

PREMIERES IN CLEVELAND

IN tonal symbols, identifiable without the visage of Victor Emmanuel though somewhat dependent on program notes for complete definition, Lazare Saminsky has imprinted Italy upon the pages of his *Ausonia*, a series of orchestral sketches dedicated to Toscanini and performed in his honor by the Cleveland Orchestra under Rodzinski, April 16 and 18.

The work has the twofold purpose, rather more literary than musical, of being both a sort of travel diary and a tribute to Italian genius, conceived according to Giordano Bruno as a curious synthesis of contradictory moods, "joyous in sadness, sad in joyousness." The emotional content is noticeably conditioned by this paradoxical melange characteristic of Italian temperament. It has a bitter-sweet merging of gayety and melancholy, elements which neutralize each other more often than they attain those lucid heights where *les extrêmes se touchent*.

The most interesting and most successfully communicative portions are those of poetic imagery, such as the darkly enigmatic opening which summons the spirit of Michelangelo's *The Thinker* and *The Night*, and the part about Venice which is truly "woven of golden rays." In comparison with what Respighi did to the Appian Way in his *Pini di Roma*, Saminsky's treatment of Via Flaminia in his final Oda Romana sounds restrained, a bit too much so for a compelling climax. What the work needs, if considered apart from its program, is less figuration and stronger thematic substance, also broader rhythmic conceptions. Yet it cannot be said that it fails in its aims and it has the virtue of brilliant, skillful and often highly individual orchestration.

Another atmospheric piece recently performed by Rodzinski is *Erie* by Normand Lockwood. Naïve and tentative in structure, but original in its sonorities, this piece is excellent tone-painting and more, an evidence of something intimately personal that achieves unsuspected significance by a curious sort of understatement. Similar qualities were noted in an all-Lockwood chamber music program at the Cleveland Museum of Art this season. This music offers imaginative adventure with simple means and without effort.

The same could scarcely be said of the *Golden Age* ballet suite of Shostakovitch given its American premiere on the program with *Erie*. It may be good ballet, but its callow striving for originality, its nose-thumbing antics, juggling of banal tunes, relics of the naughty-boy era of Prokofieff and Stravinsky present neither the freshness of a revolutionary mind nor the promise held in certain passages of *Lady Macbeth*.

Soundest of all the American novelties offered in Cleveland was the *Prelude and Fugue* of Walter Piston, performed by Rudolph Ringwall, associate conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra. The contrapuntal workmanship compels high admiration, and although one portion of the *Prelude* seemed to sag, the entire work impressed deeply by its probity, its sustaining of interest by logical expansion of a melodic nucleus and its discreet elimination of unessentials.

As laconic as its title and sententious to a degree, Vaughan Williams' *Symphony in F* heard here on Dec. 19 is very English in its neutral, non-committal coloring with here and there a sentimental vein not entirely concealed by its ascetic masque. The composer subjects himself to a rigorous discipline and builds according to D'Indy's "obsession" principle. The work generates from a four-note motive strikingly similar to B-A-C-H, which reappears insistently in innumerable forms, finally taking complete possession in a fugal epilog. Though relieved by various themes, none of which are extensively developed, this motto is like a spectre popping out at one from every corner with sinister violence.

The contrapuntal texture of the second movement smells slightly of the lamp. And if the theme in the scherzo given to bassoon and tuba is intended to be funny it is dry humor indeed. There is something unsolved in the struggle of this music to be wholly articulate, yet it is powerfully arresting and provocative.

Herbert Elwell

ROCHESTER'S SIXTH FESTIVAL

THE nice thing about the sixth annual Festival of American music in Rochester, which took place the week of April 27th, was that it served both as an exposition and an exposé of