



DAVID DIAMOND
a portrait by
MARIAN GREENWOOD

FORECAST AND REVIEW

AMERICANS TO THE FORE — NEW YORK, 1941-42

THE premieres of three American symphonies held the center of the stage for the first stretch of the winter season. The symphonies of David Diamond and William Schuman are their most recent works to have a hearing and both represent a real step forward. In his prolific output Diamond's flair has almost always assured the direct transmission of his ideas, which have a strong, personal profile, sharp rich colorings and distinguished sonorous attributes. But technical aplomb is no guarantee against the roughness that comes from hasty writing, and all his works are not so brilliantly executed as the exciting and lyrical *Concert Piece* (National Orchestral Association), which is marred only by the presence of too much Copland. But now Diamond has taken meticulous care and attempted to give his work inevitability. The *First Symphony* (a Philharmonic premiere) has a fine-grained, expressive and mobile texture, in which every note counts, and a truly good sense of continuity. Emphasis on these considerations, however, has diminished the interest of the actual material. I find the drive and intensity somewhat ascetic, the lines, though broad, insufficiently contrasted and over-severe, the coloring and orchestral sonority less pungent than usual.

In Schuman's case the advance made by his *Third Symphony* (Boston Symphony) is particularly striking. The cantata, *This is Our Time* (National Orchestral Association), though better managed than his previous work, remains the pretentious, slow-moving piece it seemed last year, of an easy and banal popularity. But in his new symphony he has returned to his original vigorous and characteristic manner, with this addition, that the music at last really moves, no longer has difficulty in articulation. Though this vigor is athletic and heavy-set rather than lithe, it creates a sense of power unmarred by the sluggishness of the cantata. Most important, there is a positive individuality, almost free of former obsequious

references. I wish Schuman would rid himself of his still passionate attachment to strict contrapuntal forms. Though his use of them is sure-handed and not at all academic, they impart a somewhat unspontaneous cast to the melodic line. And his lyricism seems strong enough to dominate the flow and establish its own freer, more fanciful architecture.

Virgil Thomson's *Second Symphony* (Philadelphia Orchestra) has waited ten years for a complete unfolding. It presents the familiar simple, tuneful material in a more relaxed manner than do the rather formal string quartets heard last year. Development is by continuous free variation, yet the transformations are all so similar that their succession makes for a rather level landscape with few high points. The ideas are of insufficient strength and profile convincingly to determine an original form of their own. Too slight to bear much mulling over of the usual sort, they could benefit from a more straight-laced, even superimposed treatment, which I should find quite in keeping with the quaint military atmosphere of the first movement. As a kaleidoscopic arrangement the work is pleasing, but the display seems to be all black and white. The first New York concert performance of the suite from the ballet, *Filling Station*, by the Philharmonic, showed that short morceaux and dance movements provide better media for Thomson's material. Here it projects jelled forms of proper proportioning. Especially charming are the old-fashioned curtain-raising atmosphere of the opening and the cinematic shooting episode. It is good lusty fun all around with considerable melodic charm. The orchestration is full-blooded, completely without the symphony's thin, rather tenuous fussiness. Thomson's orchestral music, contrary to the usual legend, represented him better than his vocal work this time. Two songs given by Doris Doe reveal mainly a knowing prosodic gift. For the Gertrude Stein *Preciosilla* he has done a good framing and matting job. The adornment, witty and pellucid, required no depth. About the undistinguished setting of Webster's *Dirge*, however, the best one can say is that no violence has been done to the text. It can be clearly heard, but has inspired the composer to add nothing to it in the way of emotional intensity and underlining.



The new Carlos Chavez *Piano Concerto*, excellently performed by Eugene List with the Philharmonic, is a work of nobility and force, of original sonority and coloring. That its large proportions are so successful is due, I think, to the incredibly sustained electric intensity — even the

placidity is charged. Any deviation from the persistent hammering at rather uncontrasted though sharply-etched ideas or from the cramped tonal orbit would interrupt this flow. Perhaps the finale, a scampering quasi-scherzo, could be more weighty to balance the monumental first movement. But the whole score, especially the opening fresco with its many clearly-defined sections, is one of considerable mastery. The piano, treated percussively, seems to serve more as orchestral component, at times almost as backbone, than as superimposed ornamentation. The brief, plaintive slow interlude is stripped and primitive, but in the first movement one feels the union of the aborigine and the contemporary intellectual. This is as mature and powerful an expression as I have heard from Chavez.

Much other American music has been produced. The National Orchestral Association devotes its afternoon series to composers who have been the recipients of various awards. Besides the Schuman and Diamond works mentioned above, these concerts have included the suave *Third Symphony* by Bernard Wagenaar, already reviewed in MODERN MUSIC, a schoolroom *Passacaglia* by Morris Mamorsky, somewhat on the underdeveloped side, and Harold Morris' *Violin Concerto*, performed by Carroll Glenn, which, like his *String Suite* (Mozart String Sinfonietta), has lyric appeal and a dark, suffused passion. This unfortunately rarely breaks forth to become compelling, so that a monotonous unfulfillment seems to persist throughout.

Representative older figures had their innings also - George Chadwick with a *Melpomene Overture*, and Henry Hadley with a *Culprit Fay Overture*. This music, though frequently able, seems dated beyond the point where it could ever again inspire interest. In these ranks David Stanley Smith is far more successful. His *Credo* (premiere by the Philharmonic) does not offer deep emotions or an arresting individuality, but it has a very pleasing aristocratic finish, invention in form and orchestration, and a placid but quite personal distinction that penetrates his conservative style. In Herman Hans Wetzler's *Adagio and Fugue* for strings (Philharmonic) the submission to late-romantic German trends, only partial with Chadwick and Hadley, is complete. The adagio has unsubtle, banal cadences of a sort that even the model, Wagner, would not have used; the fugue is merely Regerish.

Younger conservatives include David Van Vactor, whose *Bagatelles for String Orchestra*, performed by the Saidenberg Little Symphony, are overlong for their material and the suggested intention, stemming quite

directly from classical models —no *neo* implications — and palely tinted by a few echoes of Prokofiev. Also Wayne Barlow, whose *The Winter's Passed*, a premiere here too, given by the Kostelanetz Orchestra at one of the Waldorf-Astoria's Monday Morning Musicales, is penetrated by a facile nostalgia, and Anis Fuleihan, represented on the National Orchestral Association's evening series by an attractive, but rather prim and reserved *Fiesta*. On this same program we heard the Bloch *Schelomo*, which seemed composed of unending pairs of fast and slow episodes. A Philharmonic novelty, Jerome Kern's *Scenario for Orchestra* on themes from *Showboat*, is equal in value to the sum of the irresistible songs themselves, minus something for inept high-brow orchestration which lessens the music's theatrical charm.

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Foreign contemporaries too have been well represented. An event of interest was the Philharmonic's New York premiere of Darius Milhaud's *Suite Provençale*, which marks this important composer's first large orchestral performance here. The work is a fresh, green, and vital evocation of Milhaud's homeland and captures perfectly the Provençal spirit, which has been so prominent in his recent work. The orchestration is shrill and exciting, the folk-like tunes most expressive. It is good to hear a French work that seems somewhat removed from the tiny, precious, restricted growths of Paris. Milhaud's more inventive lyrical talent is revealed in the *Trois Chansons de Ronsard*, written for and sung by Lily Pons at the Waldorf Musicale. The lines are long yet simple, at times almost popular, but in a most subtle and delicate way. Subtly expressive too is the fluid orchestration of the accompaniments. Milhaud should be heard here more often.

The new Hindemith *Symphony* (premiere by the Philharmonic) is not exactly an unexpected piece. Perhaps we should no longer hope for the works of this composer to be so. It is however one of his best recent scores and orchestrally one of his most colorful. Though it never achieves the distinguished atmosphere of *Mathis der Maler*, heard earlier at a Philharmonic concert, it is well above such a routine work as the well-known *Trauermusik* (Mozart String Sinfonietta). There is considerable real melodic invention; the whole scherzo, especially the trio, is quite imaginative. The first movement is very much like his opening sections of fifteen years back, but the use of this compressed, explosive kind of form, done however in his recent stylistic manner, makes for a rather new Hindemith experi-

ence. The other movements unfortunately lack this brevity, and the finale, rather ordinary in itself, is carelessly introduced so as to sound for a good while like a coda to the scherzo. Though he achieves no more real emotional inevitability and continuity than usual in this work, Hindemith is revealed by it as one of the few composers to use the grand manner convincingly today.

The Philharmonic devoted a program to the music of Ferruccio Busoni to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of his birth. This offered a chance to weigh the claims of the enthusiasts and detractors of this controversial figure, whose work is so little known. The *Violin Concerto* and *Gebarnischte Suite* are typical late-romantic products. Yet in Busoni there is a kind of interpenetration of German and Italian thought, and this may be responsible for a certain freshness here, a lack of the heaviness which marks so much purely German music of this period, though of true individuality there is little. The *Indian Fantasy*, a later work, shows great resourcefulness of invention in orchestration and sonority, a sort of sensuous sensitivity to tonal combinations. But it is surely the worst kind of exoticism with its formal wandering and confusion. In the *Doktor Faustus* excerpts however we come upon a richly distinguished musical mind. Here Busoni's admirable desire to make long melodic lines the governing agent of a work receives convincing demonstration, though the lines themselves are at times compounded of rather disparate elements. His work has a curiously earth-bound quality, rarely taking flight. Perhaps the shunning of sentiment resulting from an intellectual, over-pure approach is responsible for its cold emotional appeal.

A *Cello Sonata* of Shostakovitch played by Piatigorsky indicates that his talent is best revealed in smaller, more intimate forms. The lyricism of the opening movement is especially good. In the *Sixth Symphony* (National Orchestral Association), which now seems a more obvious work than ever, the serious parts are pretentious and insincere, the vulgarity is grotesquely overblown. Prokofiev knows how to use little banalities to much better advantage. I still find the *Romeo and Juliet* music (Boston Symphony) of a tender and distinguished flavor, though I must admit that the various unnecessary arrangements for piano, violin and piano, and cello and piano that are flying around town strip the music to its bones and bare its basic cheapness. For really subtle transformation of rather second-rate material, though, Ravel still holds the palm. The special, pungent sonorities of the *Left-Hand Concerto* (Philharmonic) are fascinating. The for-

mal intricacies are cleverly woven so as to give the whole work an improvisational cast which distinguishes it sharply from the strict little two-handed *Piano Concerto* that preceded it. The middle section is Ravel in one of his mesmeric exotic moods, with a striking combination of themes at the climax.

Benjamin Britten has not fared too well in recent representations. Two songs sung by Doris Doe have sustained mood, but little originality and rather bad prosody. I now find *Les Illuminations* (Saidenberg Little Symphony) a less successful setting than it seemed when performed during the I.S.C.M. festival where it perhaps stood out by comparison, but though it seems no more personal than before, it is nevertheless a considerably more jelled conception than the new *String Quartet* performed by the Coolidge Quartet at Washington Irving High School. The harmonic progressions are frequently unconvincing, and the bass moves far too little for this species of composition. The melodic interest too could be more sustained and developed. Britten's easy flow and charming spontaneity carry more weight when he uses them to express more arresting thoughts.

The League of Composers gave a concert-reception for the visiting Argentine, Juan José Castro. Like many South Americans Castro is best in his songs. These have intensity, direct fresh feeling, and the charm of local color. Of the group, projected with her usual fascination by Elsie Houston, the *Tres cantos negros* stood out. The instrumental music fails to put the personality across in any memorable way, and it is none too well accomplished. Between the high point of the *Sarabanda* for violin and piano, of a pleasant flowing lyricism, and the low of the *Toccata* for piano, as futile a clambering up and down the keyboard as I have heard in a long while, came a wiry but too plain *Piano Sonata*. The majority of these works, incidentally, were given world premieres.

I attended a program of the Jooss Ballet during its return engagement and found the music of Frederic Cohen incredibly banal, a sort of semi-conscious art barely capable of expressing a distinct emotional state. The *Ballade* of John Colman is something else again. This free and imaginative treatment of the variation form successfully alternates slow harmonic and fast contrapuntal episodes, creating atmospheric power . . . Among violinists Max Pollikoff premiered a *Colloquy* by Norman Dello Joio, of nice mood and constant melodic appeal; he also gave us a *Sonata* for solo violin by Hindemith; Isaac Stern offered the local premiere of Vaughan Williams' *Concerto Accademico*, a rather fresh interpretation of the neo-

classic spirit, best in its lyrical adagio and the imaginative close of its finale . . . The Orchestrette of New York performed Aaron Copland's *Quiet City* and Peter Warlock's *The Curlew*, a personal and lovely song cycle . . . Sergei Radamsky's two recitals of Russian songs revealed little in the contemporary repertory that was striking. Most Soviet composers seem content to re-create the moods of Russian folkmusic with rudimentary simplicity. The moods, though beautiful, are hardly new, and neither is the treatment.

There have been several duo-piano recitals recently. That the repertory is limited is no news, but one may object to the way the gaps are being filled. Anything and everything is appropriated and given a sort of super-de-luxe treatment that will justify the use of two instruments. The words "two-piano music" may come to have the rather lowly significance that is now at times attached to the term "salon music." The medium is a most distinguished one, and writing for it must be more inventive if a whole two-piano program is not to appear slick and monotonous. Even works originally written for performance this way, such as those of Britten and Lennox Berkeley performed by Bartlett and Robinson, seem to take no pains to stand out from the general run. A short piece can be as striking as a more extended one. Ernst Bacon's *Sourwood Hens*, performed by Loesser and Rubinstein, is at least engaging and written with cleverness. Whittemore and Lowe's contemporary works were slight and received especially swank café treatment. Dougherty and Ruzicka exhibited great taste in selecting material of Casella and Milhaud which is rather suitable for transcription. But I can imagine no more extraordinary choice for such display than the suite from Alban Berg's *Lulu*. With but one piano at his disposal Stravinsky made a transcription of *Petrouchka* (performed by Artur Rubinstein) with a distinction and sonorous inventiveness far above all this. Is he also to be one of the few to write a valuable two-piano work?

Donald Fuller

CHILDREN'S DAY AT THE CAMP MEETING

THIS sonata* is the fourth for violin and piano. It is called *Children's Day at the Camp Meeting*. It is shorter than the other violin sonatas. A few of its parts and suggested themes were used in organ and other earlier

*Chosen as the second in the League of Composers' contemporary series, the work is being recorded by New Music Recordings with Josef Szigeti as violinist and Andor Foldes as pianist. The score will shortly be published by the Arrow Music Press.—Ed.