

the classics was both touching and inspiring: touching because of its emotional and almost mystic love; inspiring because of its intellectual grasp, its unflagging joy in the concrete music as such. He insisted that his students "face issues" and he did not minimize the difficulties of writing good music; all evasions were abhorrent to him and any attempt at "disguise," at beclouding the actual musical substance, met with his immediate scorn.

Contrary to a fairly general impression, he was not intolerant of the more advanced music of his contemporaries. Much of it confused him; due to the affliction of his increasing deafness there was some of it which he actually never "heard." In their early days he was a more or less regular attendant of the concerts of the League of Composers and the International Composers' Guild. He was, however, much too wise to believe that he could judge a composition on its first hearing and, with Leo Blech, he might have said: "I am not enough of an 'amateur' to know what I think of a piece of music after having heard it only once." His comments were always guarded and reserved and if they occasionally took the form of witticisms they were without malice . . . and without pretentiousness. In his youth he had been a champion of Strauss and Debussy and he knew the works of these masters thoroughly. He liked to tell of an evening spent, a few years ago, among some of his younger colleagues, at which he had been the only one able to remember one of the more obscure passages from *Pelléas*. He was conscious of his reputation of belonging to the "right wing" and this troubled him . . . unnecessarily, we believe.

The memory of Rubin Goldmark is one which Americans need particularly to treasure at this moment. His steadfastness, his courage, his dislike of that which was premature or spurious, his good temper and his high sense of fair-play should guide us on in a musical world which, though gaining in light and perception, is still so filled with the forces of snobbery and confusion that it is often hard for the honest seeker to find his way.

Frederick Jacobi

NEW LABORATORIES AND GEBRAUCHSMUSIK

IN the very recent past performances of contemporary American works at concerts which even portions of the general pub-

lic attended have been so rare that they took on the air of "events" regardless of the merits of the compositions played. These occasions did the composer no particular good financially, and in his relation to the public via the critics he was sometimes made to suffer unnecessarily. Explosions have a way of echoing explosively, and the ballyhoo attendant upon many of these performances irritated adverse comment to the point where it became thunderously damning. For it has been expected of every new composition that it either fall into the category of "greatness" (none ever does) or that it doesn't. If it fails, the composition has no standing at all. This ridiculous yardstick is a hangover from the nineteenth century when practically every contemporary work was said to be a masterpiece.

But now there is an important new tendency to give frequent performances of our new music. All winter the WPA Music Division has presented weekly Composers' Forum-Laboratory concerts; once a month the League of Composers has a concert of "Pre-Hearings of New Music;" there have been numerous scattered broadcasts besides the more regular ones presented over WEVD; there have been concerts at the New School for Social Research and other single performances not included in any regular series.

The Composers' Forum-Laboratory has several unique features: admission is free, discussion of compositions is invited, and best of all, in one sense, is the fact that the project is conducted on no "policy." It aims to serve no academy. The reader may groan at the idea, at once envisaging a state of boredom. True, many of the works are not interesting. That circumstance is due more to general music conditions than to lack of selectiveness. Since there is no set artistic policy the large audience which attends is fast learning to discredit the older popular belief that "bad" and "new" music are synonymous.

Several important facts become apparent from these performances. It is obvious that there is a great deal less experimentation than in the past, than say, even five years ago, and that with ultimate good or bad results a larger number of composers are attempting to write more serious and more extended works than before. At the Composers' Forum-Laboratory

I have heard programs recently by Marion Bauer and Frederic Jacobi. Both exhibited works written over a comparatively extended period of time—a plan which gives one food for thought. In Miss Bauer's case, the development chronologically is in the direction of complexity although in Mr. Jacobi's the music of ten years ago is harmonically at least far more complex than that of the present day. I liked particularly Miss Bauer's *Songs with String Quartet*, and of Mr. Jacobi's program I enjoyed especially the *Piano Concerto*.

Composers' Forum-Laboratory concerts are soon to be inaugurated in all parts of the country, and plans are afoot to present exchange concerts between composers of different sections.

The League's two Pre-Hearings have been devoted exclusively to works by young composers. The music of David Diamond, Irvin Gershefsky, and a song by Irwin Heilner, and the amusing pieces by Robert McBride were ample justification for the presentation of the two concerts. Diamond shows that he is well aware of what he is about; he presents his ideas logically and for the most part succinctly. Gershefsky has tremendous facility which seems to be both his virtue and his chief handicap. Much that he writes is admirable but there should be more pruning and more careful selection from the large quantity of notes he puts down. Heilner has revolted in favor of simplicity; his songs with revolutionary texts are amusing and effective. McBride rather defies pigeon-holing. His pieces were chiefly entertaining but unlike much other music possessing this dominant characteristic, his did nothing to violate good taste.

Since these performances of new music are so frequent and apparently casual, there are many who will of course worry about quality. For their qualms there are two answers: first, that always in the past much unimportant and experimental music has prepared the way for a comparatively small amount of important music; second, that whatever work has distinction or superiority will eventually manifest them.



Lazare Saminsky and Isadore Freed have edited a series of educational pieces for piano called collectively *Masters of Our Day* and published by Carl Fischer. The purpose is "to enlarge

the musical horizon of the youth of our day, to enrich its knowledge and to attune its ear to the new musical life." The compositions by Copland, Cowell, Freed, Hanson, Jacobi, Josten, Kramer, Moore, Saminsky, Sessions, Shepherd, Taylor, Thompson, Wagenaar, Whithorne are on the whole not only very successful as "teaching pieces," but moreover in most cases present the personality of their composers unobscured. The entire series was performed recently before a capacity audience of adults, many of whom were well-known musicians and the results were astounding. The evening on the whole was one of surprise and sheer delight. Among the most successful pieces were the two by Roger Sessions, Aaron Copland's *Sunday Afternoon Music*, Saminsky's *Fire Bell*, Thompson's *Song after Sundown*, Freed's *Story at Evening*, Hanson's *Dance of the Warriors* and Cowell's *The Irishman Dances*. Here is real and welcome *Gebrauchsmusik* for America. The publishers have done everything to make this a successful venture, the editors have chosen wisely and with care, and the composers have rallied in an unexpectedly rich vein.

Lehman Engel

ROSENFELD'S "EXPERIENCE AND CRITICISM"

ON the jacket of his new book, *Discoveries of a Music Critic*, (Harcourt Brace, 1936) Paul Rosenfeld refers to his method as "the combination of criticism and experience. . . ." It seems to me in this combination something is lost on the side of criticism, and therefore a more accurate statement would be "the *substitution* of experience for the *analytical* part of criticism." That is to say, judgment which is primary and essential to criticism, and description which is merely instrumental (though the latter here, as elsewhere, forced beyond its legitimate estate)—both of these are present; but where analysis should follow, "experience" is substituted—"experience" here embracing the visual images that crowd the mind of this acutely sensitive auditor as part of the musical "experience."

For this substitution Mr. Rosenfeld has been duly criticized. But his detractors overlook two items: first, his native sensibility which enables him to overcome that initial stage of criticism, judgment, where most self-appointed prophets immediately fail;