

Mountain quartet which offered mediocre performances of works by Beethoven and Brahms, and the Kodaly Opus 2 *Quartet* of long and unexciting history.

Cecil Michener Smith

SEASON'S END IN NEW YORK

THE season has just come to a good end with new works by Stravinsky, Hindemith, Chavez, Copland and Sessions, in short by the best composers of today.

Hindemith's fourth and least successful quartet, introduced at the League of Composers' concert, showed a complexity that he has since fortunately abandoned. The work, nevertheless, has great musical interest. Later his third and best quartet was played by the Pro-Arte, but being well-known it needs no comment here. With the Philharmonic this composer played his viola concerto, *Der Schwanendreher*, which is in his new, fairly consonant style. The clarity of this latest work is an astonishing phenomenon. Eliminating many of the poses of modern music, he gets down to an exact expression of what he wants to say. This is true also of the madrigals, which were first published in a dissonant and unsingable style, but have now been rewritten with a thinning of texture, and a use of consonant chords that is easier for choruses to sing.

This healthy attitude, so refreshing in Hindemith, is the opposite of Stravinsky's who is constantly seeking out more *récherché* embroideries on the obvious. Hearing Stravinsky's ballets in the afternoon and Hindemith's school works at the Greenwich House Music School in the evening made the contrast especially striking. At the former the Philharmonic players were beset with complications, subtleties and perversities, from which the music emerged in a tortured form, whereas in the evening, works fresh and frank were rendered by students of twelve years or so, with evident delight and little difficulty. (However this should not minimize the importance of Stravinsky, who to this day continues to exert influence, even on Hindemith.) Outstanding among the Hindemith works at Greenwich House were the five pieces for string orchestra, especially the Brandenburg-

Concerto-like finale, and the delightful first duet for clarinet and violin from *Plõnermusiktag*, which has a type of thinness often imitated by modern composers but seldom successfully. In the honesty of his musical expression he is in the true kappelmeister tradition of his great forebear, Bach.

Every new work of Stravinsky's is in some sense a disappointment, because it never follows in the expected way. It was so with *Oedipus*, *Apollo*, the *Capriccio*, the *Violin Concerto* and *Persephone*. In time we have come to realize the greatness of *Oedipus* and *Apollo*, and it is possible that this new score for the *Card Party*, on increased familiarity, will come to delight us more. Is this not, perhaps, Stravinsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, music informed with delicate and grotesque humor? It avoids the local color and brilliant effects of *Petrouchka*, or of Auric's *Matelot*.

At a recital of the Chamber Music Society of America, which opened with a tiresome talk by Roy Harris, the new and important quartet of Roger Sessions was played. Though no single theme is outstanding (as is often the case with Beethoven) every detail, the cadences, the way the themes are brought in, the texture, the flexibility of the bass, were such as to give constant delight, and at times to be genuinely moving. His sense of a large line gave the music a certain roominess without ever being over-expansive.

Aaron Copland's *Symphony*, at the League of Composers' Philharmonic concert, was given a very inadequate performance by Rodzinski. His first orchestral work, it shows the great promise which has since been fulfilled. Even here originality is present, in the conception of a first movement that is tenuous and thin, instead of the usual boisterous sonata allegro.

On the same program Honegger's *King David* was also played badly. The piece still suffers from its hurried conception; at the dramatic moments Honegger is adequate, at other times less so. The Pro-Arte played the *Second String Quartet* (a far better work than his first). It was in his usual brutal and grandiose style, when it was not dull. The slow movement with its accented 'cello chords, was particularly effective even for Honegger.

The Philharmonic also played Strauss' *Elektra*, (much in the same vein as it did Honegger). In even less good taste this much

more vital music, so terribly dated, is just beginning to receive general appreciation.

Szymanowski's *Harnasie* was presented on the day of his death. It is the best work of Poland's finest modern composer. Often brutal, often gay, sometime wistful, the work is full of interesting orchestration which one would like to hear again.

The Philadelphians played Kodaly's *Dances from Galanta* which, agreeable and soothing, should make a pleasant addition to Pops programs.

Among the younger American composers Goddard Lieberson produced a *Tango* for piano and orchestra, which was over-orchestrated and not as good as his *Homage to Handel*, and Israel Citkowitz a setting to a Blake poem, for women's voices. This latter was particularly successful in its mingling of sung words and vocalizing. It is unfortunate that we do not hear more music by this man whose every work reveals loving care in construction and genuine musical ideas.

Elliott Carter

SPRING FANCIES, 1937

EVEN the most detached personalities must realize that this is spring, and so, much of the new music being presented at this time gives itself over for performance to motherly festival committees which, in turn, provide audiences who can, ostensibly, "take it."

Mr. Lazare Saminsky got off to a flying start way back in March by auspicing a "Three Choir Festival;" the three being Lehman Engel's Madrigal Singers, the New York University Choir, and Mr. Saminsky's own Emanu-El Choir. Much of the music was from the Gothic Period, but parts were American choral from Jacob Kimball (1761-1826) to the present day. The only first performances were Arthur Shepherd's doleful *A Ballad of Trees and the Master*, and Lazare Saminsky's *De Profundis* which I found, by far, the more interesting of the two. Other choral works heard were by Roy Harris (his vigorous setting of *The Story of Noah*), Randall Thompson, Ernest Bloch, and Lehman Engel.