

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

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LATE WINTER, NEW YORK, 1937

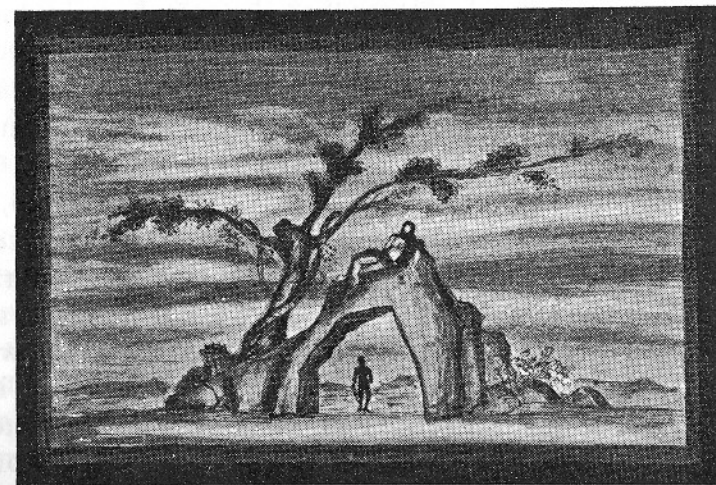
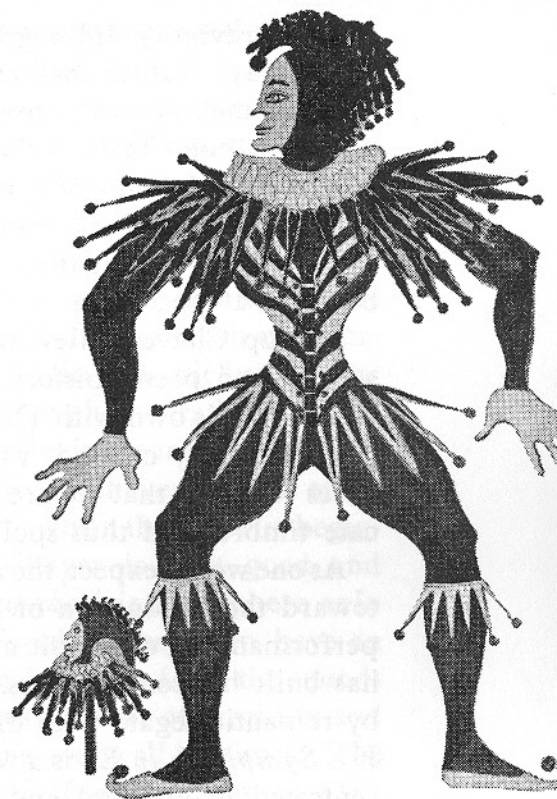
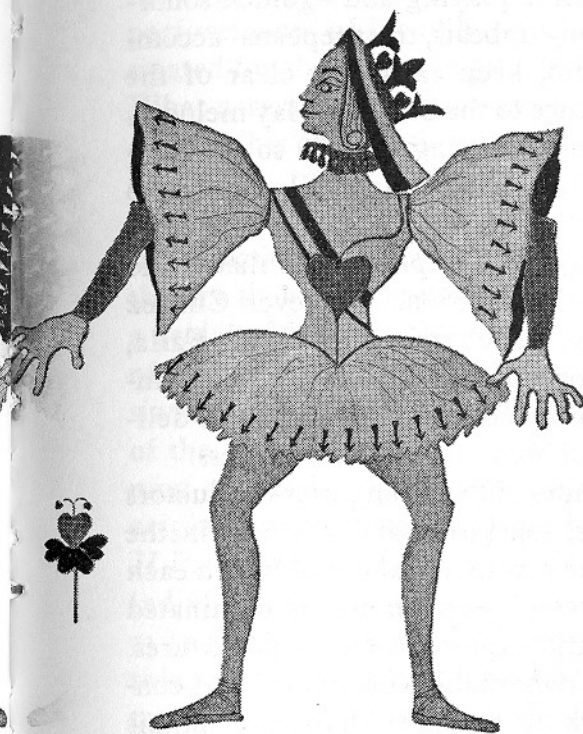
AN interesting thing to consider about music is the influence of new works on older ones. For instance, Stravinsky's latest, the *Jeu de Cartes* (which will be heard in April) by its pointed wit and broad jokes brushes up our appreciation of Rossini and Haydn, making us keenly aware in present-day terms of the great humor that can exist in music, so that we are able to catch more of it in removed periods like the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chavez' *Tierra Mojada* and *Antigona* do the same for Perotinus and Guillaume de Machaut. New works like these change our perspective and sharpen our delight in some phases of older music.

Besides the change in appreciation there is sure to be a corresponding emphasis on these newly perceived elements in the performance of old music. During the last months we had an unique opportunity for such observation in the direction of the Philharmonic by three composer-conductors. Each belonged to a different school of music: Enesco to the romantic of Brahms and Franck, Chavez to the impressionist and early Stravinsky, and Stravinsky, of course, to the later Stravinsky.

Each conducted Mozart. Enesco gave him a good husky, full orchestra and imbued the *G-Minor* with a vigorous and expressive atmosphere, doing it so well that it was as convincing, though not so up-to-date, as Stravinsky's performance with Beveridge Webster of the *G-Major Concerto*. This Mozart was a good example of the "non-expressive" playing for which Stravinsky makes a plea in his autobiography. Let the notes speak for themselves, no interpretation by the conductor who sees that all the markings are carried out precisely and indicates the tempo. Yet

STRAVINSKY GALA, BY THE AMERICAN BALLET

On April 27th and 28th in the Metropolitan Opera House the American Ballet will present the premiere of *Jeu de Cartes*, specially commissioned for that occasion. To the right are sketches by Irene Sharaff. The program includes a revival of *Le Baiser de la Fée*, sketches by Alice Halicka, below, and of *Apollon Musagète*, décors by Stewart Cheney, lower right.



really Stravinsky did a great piece of interpreting in another, newer way. Rather than expressive playing and "golden sonorities," his method was to give strong upbeats, treat repeated accompaniment notes in heavy staccato, keep each part clear of the others, lend rhythmic independence to the bass and play melodies in an even way over a strong unfluctuating rhythm so that tension, instead of dissipating itself at each rise and fall, piles up to burst out at the accents.

Not up Chavez' alley, the *Jupiter Symphony* was made into a prim and pretty historical reconstruction. However Chavez came into his own with Debussy, Ravel and especially de Falla, giving sharply colored, well contrasted, full-blooded performances to music that we are accustomed to hear wrapped in delicate timbres and thus spoiled of some of its true richness.

As one would expect, the attitudes of these composer-conductors toward the production of notes, sonorities, and rhythms in the performance of old music are the raw material out of which each has built his compositions. Enesco's early music is dominated by romantic legato with dramatic explosions and rich textures. His *Symphony in E $\flat$*  is a work remarkably constructed and concentrated in material and working out. His harmony in this early period is conventional but so tastefully handled that it has a genuinely personal quality. It is rare to hear an academic work rising to such imaginative heights. This is even more true of a better work, his *Octet for Strings*. The *Suite for Orchestra, No. 2* is much clearer than the symphony and not altogether successful in the brilliant places. This and the agreeable *Roumanian Rhapsody No. 2* show signs of impressionist influence which is a weakening one in Enesco's music for he does not achieve the harmonic color that makes such works bearable. In his later works it is actually debilitating, in the *Cello Sonata*, for instance (played by Salmond) which, despite beautiful places like the cello solo beginning the slow movement, wanders terribly.

Stravinsky has bit by bit worked out a completely individual attitude toward musical raw material, which I have already attempted to describe. He makes very interesting use of these basic effects which are after all more suited to his own music and its timing than to the more leisurely works of Mozart. We had

no opportunity to hear any of his most recent compositions as did the South Americans earlier this fall. But we did hear excellent performances of his older works, so good in fact that they dissipated for the time being the feeling that they had begun to date. What a remarkable musician to have learned at middle age to conduct his own music and play it on the piano better than anyone else.

As a composer Chavez must surprise those who had heard only his direction of other music. His conducting is much more orthodox than his compositions which, at first knowledge, appear a denial of tradition. Fundamentally, though, the tradition is that of Moussorgsky. But it is one thing to be influenced by the Russian's music and another by his esthetic, as Chavez is. The effect of the first has been fairly sterile here, while the latter is beginning to produce vigorous results. Chavez is least good and original in his evocation of the *Petrouchka*-fair atmosphere as in *H.P.* and the superior *Sinfonia India* which, however, have an individual texture deriving almost realistically from the sounds at Indian ceremonies. *H.P.* is a curious mixture of turgidity and thin, nice places joined together none too well at times. The tangos in it are charming. In *Sinfonia India*, the slower parts with their empty two and three part writing produce a beautiful effect. His use of percussion in combination with the orchestra is skillful and sounds well. There is too much repetition in these two works as concert pieces but as background for primitive festival scenes this same repetition might prove evocative.

*Antigona*, *Tierra Mojada*, *Spirals* and the *Sonatina* for violin and piano are Chavez' best works. They are conceived in a new idiom completely transforming musical speech to its own ends. It is unfamiliar enough to arouse doubts about the effectiveness of certain procedures. For instance, the remarkable point near the beginning of *Antigona* where violins suddenly start a long line in the highest register against wonderful heavy chords in low woodwinds leads one to expect, after these have drifted to their middle registers, something that carries out the tension of this stunning place. But it does not come and changing its mind, the work subsides into a peaceful atmosphere. In the latter part there are beautiful moments in two contrapuntal sections and a

moving ending on an ornamented octave, of great freshness and force. *Tierra Mojada*, sung by a chorus accompanied by an oboe and English horn, with its linear vocal writing, its dialog between men's voices speaking and the women's high sung answer is brilliantly effective. Certain realistic picturesque details are perhaps questionable as when the oboe plays a few isolated high staccato notes as if warming his reed, reminiscent of many a bird-call effect in old music; however the device does add to the primitive improvisational atmosphere. *Spirals* is free from most all of Chavez' faults and is one of his best pieces.



The outstanding piece of new music this season was Alban Berg's last work, his *Violin Concerto* played by Krasner under Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony. In character like the movingly understated last scene of *Wozzek*, it is quieter and more rhythmically unified than Berg's other instrumental scores. Like them however it has the same combination of consonance and dissonance ordered by a twelve-tone row. As in the best of Berg's music this usually arid system does not cripple him but rather heightens his effects, giving them a beautiful order that, heard and understood, may be compared to Bach's use of imitation. As completely alive in all its details as the best of Bach, this work never has a lapse from taste nor an incongruity, such as one might expect in the place where Berg introduces phrases from Bach's harmonization of *Es ist Genug*. On the contrary this is brought in so naturally as to seem a necessary part of the work. The orchestration too is natural and has a beautiful sonority, avoiding the curious and extreme sounds that Berg has so often used to express violence and fright. For this music, very tender and touching, on occasion impressively tragic, is full of restrained power. It is perhaps because of this as well as the wonderfully expressive use of his original technic that the work appears to be not only one of Alban Berg's best but one of the best of our time.

Many other new works have been heard this season. First of all Malipiero's *Julius Caesar* (Schola Cantorum) which is the best of that composer's recent works. Heroic rather than realistic and dramatic, this music, Italian in emptiness and lack of power, was strangely inadequate in the big assassination scene. How-

ever in lesser moments the score was often good. Its best feature was the excellent scansion of the vocal recitatives as in scenes one and two. Malipiero has developed an effective lyricism for tender places as in Marc Antony's music, which is rare in his work. But in spite of many interesting things in this score it is scarcely an addition to the repertory of important modern operas—most of which have still to be heard here.

Bernard Wagenaar's *Third Symphony* at the Juilliard was in a clear, conventional form with sure, well-timed effects. Much less dissonant and more romantic than his other works it is more real emotionally. The generally quiet low-register atmosphere and leisurely pace were pleasant though I wished that with all his skill in form and orchestration he had tried to do something more interesting.

But not so interesting as Schönberg's *Fourth Quartet* played by the Kolisch Quartet at the Public Library. This work is noteworthy for it gives the impression that Schönberg is seeking after greater rhythmic coherence and more natural sentence structure. He has returned to the dissonant, atonal style of his music before the *String Suite*, and to its sudden extreme fluctuations, their tensivity, fragility and negation of rhythmic flow. These make his music a realistic picture of feelings outraged by the impact of modern life, which, though expressed in terms so refined as to be near the point of unintelligibility, are occasionally very poignant. On the other hand the slow movement is comparatively sustained and not so intensely "interesting" that the listener must give up from sheer exhaustion.

Hindemith's violin *Sonata-in-E* played by Szigeti is a good compromise in the matter of interest though at times there is a lag in the facile developments. Mozart and Beethoven are beginning to root out the rather mechanical Bachian counterpoint that he has used for some time, and this is well. Bach still influences composers, often with good effect. Paul Nordoff's *Prelude and Three Small Fugues* played by the Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra in the Bennington Series are an example of this. Over-ambitious in chamber orchestra sonority and not adventurous harmonically, these works were however natural and uninhibited. More suited to chamber orchestra were Saminsky's

suave but unimpressive *Songs for Three Queens* and Otto Luening's *Prelude to a Hymn Tune* by William Billings, also on the same program. Luening's music was formed of variations which started consonantly, grew successively more dissonant and then returned to simpler harmonies. This proved to be somewhat crippling, for Luening, at his best in dissonant contrapuntal anguish, could not sustain the interest in the more consonant parts.

Wesley Sontag and the Mozart String Sinfonietta gave an all American program for every taste. A slightly augmented seventeenth century piece called *Ukranian Suite* by Quincy Porter began the program which went on to a romantic song, *Dover Beach* by Samuel Barber, and a modern work *Homage to Handel* by Goddard Lieberson. Quincy Porter's work was nice and Lieber-son's was interesting especially in the Minuetto and Air-Courante which showed considerable feeling. The rest of the program on which there appeared Danburg, Kramer, Kernochan, Watts, Van Eps, Ebann, Mauro-Cottone, Marki, was of the leveling tastelessness of radio arrangements, Danburg's *Variations on the Hoochy-Coochy* being the best but never at any moment evoking the rich associations of this tune.

Movie and radio arrangements in France and Russia have a quality rare to our cheap splendours. Khrennikov's *Symphony*, played by the Philadelphia under Ormandy, was a work in the style of the best Russian movie backgrounds—appealing and fresh and full of melodic interest. It is better music than Shostakovitch's *First Symphony* with which it has many points in common.

*Elliott Carter*

## CONCERTS FREE AND PAID FOR

**I**N the past, we have been wary of free concerts, but this winter's experience with the Composers' Forum Laboratory Free Concerts has banished that fear. When the Federal Music Project presents Aaron Copland, Nicolai Berezowsky and Quincy Porter, to mention but three composers whose music was heard in the last two months, I for one am perfectly willing to attend, free or otherwise. For those interested in contemporary music, the season