

FORECAST AND REVIEW

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IT must be very evident to any thoughtful person that a critic of necessity fulfills a very humble role in relation to the art of his time. For lack of perspective his opinions are likely to be wrong and his judgments irrelevant, even destructive. His obvious function is to point out what works are important, which creators are influencing the contemporary scene and of course to quicken the understanding of the public and intensify its pleasure in what is happening. It is clear that literary, art and dramatic critics consider this to be one of their chief duties. Unfortunately music critics in the daily press pay no attention to that important phase of their work. A new novel by Thomas Mann, a new picture by Henri Matisse, or any work by a serious thinker and inspired artist command a literate, intelligent review from a writer who can back up his statements with a thorough knowledge not only of the past but also of the present. But in the field of music, it is the fashion to dismiss all contemporary European works as the sterile product of a dying civilization and the American output as either inept or cacophonous regardless of quality.

Among the many reasons for this peculiar situation is an economic one which is rarely pointed out. Book publishers and art dealers stand to gain or lose a good deal of money on the reviews of new works. Large sums are involved and the writers naturally feel the responsibility of this pressure. They have to make real sense in their articles and the public has come to expect such a fulfillment of duty. This is not to say that the music critic has no economic influence. He does, but, naturally, only where money is made in music which is in the field of performance, for he can often make or break soloists or other performing groups.

Consequently here the music critic is more highly trained and observant, and as music of the past is the raw material for almost all performances he is as familiar with it as he is with the different tone qualities of singers and instrumentalists.

In the domain of serious modern composition there is little, if any money to be gained, in this country at least, though often large amounts of energy as well as money are spent. From an economic point of view therefore the musical arbiter is under no compulsion to show much interest in such an unrewarding field. He can, and he frequently does, condemn every new work as it appears and no pressure is brought to bear from advertisers or public; the former have nothing to gain and the latter has succumbed to the critic's attitude through constant hammering. The critic need make no effort to understand, or even to be literate in his condemnation. Every one but the composer is pleased to remain lethargic in this economically unexploited field.

Yet despite the hostility of critics, a taste for such works is developing. Recording companies and the broadcasting systems even find it to their advantage to explore if not exploit contemporary music. In the colleges many excellent teachers and composers are awakening the young to an appreciation of new works, and on every hand there are evidences of a growing interest. Already the public responds more enthusiastically than the critics. The tendency could be observed this season when three outstanding new works were performed in New York, Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, Stravinsky's *Jeu de Cartes*, and Malipiero's *Second Symphony*. Each was a superior piece by a composer who has a reputation for great excellence in the musical world. The entire press was hostile while the public showed considerable enthusiasm.

The Malipiero *Symphony* played this Spring by the New York Philharmonic is one of the composer's finest works, continuing the general musical direction of his *Julius Caesar* which was performed here last year. It is contrapuntal with diatonic modal melodic lines of great simplicity, constantly moving harmony over a well constructed bass and a straightforward though free rhythm. The texture is transparent to the point of being

bare and it is orchestrated with the most severe economy. Malipiero's approach to the symphony is almost a complete denial of the nineteenth century dramatic form. It is closer to the instrumental works of Monteverdi, such as the *Sonata sopra Sancta Maria* where there are no dramatic effects, the expressive interest arising solely from the simple beauty of the themes and their linear free development. Many of the restraints unconsciously observed by Monteverdi such as the avoidance of violent outbursts, constant growth of tension, strong contrasts, piling up of rhythm, chromatic dissonance and big orchestral crescendi are to be observed here. But whereas up to now Malipiero seemed to be imitating the moods of sixteenth and seventeenth century music, in this symphony, sub-titled *Elegiaca*, he has become much more intimate and personal in feeling. All four short movements, though varying in speed, are permeated with the austere, serious sadness which, as the sub-title suggests, is the symphony's main character. It is the best work of Malipiero I have heard, surpassing his early *Sette Canzoni* in seriousness and depth, and avoiding the dead spots which mar not only so much of his more recent music but also so much of contemporary Italian music.

Among the other works played at the Philharmonic were Quincy Porter's *Symphony No. 1*. Dissonant counterpoint, constant use of short melodic motifs, interesting incidental rhythms but no large rhythmic line and sparing use of the orchestra characterize the musical side of this work. Emotionally it seemed to be not very clear in intention. At best a subjective, tense, bare atmosphere came across, as in the first movement, which is by far the most successful of the three. The other two lacked unifying conception and tended to be repetitious of the first.

Musical humor falls into several categories ranging from the Haydn, Rossini type where it is an integral part of the music, through the more obviously descriptive kind as in *Till Eulenspiegel* to the plain cartoon or burlesque which relies on the recognition of familiar themes and the exaggeration of familiar devices. Walton's *Façade* and McBride's *Fugato on a Well Known Theme* are examples of the last. This is a sure-fire way to get a laugh out of the audience on first hearing. Whether on several repetitions the naivete of the idea does not wear thin de-

depends on whether the composer has merely exploited the effect of recognition. I feel that neither Walton nor McBride have succeeded in doing more than this, though there are many numbers in the Walton which are extremely amusing at first hearing because of the cleverness of their orchestration. Barbirolli did the Walton up to the hilt and Barzin did very well by McBride.

At the Philharmonic Chasins played his *Second Piano Concerto*, a very brilliant and agreeable work in a kind of Brahms-Reger style, which Chasins handles with consummate skill. As it had no pretensions to great originality but aimed to please and to keep the audience interested it succeeded very well. Not so much could be said of the two other reactionary pieces, Maganini's *Tuolumne* and Samuel Barber's *Overture for the School for Scandal*, though in all fairness, Barber's piece, confessedly a student work, was very well done, while Maganini's was cheap, incoherent stylistically; though well orchestrated it fell to pieces at the end of every short breathed section.

The Boston Symphony played no American music this year and introduced no contemporary music of any but the most famous composers. They did however during this spring season do a significant work by Prokofieff, his suite from *Romeo and Juliet*. The work is in line with his *Lieutenant Kije*. Although in a much simpler and more direct style than his *Enfant Prodigue* or *Pas d'acier* the personality of Prokofieff penetrates into his music even when it is completely consonant. One of the most striking things is his wonderful mastery of the orchestra, which is transparent without any fancy effects and sounds completely original. His melodic line retains its individuality even when it is reminiscent of Tschaikevsky as it so often is in this ballet.

The Philadelphia scored a great success with Bernard Wagenaar's *Triple Concerto for Flute, Cello and Harp* played by the Barrere-Salzedo-Britt Trio. This work is uncompromisingly in Wagenaar's individual and rather dissonant manner and its success bodes well for all the other contemporary composers. To begin with it is an excellent integration of a brilliant cadenza-like style for the solo instruments into a symphonic whole. It is in the general period of Wagenaar's excellent *Third Symphony* of last year but it is more adventurous formally. The work is strong and

clear intentioned, with a definite personality behind it. Its only fault seemed to me to be that a few of the cadenzas were a little long.

For some time now Harl McDonald's music has had an annual New York performance by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Each work shows no improvement over the preceding one and each is in a different style. Last year it was a feeble impressionism and this year his *Fourth Symphony* was in the student-work manner derived from Tschaikovsky; it included a few of the Jewish themes left over, I suppose from his *Three Poems on Aramaic Themes*. His music is disconcerting as there seems to be no personality behind it, and no noticeable musical intention. There might be some excuse for playing him if he had handled his style well, but the ineptitude of the form and harmony of this symphony was surprising, considering that he had such a good model as Tschaikovsky to go by.

McDonald also appeared on the program of Saminsky's Three Choir Festival, when his a cappella *Missa de Battale* was performed. In a pre-Palestrina mood that reminded me a great deal of Goudimel's *Mass* in its straight-laced counterpoint, McDonald wrote a work that is almost indistinguishable from his model except for one short passage where the voices sang in octaves. It would be simpler for the critic if McDonald would make up his mind what style he believed in and started from there.

At this festival there were many interesting things played, Florent Schmitt's *Laudate Nomen Domine* full of the robust dramatic quality that is so typical of this composer, a very touching setting of *May the Words* by Bloch, and Saminsky's very fine sounding *By the Rivers of Babylon* which is in the field of religious music where that composer is at his best.

David Diamond's *Quintet* for flute, piano and string trio, a League of Composers' commission, was played by the Barrere-Britt ensemble. The work is characteristic for its excellent and strong harmonic pattern, and its nervous excitement, with the slow movement the clearest and most beautiful of the three. There is a tendency to overwriting and confusion in its very free contrapuntal texture. This *Quintet* does not have the same originality and strength that Diamond's orchestral works do, but it re-

veals his great fertility of musical ideas especially in harmonic progression.

Another young composer, Dante Fiorillo, had two movements of a *Concerto for Piano, Oboe and Horn* played at the concert of the Society for Professional Musicians. Though very dissonant in style, the work was not original in conception. The confused contrapuntal texture and the static harmonic basis gave it a diffuse and uncertain quality which canceled out the tension caused by the dissonances. If its form had been tighter and clearer the message might have come across better. The composer seems to have a personality but has not learned to express it convincingly.

The Henry Hadley Memorial Society gave an entire evening of their composer's orchestral works which turned out to be quite interesting. Although Hadley's style is very much in the European late nineteenth century romantic tradition, two pieces, *The Culprit Fay* and *In Bohemia* both achieve a real character and a deeply felt quality that in spite of their lack of strong individuality make them worth hearing more often in our orchestral concerts.

Elliott Carter

POLITICAL ART—NOTES ON KRENEK'S KARL V

WE read in *Faust* that "a political song is a vile song," and so think all those who believe that the artist creates in an ivory tower, remote from current movements, withdrawn from the confusion of the day. Even Krenek, if I am not mistaken, often defended this thesis (or wasn't that his intention in the song, *Politik*, from the *Reisetagebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen*?) But in his latest stage work, *Karl V*, he has not only turned to political art but to the art of politics. For anyone who ventures to use the twelve-tone technic as a material in his musical works today has yielded to political art. Why not call a spade a spade? Anyone professing progress becomes actively involved in art-politics. It is a fact which characterizes this age, regrettable perhaps, but nonetheless true. Furthermore, anyone who propounds the question of reformation and counter-reformation, that is, the problem of political Catholicism, affirms *a priori* the necessity of introducing political questions into art. Of course,