

was writing with tongue in cheek.

In the *Second Symphony*, Piston lets himself go for the first time on a large scale. At times I was reminded of César Franck (as was true in moments of the *Violin-Piano Sonata* of some years back) and I am not trying to sneer at the new work but to praise it. Perhaps the chromaticism is responsible for this impression, although it should be noted that the symphony is tonal throughout and the least dissonant of Piston's works. Perhaps it was the welcome change from so much contemporary music, a good, sound, solid, melodious bass.

The third movement is the accustomed Piston, bright and witty and politely cocky, although even here is evidence of the mellowing process. As a whole this work seemed to me the best all-round essay by any American composer in the symphonic form to date. Whether it is the "greatest" I don't know. My guess is that it is going to be popular.

Moses Smith

THE NEW AND CONTEMPORARY IN PITTSBURGH

A REVIEW of the season's new music in Pittsburgh suggests a revaluation of standards. Some older works by contemporaries strike us as "new" because we still feel in them the challenging quality that revolutionized trends and technics at the turn of the century. In contrast, certain novelties of young musicians seem to be old at their 1943-44 premieres. Bearing the stamp of conventionality, they are marked for eventual defeat by time – regardless of their immediate reception.

The city's symphony orchestra, under Fritz Reiner, in the deplorably short period of only sixteen weeks offered a remarkable list of contemporary works. Composers who spell progress in the history of modern music were represented rather by works of their youth: Schönberg with his sextet, *Verklärte Nacht* (in the fine new arrangement for string orchestra), Bartok with his *Second Suite* – both scores "Opus Four" in their respective list of works.

Young people hearing and appreciating these for the first time wonder what it was in such clear and tuneful music that created so much antagonism half a century ago. The musician who grew up with the scores and now experiences them anew, perceives what steadfast conviction and courage live in these truly modern masters who enjoy at least the victory of their earliest works even though belief in their more recent

music is shared by only the loyal few. Reiner gave stirring interpretations of both Schönberg and Bartok pieces. Coming at the end of the season, the performances of these and other modern works benefited by the systematic building up of the orchestra.

The youngest composer to be represented was Leonard Bernstein with his *Symphony, "Jeremiah."* He had been invited to conduct by Reiner who taught him at Curtis, and his success here was assured; warm applause welcomed him even before he raised his hand. An interesting yet typical product of the time and place in which the composer lives, *Jeremiah* is easily understood in its blend of broad American diatonism and Hebrew melos, in its rhythmic vitality and effective instrumentation. When, in the finale, the sung word enters the symphonic cycle, the composer's reference to the *Book of Lamentations* conveys a touching message.

A blend of two cultures is also evident in Bohuslav Martinu's *Second Symphony*, which made a strong impression of integrity and musicianship. His symphonic style involves controversial aspects of national expression. It shows how misleading and banal is the attempt to identify this Czechoslovakian as the modern Smetana. The Bohemian Martinu, who spent decisive years in Paris, keeps his door wide open to French influence, much as did Gluck or the Italian Lully. Whatever the calibre of a composer, he has only to gain by the inspiration derived from national sources other than those of his own country.

Modern suites, dance cycles and overtures were also featured in the Pittsburgh programs. An attractive comparison with the Bartok suite could be drawn from Kodaly's *Dances of Galanta*; we could note the differences and similarities in the approach of the two Hungarians to the peasant material of their country. (With this performance, Pittsburghers were again treated to a superb reading which certainly owed much to Reiner's own Hungarian origin; it should have been preserved in a recording.) The same folkloristic metier could claim the *Divertimento Number 1 on Old Hungarian Dances, for String Orchestra*, of Leo Weiner. Yet Weiner's clever setting for *Csardas, Fox and Swineherd-Dances*, in its realistic playfulness, is a world apart from the earthy and inward music of Bartok.

To American folklore a number of other symphonic works owed their inspiration — Macdowell's *Indian Suite*, Henry F. Gilbert's *A Comedy Overture*, and Aaron Copland's *Suite from "Billy the Kid."* Villa-Lobos with his *Bachianas Brasileiras Number 2* represented the southern con-

minent. Glancing through Gilbert's personal notes, one finds a prophetic anticipation of this American emphasis, which has since led to so many different and even conflicting modes of expression. Because Copland possesses imagination, craftsmanship and spirit, an encounter with his music is always a satisfying experience. The Gilbert score as well as other new works were convincingly interpreted by Vladimir Bakaleinikoff, assistant conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony.

The vintage of modern instrumental concerti was poor. Only Artur Schnabel brought with him a score unknown to Pittsburgh audiences, the piano concerto of Aram Khatchaturian. Its mood and pictorial substance hit the average listener at the right spot — touching off dreams of a beautiful landscape and romance anywhere between the Caucasus and Hollywood. The choice of Schnabel (and for that matter, of all the other pianists and violinists who play in Pittsburgh), does not satisfy the discriminating segment of our audience, which wants to hear significant new concerti. Important scores have recently come to the fore, but are inexcusably neglected by the soloists' refusal to bet on anything but a sure success.

Frederick Dorian

DIMINUENDO IN THE WEST

THE orchestra season drew to a close in Los Angeles with a diminuendo for new music. During the final weeks Alfred Wallenstein gave us performances of the suites from *Hary Janos* and *Billy the Kid*, and William Schuman's *A Free Song*. The audience which heard the Copland music was there principally for the debut of a charming young local violin prodigy; that is to say, it had come to be enchanted by a Saint-Saëns concerto in an aura of rosebuds and organdie. After this vision of Victorian loveliness, *Billy* proved too rude a reference to some episodes of frontier life and it was received with amused tolerance.

Schuman's cantata on a Walt Whitman text appeared in more congenial company and it had a correspondingly warmer reception. This music is full of faults. There is first of all the tendency to build up a composition of length by stringing together a series of miniatures; one hears a thirteen-bar piece on the words "Long, too long, America;" while the altos continue that admonition as a pedal, the other voices reiterate the next phrase until it dies of exhaustion. After a few bars, "crises of anguish" are