

Chávez and Revueltas, the two outstanding representatives of Mexican music today are discussed quite dispassionately. Fortunately Mayer-Serra does not belong to either "school." After a detailed analysis of their music, he makes a cool evaluation as follows: "For Chávez, the aboriginal musical culture is the most important in the history of Mexican music; his desire is to reconstruct musically this atmosphere of primitive purity, hoping to find in it the 'true' Mexican character. For Revueltas, on the other hand, Mexico is as genuinely represented by the remains of the primitive cultures . . . as by the surprising results of the mixture of distinct races and civilizations, so characteristic of modern Mexico." There comes then a brief mention of the younger composers: Luis Sandi, Daniel Ayala, Salvador Contreras and Blas Galindo.

Mexican music, says Mayer-Serra, has not yet found a "constructive principle." But, to quote the concluding note: "A synthesis of the two present tendencies which we might call *indigenismo modernista* and *realismo mestizo* — represented by Chávez and Revueltas respectively — can introduce a new perspective in the future development of Mexican music, the realization of which is in the hands of the young generation of composers."

This *Panorama* is very well documented. If it contains many provocative statements they are, nevertheless, based on careful research and sound reasoning. At last we have a valuable study of contemporary Mexican music. And now let us hope that Mayer-Serra, so eminently equipped for the task, will give us a more exhaustive study on the subject of nationalism in general.

Conlon Nancarrow

## PISTON'S MANUAL OF HARMONIC PRACTICE

SINCE the publication of Walter Piston's small volume, *Principles of Harmonic Analysis*, students have waited eagerly for another book that would carry his viewpoint into the field of modern music. Much in this early volume is admirable: a treatment that makes the study practical rather than dully theoretical, a fund of illustrative examples well chosen from actual music, a method excellently correlated with hearing rather than with the visual aspects of music, but, most important of all, a fresh approach to methods of tonal analysis. It stimulated a great deal of new musical thought and gave the student a new technic for analyzing musical scores of the past two centuries.

*Harmony*, (W. W. Norton and Company, 1941) though not a continuation of that work is an admirable application of Piston's viewpoint to the field of a college elementary course. It is a text book written to introduce the student to common harmonic practice. There is great need for a book like this which may influence the teacher to make his course in harmony more than a mere introduction to musical rhetoric; to lift it to an exciting practical introduction to musical statement and thought. The effort has been made before but musicians have either lacked the creative viewpoint or the thorough grasp of the subject, or they were insufficiently acquainted with the curriculum of the American college to

be completely successful. Mr. Piston, being an outstanding composer, an excellent musician, and a professor at Harvard University, has special qualifications to meet the demand. Actual music is again brought to bear on every point, the illustrations are most carefully chosen, the assignments, though not completely adequate, do, in the earlier chapters suggest to the teacher a method of writing which, if expanded, would be exceedingly stimulating to student progress. Indeed, this volume is a manual for the teacher more than for the student. Its organization implies a great deal of work, especially in analysis, that is not actually presented. No student could possibly cope with the chapter on modulation so soon in a college course unless considerable time had been given to the study of more simple musical organization. Yet two excellent chapters on *Harmonic Rhythm* and the *Harmonic Basis of the Phrase*, suggest concisely the direction that the earlier study should take.

Musicians will of course find themselves disagreeing with Mr. Piston over this or that. One may feel that the chapter on cadence comes surprisingly late in the volume, or that the first inversion chord is not treated with the same clarity that

is shed on the six-four chord. It would be impossible to write a text book on elementary harmony that would satisfy all musicians. This reviewer, for instance, cannot accept the argument concerning the augmented sixth chord, for it seems to him essential that this, also, be related to the tonal concept; historical argument cannot prevent him from hearing the chord as an incomplete dominant, the third having the characteristics of the lowered second step of the scale just as the root has of the leading tone. But disagreement with detail does not detract from the validity and effectiveness of Piston's presentation. This introduction to elementary harmony preserves a sane balance. Throughout, the student is made to feel the purpose of the work he is doing — to relate the theoretical task to music as a whole. Mr. Piston makes clear his purpose: "The function of a harmony exercise is to clarify principles by practical experience with the material. The attempt to go over the same ground, to solve the same problems as the composer, will afford, as no purely analytical process can, an insight into the nature and details of these problems and into the manner and variation of their solution."

Ross Lee Finney

## COMPOSERS BY THE ALPHABET

AS AN introduction to contemporary composers and their music for readers who are not familiar with the subject, *Great Modern Composers*, edited by Oscar Thompson, written by many different critics and published this October by Dodd, Mead and Company, is not of much value. Still less is it of value to those who already know something

of the subject and want to know more. A selection of biographical and critical articles on thirty-three composers, partly drawn from the *International Cyclopaedia of Music and Musicians* and partly written for the occasion, this compendium is a welter of as many divergent points of view as there are contributing authors. Few of the authors attempt the kind of