

When the supposedly terrible visions appear, they are somehow more attractive than fearsome, more humorous than dreadful. The gunshots that dispel them bring relief to Jones but only a shock to the audience, more disturbing than what they dispel. By one device, however, O'Neill, in the original, succeeded in striking terror to the heart of the listener: the acceleration of drum beats at the moment the shots are fired. This use of drums was a *coup de théâtre* unique in the history of modern drama. Its tremendous effect was achieved by selecting one instrument and throwing out all the rest of the orchestra. In other words, O'Neill, with the power of the drums in mind, omitted the first half of his tragedy and relied on the drums to take its place. Gruenberg has put back the rest of the orchestra, but the frequent tenuousness of the music implies that he tried to preserve the effect of the drums. Unfortunately his screaming interludes by the chorus and orchestra far surpass the drums' sonority.

One wishes too, that the interludes which offered the chief opportunity for real music, could have been less frantic. They have the weakness of uncontrolled rage. They might have had the savage power of patient and deliberate revenge.

The premiere was the occasion for an ovation. Whether credit goes to the play, the music, Tibbett's performance, Serafin's conducting, Mielziner's décor, or a combination of all five, is perhaps beside the point. The work represents a step forward for Gruenberg and so for American opera, and for opera in English. Many an opera has been first a fiasco and then a success. Many another, first a success and then forgotten. Some few have been hailed at the start and have maintained a series of triumphs. It is to be hoped that *The Emperor Jones* will fall into the third category.

Randall Thompson

EXPERIMENT AND NECESSITY—NEW YORK, 1932

WHAT law will determine the eventual ascendancy of one or other of the conflicting forces that come to light in a concert-season today? Will it simply be the advent of some "strong man" who, like his political counterpart of today, will dominate an anarchic situation by sheer personal power? Will

the future development of music in that case be wholly dependent on the wilfulness of this dictator? Or may we suppose that musical development, far from relying on this or that "strong man" to direct it in any one of a dozen possible paths, really transcends such arbitrariness? In other words, may we believe that music develops according to necessary laws?

If we assumed such a belief, and there are innumerable musical grounds for it, would it not lead to a conception of genius totally different from that of an arbitrary dictator? In that sense would not the genius of a composer consist precisely in the intensity with which he apprehended laws and fulfilled them in his music? It is exactly such a powerful apprehension that enables a Monteverdi to project an epoch and a Bach to draw the boundaries of another. This passionate surrender to necessity that in former times continually deepened the scope of our art, in our time distinguishes the truly musical work from the academic or experimental one. In fact, it is on a scale that runs from the zero of absolute arbitrariness to that intense degree which stamps a work of absolute necessity that we can locate the real value of music in all ages.

Such an evaluation, with its stress on works realized in energetic apprehension of their own confines, would necessarily pass over those multitudes of artists whose vague lack of motivation is equally apparent, whether in the eighteenth century or in ours. A too-soon or too-late is the characteristic refuge of these artists; plus, in our times, the fond hope that their children's children may profit from their inchoate experiments. Well—thank Heaven for the real artist, for the splendid Here-and-Now-ness in him that focusses his efforts on what he himself can entirely and perfectly realize.

Coming specifically, then, to some new works presented this season, what can we ascertain of their value from this viewpoint? We find that a work like Schönberg's *Piano Suite*, opus 25, (given by Hortense Monath) may be located at the very zero point of absolute arbitrariness. It is part of Schönberg's undoubted mastery to have maintained it there so exactly. Like those fantastic but logical geometries that are developed from a set of imagined postulates, this music evolves a precise realm

of its own in accordance with given hypotheses. To be sure, the effect is thoroughly *abstract* and unrelated to our sense of tonal reality. (For music, though commonly referred to as "abstract," possesses, like painting and sculpture, a basis in nature, the total exclusion of which has the same baffling effect on us that some modern abstract art has.) Nevertheless throughout this brilliant work, Schönberg's control over his material is evident—especially in the firmness of its rhythmic continuity.

No such mastery was appreciable in Wallingford Riegger's *Dichotomy* (at the Pan-American concert). In this work, with all its elaborate twelve-tone technic, I missed all sense of any poised strength whatsoever. Its thematic matter is flaccid, its development and rhythmic oppositions banal, and an excruciating use of dissonances seems unwarranted by any musical or emotional necessity. On the same program, Jerome Moross's cantata, *Those Everlasting Blues*, in spite of its trenchant quality, dissatisfied me because it lacked decisive orientation. It was near enough to jazz in quality to make one wonder whether a real band and a real torch-singer wouldn't be more to the point. And it offered no crystallized musical design to compensate for the fact that we weren't getting our jazz "straight."

A similar confusion in its intention vitiated *Washington's Birthday* by Charles Ives. The first part, though over-long, had genuine poetry. The scramble of village bands achieved something definite in musical appeal. But the slow section, trite and stupidly devotional, what was its function? It was too banal to have been meant as a serious expression; and if it was meant as a photographic specimen of the way some people feel on February 22nd, it certainly had no place in a musical work. I am not proposing a rigid purism as to what is "proper" conduct for the well-bred musical work. The satiric, the grotesque, the exotic, any element at all is free to enter into its composition. But one law stands over the dissociative effects of all these elements: they must be absorbed into and motivated by a continuous, self-sufficient musical fabric.

This latter proposition would find young Shostakovitch of the U.S.S.R. very much to the contrary. His *May* symphony in part did realize an energetic continuity. But the rest of it

proceeded with deliberate foolhardiness to break its neck; as a sort of defiance, I suppose, to a gravitational system that originated in a bourgeois society. In his efforts to achieve freedom of style, Shostakovitch betrays a supremely inartistic approach. For him, freedom connotes complete liberty to perform any series of erratic acts, each one as unpredictable as possible, the ideal, in short, of a tumbling clown. Real freedom however, in a trapeze artist let us say, would consist in his recognition of the limits within which he could weave individual propulsion and spatial exigency into one indivisible whole. That such a flawless pattern is a few thousand light-years away from the wilful (or would it be more exact to say will-less) antics of a tumbling act, is obvious. Papa Haydn, in a perruque, has realized this kind of miracle in some string quartets. Of course he was only "bolstering the rule of the upper classes" and so it is with the profoundest apologies that I offer him as an example to Tovarish Shostakovitch.

Jean Wiener's *Franco American Jazz Concerto*, a lumpy half-baked affair, made us only more conscious of Maurice Ravel's real elegance. The latter's *Piano Concerto* is also a Franco-American jazz combination, but what precise care has gone into its fashioning! It is curious but indicative of the nature of Ravel's art that he should always induce a certain type of comparison. For all its grace the work could never be compared to a flower or to any other of the natural elements. For all its architectonic detail it never grips our imagination as a perfectly formed whole always does. It rather makes us feel the same admiration that a faultlessly fashioned garment arouses,—or, better still, the pleasure some cunning little masterpiece of a cream-puff would give. This art is always immersed in the sensory, always directed to the pleasure of a discriminating palate. Ravel's struggle with his material does not proceed from the will to imprint a passionately conceived unity in his work, but rather from the meticulous preoccupation of a chef, a masterly chef intent upon the perfect elaboration of a recipe.

How far from this intentness to Prokofieff's who-cares attitude. Prokofieff has the charm of a person always himself, for better or for worse. His *Fifth Piano Concerto* proceeds in a charm-

ing insouciant way. At times one gets a bit irritated at the fellow, wishing he'd take his hands out of his pockets and take hold of things more. I don't suppose any such idea ever entered his head. In comparison with this boyish carelessness, Bernard Wagenaar, with a carefully realized *Second Symphony*, seems very adult. Its close-grained quality made one more appreciative of its skillful working-out at a fortunate second hearing. It was the vivid scherzo that particularly captured one's fancy.

I think that this takes in about all the various elements presented so far this season. How many more seasons will pass before one of them assumes the preponderant role by "virtue of inherent musical weight?" May we remind ourselves consolingly that disorganization is no new factor in musical history; and that from every impasse a triumphant resurgence of new forces has always forged another link to the mighty chain of western music.

Israel Citkowitz

BIRTHDAY AND BAPTISM

TWO successive Sundays were occasions for ceremony. On one the League of Composers celebrated its tenth anniversary with a proud retrospective glance at a decade of activity. This survey brought with it the cheer of work well worth the doing. It is a matter of congratulation to the League that it should still maintain itself as the almost unique medium for the performance of new works.

At the anniversary concert the works of five composers were given, each one definite and mature in expression. Marion Bauer's *Noël* was a charming and sonorous piece of writing for that most difficult medium, women's voices a capella. Hindemith's *Marienleben* is well-known enough, but the lovely quality of Ada MacLeish's voice, particularly in the *Geburt Maria* and the *Pietà* more than renewed their beauty. The excerpt from Lazare Saminsky's opera *The Plague's Gagliarda* was very dramatic in quality, which made one miss all the more the added pleasure that a knowledge of the musical and poetic context would have given. Louis Gruenberg's *The Creation* was remarkable for the close grasp on form it maintained for all its rhapsodic character. This was also true, to an extraordinary