings by Bloch. This monumental work, spacious, strong, Biblical, coming as it did after so much music of an experimental character, spoke in tones of irresistible power and roused the admiration of the international audience.

The conclusions developed from the sixth festival of the Society point to an almost complete disappearance of atonality with a strengthening—daily more evident—of form, of rhythm, of architecture, and to a melodic renaissance. What will Geneva offer in 1929? I believe that the next session will show a still firmer movement toward clarity and a definite return to the great European tradition.

Alfredo Casella

MORE FUN, LESS MUSIC

INTENTIONALLY or otherwise, the extra-musical preponderated over the musical at the German Chamber Music Festival, held in the Kurhaus at Baden-Baden in mid-July. In a program of films and music the pictures were first, the music a minor, perhaps even a diminished second. One melodrama and two farces, in an evening devoted to chamber opera, proclaimed the supremacy of the word, the relative unimportance of the note.

Illustrative of the same tendency was Darius Milhaud's oratorio, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, in that its earnest and often convincing effort to arrive at a form of intervallic speech suitable to the text may be regarded as having largely excluded more purely musical considerations. But as the Milhaud *Prodigal Son* is now eleven years old, having been finished in 1917, and as it certainly is not German chamber music, it occupied almost the position of a guest composition among the products which Messrs. Paul Hindemith, Heinrich Burkard and Josef Haas placed on their programs in illustration of the trends of the day in Central Europe.

The film and chamber opera programs were the most character-