

relationships are continually stressed in the field of opera, which is given much more attention than is usual in a history of music. Indeed the amount of space allotted to the discussion of opera is a true indication of the enormous importance of this form of music in human life.

One cannot help adding a word of admiration for the literary style of the

work. The clarity and ease of Professor Láng's handling of our language is little short of miraculous in view of the fact that English is not his native tongue and that it is an acquisition of fairly recent date. His history of music is good reading as well as a deep and informative study of the participation of music in the making of western civilization.

*Walter Piston*

## THE NEW ROMANTICISM

**O**UR *New Music*, by Aaron Copland (Whittlesey House, 1941) is designed primarily as a layman's guide to contemporary music. But the author's critical acumen, as well as his impartial way of presenting points of view divergent from his own (a divergence that often can only be inferred) should recommend much of it to musicians.

Copland begins with a brief sketch of the nineteenth century background, laying especial stress upon the figure of Moussorgsky. In the realism of *Boris* he finds the first seed of the new "objectivism" that was developed by Debussy in *Pelléas* and by Stravinsky in *Petroushka* and that has reached its fullest growth to date in neo-classicism. He does not of course try to fit all twentieth century music into this scheme. Sibelius he regards as a nineteenth century survival, whose music, he remarks rather vaguely, "does not grapple with the problems of our own world." Mahler and Strauss he places in the same category; also Fauré. Why he should choose to lump Fauré with these three is not clear, especially since he gives him credit for "classic restraint," "love of clear lines and well-made proportions," "directness and simplicity" — all traits that he would like to

find in the music of tomorrow.

There are other contemporary trends that diverge from the line of realism and objectivity as it may be traced from Moussorgsky to Stravinsky. Copland gives a just and clear account of the Viennese school and its aims and technical contributions. But he expresses his belief that the twelve-tone system is the artificial product of an "over-cultured" society, and that it lies outside the main current of musical evolution.

Covering so extensive a field it is natural that this survey should prove broad rather than deep. Its importance lies in the fact that the author's comments and evaluations are not only shrewd but "personal" in the real right sense. Gifted with a keen sensibility, he has disciplined himself to judge every variety of modern music with his ears open, his mind alert, and without prejudice of any kind — truly a remarkable achievement for a man of creative talent. He is too modest to claim the last word when a point of doubt remains in his mind. At such times his attitude is one of half-diffident charitableness. Phrases like "whatever else may be said about this music" occur frequently, betraying a certain softness of critical fibre. Elsewhere adverse opinions are

expressed firmly. The chapter on Roy Harris leaves one with the impression that he finds on the whole more to condemn than to praise in Harris' music.

Having started his voyage with a clean hull and completed the major part of it in such a brisk and prosperous fashion, one regrets that Copland should suddenly be brought almost to a stand-still by a mass of sea-weed and barnacles. In the chapter devoted to himself, whose disproportionate length somewhat outweighs the disarming modesty of its tone, he confesses to a growing preoccupation with the problems of the composer's relation to his audience. In the chapter following, on the subject "The Composer and Radio," the possibility of mass-audiences that the radio offers seems fairly to intoxicate him. The importance of radio's invention he rates with that of the printing-press. Without speculating as to the accuracy of this estimate, one may remark that the superior age of the printing-press seems to enable serious writers to face the potential vastness of their public with more poise than Copland does.

He is aware, of course, of the dangers inherent in the practice of composing for mass-audiences. But his formula for circumventing those dangers is specious. He writes: "The new musical (radio) audiences will have to have music that they can understand. That is axiomatic. It must therefore be simple and direct. . . . In no sense must it be capable of being interpreted as a writing down to the level of the public. That would be merely a vulgarization of what was needed . . . But to write a music that is both simple and direct and is at the same time great music is a goal worthy of efforts of the best minds in music."

The distinction Copland seeks to establish between the level of the masses which he aims to reach, and the "level of the public" to which he would on no account "write down" is hardly convincing.

If there is a hope which socially-minded composers can permit themselves to entertain for the radio, it is that it may help to educate the ignorant to the point where the more ambitious and intelligent of them will be able to meet great music upon its own terms. Any other attitude on the composer's part must inevitably be one of exploitation,\* justifying itself, in Copland's case, on sentimental grounds. He writes further: "What the radio has done, in the final analysis, has been to bring to the surface this need to communicate one's music to the widest possible audience. This should by no means be confused with mere opportunism. On the contrary, it stems from a healthy desire in every artist to find his deepest feelings reflected in his fellowman."

It is hard to reconcile this passage with Copland's enthusiastic account of the "new objectivism" wherein he clearly conveyed that music is no longer considered a medium for communicating "deep feelings." Composers, we were told, have come to regard music as an *object* that exists in its own right rather than as a means to an end. We had reached the satisfying conclusion that a great symphony is not a mere vehicle, any more than the sun is a mere vehicle for communicating light and warmth. Both, we agreed, are primarily self-subsisting objects in which such properties, in their different modes, inhere. That both sun and symphony should impart benefits to those who come within the

\*Composing for the radio as a purely technical problem is of course another matter.

orbit of their influence is a sequel to the primary fact of their existence. It is not a condition of that existence. The composer's role, as deduced from this, suggests the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God of Scripture, who indeed, should serve as model for all creative artists. What is atheism if not an unconscious tribute to the Creator's impenetrable objectivity?

But all at once this thesis falls into dust. It would seem that the term "neo-romantic," tentatively used by the author to describe Fauré's position, could be better applied to Copland himself. As a matter of fact, he applies the term to Fauré only as a kind of half-remorseful gesture. Having assigned him to a dormitory filled with out-and-out romantics, he concedes him the prefix "neo," which serves as a screen to put about his bed that he may enjoy some measure of privacy. But "neo" means "new" and has therefore nothing to do with Fauré's case. Whether Fauré was a romantic at all is open to question. But to set up a historical division between him and his contemporaries such as calling him "neo-romantic" implies is a bit nonsensical. One suspects, from the way Copland uses the word, that he thinks "neo" means something like "near."

The weakness of the romantics was to think of music in terms of adjectives rather than of the substantives from which these derive. They were more interested by what music expresses than by what it is. Copland's reference to

what he calls the change in the "emotional climate" of our day does not touch the core of this fallacy. Indeed, by substituting one batch of adjectives for another he only perpetuates it. It is not enough, as he would perhaps have us believe, to be tough where the nineteenth century composer was tender, direct where he was involved, terse where he was long-winded, or athletic where he was brooding. This is merely romanticism in reverse. His superficial analysis of the problem shows plainly that he has missed the point of the very trend he would seem to favor.

The premise of the "new objectivism," properly understood, connotes no denial of the expressive powers of music. It simply re-affirms the basic priority of the *being* of music, which is luminous and explicit, over its *meanings* which are shadowy and vague.

The composer who is seeking "health" and an escape from subjectivism that will not lead to an excessive preoccupation with his relations to his audience can find no better guidance than this doctrine affords. It provides him with an ontological approach to basic materials that is at once healthily ascetic and profound. It takes him out of himself and renews his sense of what Hopkins calls the "dearest freshness deep down things." He thus comes to regard his creations as analogous to natural organisms. For music, though it is to some extent an outgrowth of surroundings has for its chief concern the ideal fulfilment of its own discrete being.

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## MEXICAN MUSIC - A DEVELOPING NATIONALISM

**N**ATIONALISM in music is seldom discussed rationally, sociologists

taking very little interest in music, and musicians either dropping a few imper-