

WHITHORNE'S SYMPHONY; JOSTEN'S SERENADE

IN Emerson Whithorne's *Symphony No. 1, in C-minor*, recently performed by the Cleveland Orchestra under Artur Rodzinski, one finds little of the pictorial suggestion and urbanity that have characterized such works as his *New York Days* and

Nights. Ignoring the scenery, he embarks upon a stream of thought which, flowing through conventional channels, loses some of its momentum as it broadens. The first three movements disclose clear motivation and ordered progress, and the current meets with the right kind of opposition in the *Scherzo* to produce sturdy and exhilarating rhythmic tensions. Something in the romantic lyricism of the symphony, however, particularly in the Brahmsian mellowness of the last movement, promises a more triumphant peroration than is emphasized in the conclusion.

By delving into emotional veins that extend toward the tragic and the heroic, Whithorne sets in motion dramatic elements that suggest a more complex denouement than he is at present disposed to come fully to grips with. This is partially indicated by his occasional slips into commonplace, and by the sometimes deadening regularity of too frequent four-bar phrase sequence. Yet admiration is evoked by the logic, the conviction and the forthright manner in which he expresses a strenuous and lofty idealism. His robust, positive assertions, the diversity of his moods, his effective grasp of the larger outlines and his easy command of orchestral resources mark him as a symphonist of eloquent and forceful communicative powers.

Whithorne's *Symphony* impressed by its earnest desire to be "serious," while Werner Josten's *Serenade*, given its first performance at the same concert, evidenced equal determination *not* to be serious. Totally dissimilar in externals, both works had this much in common—that they fell short of a really acute experience by too obvious a devotion to structural method. Of the two, Josten's writing is more distinguished and better realized, yet this is mainly by virtue of its being more circumscribed in purpose. Aiming principally at decorous whimsy, he indulges engagingly in piquant badinerie, puckish fancies and alluring polytonal juxtapositions. Devoid of amorous impulses, it is a serenade dedicated to precocious fun. Contrapuntal dexterity and rhythmic felicities abound in its three contiguous movements, *Allegro*, *Nocturne* and *Dance*, and in the last movement, an angular fugal theme vies with gay, reckless melody to form a lively conclusion. One blemish, easily forgivable in a work of such unpretentious dimensions, is that the middle portion has

a tendency to lose itself in the bleakness of craftsmanship for its own sake.

Herbert Elwell

SCHERCHEN ON CONDUCTING AND EWEN ON COMPOSERS

WHAT must one do in order to become a conductor? Here, in English, for the first time, is a book which succeeds in fully answering that question. For despite the continual discussion that goes on in relation to conductors and conducting, no attempt has been made up to now to write an exhaustive study of the actual technic involved in the conducting of an orchestra.

Hermann Scherchen was ideally fitted for this task. In a foreword Professor Dent says, "Herman Scherchen has won his distinguished reputation chiefly by his courageous interpretation of the music of our own day. There is no conductor whom modern composers and those who are seriously interested in their work should regard with deeper gratitude." Scherchen has given us further cause for gratitude in the writing of this *Handbook of Conducting*, (Oxford University Press, 1934).

The author begins with the assumption that a student can be fully prepared for his job as conductor without ever having faced an orchestra. This goes counter to the usual opinion that conducting can be learned only "by routine." But Scherchen shows that a technic of conducting exists which "can be learned and practised down to its smallest details before a student first attempts to conduct an orchestra." ("When conductors try to learn their job from an orchestra," Scherchen says, "the orchestra should refuse to play.")

In an important section called "The Science of the Orchestra." Scherchen does not repeat what can be found in any good text book on instrumentation, but instead he lists the qualities, peculiarities, weaknesses inherent in the nature of the various instruments or of the way in which they are played. A wealth of musical illustrations ranging from Bach to Anton Webern accompany the text. The author is especially acute on the subject of the percussion group of the contemporary orchestra. "These instruments," he says, "are constantly gaining ground in modern