

by Michael Gusikoff were in the usual poor taste.

A fine series of French Music by French Artists is in progress at the Coordinating Council for French Relief Societies building. These programs have stuck largely to the familiar in the modern repertory, with emphasis on Debussy, Ravel, and Fauré, but there have been some interesting flute music by Roussel, a delicate, precise *Sonata da Camera* by Gabriel Pierné, and a premiere performance of the *Second Violin Sonata* by Robert Casadesus, impressionistic in feeling, yet with a definite neo-classic underpinning. An entire program by Judith Litante was devoted to the French art song.

A new *Two-Piano Sonata* by Hindemith was performed by Dougherty and Ruzicka. It is one of the better of the series, but the imaginative bell effects of the opening made one wish for less academicism in the rest. The old English song which inspires one of the movements seems to have had little beneficial influence. There were minor works by Germaine Tailleferre, Henry F. Gilbert, and Mary Howe, all of whose appeal was lessened by interest in the Stravinsky *Circus Polka*, as arranged by Dougherty, in its first performance for this medium here. There are a delicacy, grace, and wit in this little concertante piece, which are not at all incompatible with the elephants for whom it was written. There is no feeling of a stale joke. The *Polka* was also presented on the Vronsky and Babin recital in the latter's arrangement, which seemed to differ little from the other version. It was accompanied by a strangely inanimate *Tango*, which I believe is a piece written by Stravinsky for a piano teaching series, hardly worth while extending beyond its proper function. Babin's own *Three March Rhythms* proved skillful if none too original works, and the recital closed with the scintillating and gay *Scaramouche* suite of Milhaud, fresh and clear in its sonorities as the Stravinsky is elaborate and refined. But this *Circus Polka* is a piece of real charm and good humor.

Donald Fuller

BIRTHDAY PIECES

TWO programs of Birthday Pieces written especially for the occasion, the first tendered by the Town Hall Endowment Series as a "Salute to The League of Composers," while the second was offered by the League itself at the Museum of Modern Art, were an appropriate celebration for the League's Twentieth Anniversary. If on the first occasion the good people of the Town Hall audience, with their essentially philanthropic

attitude towards modern music, could not but cast a pall of icy benevolence over the whole proceedings, the tributes from the composers themselves stand out in retrospect for their high level of intent and achievement. At the second concert, a festive group mainly of musicians and friends, established a more intimate and cordial rapport to the musical offerings, and demonstrated thereby that for composers to take in each other's compositions is surely not the worst lot that may befall them.

At the Town Hall concert, Walter Piston's *Quintet for Flute and Strings* and Darius Milhaud's *Eleventh String Quartet* were noteworthy for the general scope of treatment and for the refinement of workmanship displayed. Both men possess an enviable grasp of that most difficult medium, chamber-music ensemble. However these works, intimate and finely drawn in character, suffered a little from following close on each other, and from lack of intimacy in the surroundings. Aaron Copland's *Piece for Two Pianos on Cuban Themes* displayed in a more informal manner than *El Salon Mexico* his real flair and zest for the characteristic colors and rhythms of our Latin neighbors. Frederick Jacobi's setting of *Three Excerpts from the Prophet Nehemiah*, for voice and two pianos evolved a striking and successful balance from what seemed at first a formidable challenge, the pitting of two pianos against a soprano voice. Martinu's *Madrigal-Sonata for Flute, Violin and Piano* with its transparent mood and texture provided music of real charm. Louis Gruenberg's *Variations on a Popular Theme for String Quartet* suffered from a lack of balance between the elaborateness of the musical structure itself and the mood of persiflage at the basis of the work, though with it went a very dextrous handling of string-quartet writing.

At the second concert, Arthur Shepherd's *Praeludium Salutatorium*, well-conceived and craftsmanlike in effect seemed to pursue its course on a more abstract plane, while the flesh and blood character of the instrumental ensemble itself was more remote. Bernard Wagenaar's *Concertino*, especially in its first and last movements, offered a most attractive fusion of formal logic and vivaciously conceived instrumental character. Lazare Saminsky's *Rye Septet with Voice* manifested a more individualistic approach. Curiously enough, what might have been most problematic in effect, the bringing-in of the solo voice after purely instrumental elaboration proved the most successful; the treatment of the voice and the accompanying texture were highly poetic, while the instrumental portions of the work proved somewhat elusive at first hearing. Douglas Moore's *Quintet*

for *Wind Instruments* was well-contrasted with Saminsky's more sombre vein. The music is attractively instrumentated and readily assimilable. In the *Six Portraits for Harpsichord* Virgil Thomson has succeeded in perfecting a little genre all his own. Each one etches its atmosphere with simple, telling means. The *Portrait of the Spanish Lady* was especially charming. With the exception of the middle movement, Roy Harris' *Three Pieces for Piano* offers some of his best-wrought music to date; the last with its fanciful charm is surely one of his best creations.

Israel Citkowitz

LONDON: FOURTH WINTER OF THE BLACKOUT

London, December, 1942

THE BIG TOWN: The joint is jumping. Even before the North African landings, admittedly a galvanizing agent, there was evident here about a frenzied activity in all fields, and a driving spirit I hadn't remembered in pre-war London. They are working, fighting, and playing furiously. Theatre-life and concert-life are booming; restaurants, taxis, clubs, pubs, are all doing land-office business. (The food is not much, and not good, so that most bought meals are short on content and strong on "production" – like the supper at the Savoy, where bread showed up in three different guises; and very decorative too). If the blackout is lifted or modified – there has been some talk of it – a certain seething undercurrent and excitement will go. For now the gloom is shot with dancing torches; and on the streets you hear the click of all-leather heels and the strangled, really desperate yells of "taxi!" (The taxis themselves are small, dim, one-eyed and disdainful, like a scottie with a shiner). Jammed dance-halls, snack-bars and pubs prove that the non-com military and working-people are also taking strenuous release, for a few hours, from the grind of war work and the war.

2. COMPOSERS: Among those as yet unclaimed by the Royal Forces are Edmund Rubbra, William Walton, Constant Lambert, Vaughan Williams (at his age, he is unlikely to be drafted), Benjamin Britten, Arthur Bliss (who has for the time being given up composing to head the B.B.C.), and Arnold Bax, official composer-laureate. Alan Bush, a soldier in the Medical Corps, is stationed in town, and is able to turn out music working nights in a hideaway studio on Baker Street. The output in general is