

## NEW MUSIC AND THE MONTE CARLO IN CHICAGO

IN Chicago, as elsewhere, the chief excitement of the season so far as modern music is concerned, has been the visit of the dancers from Monte Carlo. Their performances scarcely classify as local events, and they have been reviewed by other contributors to MODERN MUSIC, but any discussion of recent happenings in this city would be incomplete without some brief mention of this ballet company.

In essence the Diaghilev ideal in the ballet is not much different from the Wagnerian "art work of the future." Like Wagner, Diaghilev strove for a unified art form in which the aural and the visual would be welded into one. In its ideal state the ballet is not memorable for the contribution of any one creative artist, but for the collaboration of three—the musician, the designer and the choreographer. Diaghilev came close to realizing this ideal—closer than anyone else has ever come, before or since. His productions were perhaps weakest as regards setting and costuming; they were surely strongest on the musical side. One has only to think of such scores as *The Rites of Spring* or *Daphnis and Chloe* to realize what Diaghilev means to the history of music.

All this is obvious enough, but it needs to be said in order to provide some sort of standard by which to judge the Monte Carlo performances. If Colonel de Basil's company is to be considered the successor to Diaghilev's, and it seems to be so considered by

everyone concerned, it is to be criticized in the light of the older ballet master's achievements. And in this light the Monte Carlo Ballet Russe carried in its repertory exactly two integrated works of art—*The Three Cornered Hat*, by De Falla, Massine and Picasso, and *Petrouchka*, by Stravinsky, Fokine and Benoist. And both of these works are hold-overs from the repertory of Diaghilev himself.

Three of the new ballets—*Concurrence*, *Les Matelots*, and *Beach*—were especially noteworthy for their sets. Derain, Pruna and Dufy are among the finest painters of the day, but their musical collaborators, Auric and Françaix, are pretty poor successors to Stravinsky, De Falla and Ravel. Diaghilev's composers could write something more than polytonal movie music, which is rendered the more futile through its use of sophisticated cliché.

As for the rest, the productions ranged from *Les Présages*, a prize horror in which the fifth symphony of Tschaiakowsky was "interpreted" in a choreography reminiscent of the drawings that insane people make on the walls of their cells, to *Union Pacific*, which was very gay, very dilettantish, and entirely unauthentic. The visit of the Monte Carlo was a delightful occasion, and its attractive young personnel will be welcomed back, but it showed us nothing creatively new except some backdrops.

In the latter half of its season the Chicago Symphony orchestra presented four new works worth talking about. One of these was the *First Symphony* of Aaron Copland, a creation of concentrated vigor and brilliance and roughness with all the water squeezed out of it. It provided a significant contrast to the reminiscent jelly of which Howard Hanson's "Romantic" symphony is composed.

In Leo Sowerby's *Passacaglia, Interlude and Fugue* the composer continues to hark back to Vaughan Williams, plus a keen-edged orchestration of his own. Robert Whitney's *Concerto Grosso* is a sincere, unpretentious and melodious contribution to the "neo-classical" literature for the orchestra.

The Woman's Symphony orchestra was responsible for the first Chicago performance of Ravel's *Piano Concerto*, in which that Mephistophelean orchestrator turns to the self-same neo-

classicism, with results that are as scintillant as they are meaningless. The woman's orchestra also gave the world premiere of Hazel Felman's choral work, *Good Morning, America*, in which one of Carl Sandburg's best poems is turned into prosy recitative and set off against disconnected splotches of orchestral color.

In chamber music there has been next to nothing. The only significant performance was that of Roy Harris' *Concerto* for clarinet, piano, and string quartet, which had not been publicly performed in this city until it was done at the one and only concert of the International Society for Contemporary Music. But this work was the event of the year. Since it has been played frequently elsewhere and is available on discs, it requires little comment at the present moment. It is music with a top, middle and bottom, and with logic and life in all its parts. It is not brilliant, but solid as mountains, and is one of the masterpieces of American art.

Tomford Harris, a pianist who likes his music difficult and who is at his best when tossing off the most devilish conceivable intricacies, gave a series of four recitals devoted to twentieth century composers. There was little new music, and the composers represented were the standard names—Honegger, Stravinsky, Bartok, Debussy, Scriabine, and so on. But two of Mr. Harris' most interesting works had not been heard from a Chicago concert platform before. The Roger Sessions *Sonata* has a first movement that seems on first hearing to build up in a series of overlapping blocks of sound to a big weighty pinnacle, like a newspaper architect's lurid vision of the towers of our local Century of Progress. The *Airplane Sonata* of George Antheil sets the irresistible force of rhythm against the immovable object of harmonic dissonance, until both are reduced to spent and burned out powder. But what a fine shower of sparks flies off in the process!

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