

FORECAST AND REVIEW

WINTER TO SPRING, NEW YORK, 1942

THE short musical movement provides special opportunities for minute formal invention, a delicate balancing of concise materials. In long pieces such extreme precision would eventually become unbearable, the broad lines would be split up. This specific feature of the short form, wherein the unit is a brief phrase and the spans are only a few seconds long, has seldom been so carefully explored as in Aaron Copland's *Statements for Orchestra* (first complete performance by the Philharmonic), which is perfect in timing and dovetailing. This work has the stripped power and depth of other Copland pieces of the same period. It comes down from its lofty height only once. The various musical elements are of course very personal, and it is all conceived with the utmost sonorous interest. The "cryptic" and "prophetic" statements carry the deepest and most moving message. The "jingo" movement is a brilliant *tour de force*, which is no reflection on its very real significance; its unexpected close seems a philosophic commentary. The "militant" statement is fresh and healthy, the "subjective" not so revealing as some of its companions, and the "dogmatic" which succeeds quite well, reveals less play of the free imagination.

The more usual, light-hearted conception of the small piece is exposed in Robert Russell Bennett's *Eight Etudes for Orchestra* (Philadelphia Orchestra). Here the technic is slick rather than pondered. Since no great care has been taken about the seams, these morceaux do not hang together tightly, the continuity is sometimes too easy-going. But as the intention is always clear, and what is offered direct, natural, and winning, everything comes off.

Since Mitropoulos left the Philharmonic nothing new of any weight has appeared. There has been only one large-scale work, Weinberger's late-Victorian interpretation, the *Lincoln Symphony*. He now seems to

take his influences strained through the Hollywood sieve. It is unfortunate that the term "movie music" has been so over-applied, for it describes perfectly that special sense of continuity which is clearly based on a series of fade-ins and fade-outs.

The spontaneous Bohuslav Martinu has produced another winner in his *Concerto Grosso for Chamber Orchestra* (premiere here by the Boston Symphony). Unlike most facile composers Martinu has something new and urgent to say in each rapidly succeeding piece. His relaxed, secure command sets no obstacles to the expression of fresh, inventive feeling. I was delighted by the scoring for the two pianos, which has great richness, and at the same time delicate coloring. The *Second Symphony, Kormitchaia*, by Arthur Lourié, also given its premiere by this orchestra, is most interesting for sonorities which are reminiscent of austere late Stravinsky. The ideas and the personality are liturgical and thus not very colorful. In spite of the work's elaborate explanations it appears to be merely a rather well-integrated working-out of the "set of variations on one short motive." Since the plan is stretched to the breaking point, the over-all effect seems niggardly, repetitive, or simply diffuse when the derivation from the basic "theme" is not quite clear.

A good deal of contemporary music has appeared on the New York City Symphony Orchestra programs recently. The *Two Piano Concerto* by Francis Poulenc has singing strength and an appealing sentimentality. It carries all the charm of somewhat low-down influences, and in more serious moments, a delicate mysteriousness. On this same evening we heard the *Suite Provençale* by Darius Milhaud and Copland's *El Salon Mexico*. The *Piano Concerto* by Stanley Bate shows command of means and clear, if not very striking, ideas. The personality is modest, yet there is more than mere fluency here; Bate's use of popular materials in neo-classic forms strikes a personal note.

Frederick Jacobi's *Rhapsody for Harp and String Orchestra* received its first performance at the Juilliard. It is a typical work, with considered thoughtful form, and melodies of great simplicity turned with distinction. Sometimes however I wished it less unassuming. Also heard was Robert Ward's *First Symphony*, disarming in its directness and lack of adornment. It needs more invention and cunning, but the lyrical talent, despite its debt to Ravel, shows real distinction.

The winners' series of the National Orchestral Association gave us the first performance here of Douglas Moore's *A Symphony of Autumn*.

Its impassioned romantic feeling does not make up for the general wandering. Only the last movement, in which a folk-like theme predominates, traces a direct course. Though the whole work is atmospheric, the finale's gusty, buoyant, plein-air mood appeals most. The *Suite for String Orchestra* by Philip James has definitely second-rate material, unworthy of the skillful developments; the *Fugue*, with its Old English jollity, is best.

Another New York premiere on this series was Nicolai Berezowsky's *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra* (previously heard via radio). Its broadly developed first movement has the strongest profile. The work is lyrical throughout, but the finest melodic expression is the slow movement's. The other sections are largely grotesquerie, done with much wit and imagination. There are colorful, interesting orchestrations and inventive figurations for the solo instrument. The light and serious movements are perhaps too far apart in degree of significance. Kent Kennan's *Andante for Solo Oboe and Small Orchestra*, a work of distinguished and personal romanticism, presents a mood of unrelieved poignancy, and for that effect is too spun-out. Much, much too long is Leo Sowerby's *Medieval Poem*, replete with organ and solo boy-soprano. This is a rich mélange to deserve such a title, rather Oriental when it is not devotional in the most ornate manner. Its wandering discontinuity can be traced all too clearly to sentimental church fill-ins.

The first of a series devoted to contemporary chamber music by the Musical Art Quartet at the Museum of Modern Art presented such familiar works as the Bloch *Piano Quintet* and Walter Piston's *First Quartet*, deeply expressive in the slow movement, but too volatile for my taste when it is fast; also the less well-known *Second Quartet* by Arthur Honegger. Frequently Honegger is merely adequate. Nothing in particular is missing, but the actual meaning seems tiny compared with the blown-up rhetoric of the whole.

III

The unusual in violin and piano sonatas has been the preoccupation of some recitalists recently. Hinda Barnett and George Robert presented the *Sonata* of Virgil Thomson, the best chamber music work by this composer I have heard. There are long, undulating, carefully-molded melodic lines, an intimate atmosphere most appropriate to the medium, an unpretentious, clearly-defined individuality. Ravel's *Sonata*, heard on the same program and also performed later by Szigeti, is not one of his most successful late works. The flowing lyricism of the first movement appeals

most, although the *Blues* derives, from its refined treatment of a mood with which Ravel has no true affinity, a certain peculiar attraction. As always, the very best possible is done with frequently trifling means. The *Fourth Sonata* by Charles Ives (Szigeti recital), sub-titled *Children's Day at the Camp Meeting*, surprises by its simple, clear construction. The feeling for local color is strong and makes a more direct impression than in other works. But the medium is not well-considered. Interest centers on the piano, the violin being limited to melodies of hymn-tune cast and such. Two pieces by Szymanowski represented both his impressionistic and later folk-inspired period. The *Sonata* of Joseph Schillinger, performed by Dr. Jerome Gross, is mostly plain, conservative Russian. At times it exudes a strange, forgotten beauty borrowed from Scriabin.

Flos Campi, a suite for solo viola, small orchestra, and voices, by Ralph Vaughan Williams, was given by the Orchestrette of New York. It revealed his pastoral mood at its most convincing, though it is somewhat unvaried. The style is distinguished by a lyricism and personal use of a polytonal idiom, with fluid but controlled form.

John Kirkpatrick's annual recital of American piano music offered mostly finished works by our mature composers. The program opened with a well-known yardstick, the Sessions *Piano Sonata*. Carl Ruggles' *Evocations* are less interesting than his orchestral music. I think complexity and varied tone color are necessary to his quite special feeling. The *Fantasy* by Ross Lee Finney is an expert work in his conservative but personal neo-classic manner, though less intense and exciting than some others. Theodore Chanler's *Toccata* is a charming invention with a distinct dance-like flavor, similar to a hornpipe. His *Aftermath*, written for the *Homage to Paderewski* album, is a sincere miniature in romantic vein. The pieces by Arthur Farwell are interesting treatments of indigenous material, conservative and well-managed, but close to the work of our primitives because of their fresh feeling. Kirkpatrick repeated Hunter Johnson's *Sonata*. Not only the material, but also the whole formal plan is derived from the Harris *Piano Sonata*. The intensity does little to harness the piece's direction, and its mood is one of the easiest to project in music, what with changing metrics and other devices. More valuable seems the unruffled placidity of his later *Serenade* (originally for flute and clarinet). Robert Palmer is a young composer also noted for his sound and fury, but his new *Three Preludes* are, excepting the last, as tranquil as the recent Johnson piece. Their delicate, expressive simplicity affords great pleasure.

Another of the League of Composers' "good neighbor" concerts fell as flat as most such gestures. This program of young Canadians showed them open to the same influences as are young Americans, but less alert. Their music is not so accomplished, and it is less interesting. The most positive personality was Barbara Pentland's, more vigorous than any of her male compatriots'. I found the lyric appeal most constant, but there is harmonic invention as well. John J. Weinzwieg's *Second String Quartet* was pleasant enough, but its preoccupation with phrase structures is student-like. The later piano piece is a rather Schönbergian attempt. The music of Louis Applebaum and Godfrey Ridout is French in derivation. The former suffers from lushness, the latter has an attractive clear, simple romantic style, which is however over-pale. Hector Gratton's *Canadian Dance* for violin and piano was comparatively refreshing, but offered no distinguished treatment of folk material. The piano pieces of young André Mathieu are finished miniatures, very pianistic, some in the impressionist tradition, others cleanly classical. The talent they reveal is naturally as yet imitative rather than original.



The League's program devoted to young Americans revealed a striking command throughout and, more important, strong personal style and emotional fullness in general. The *Piano Sonata* by Ulysses Kay is too much under the influence of Hindemith, but it has melodic spontaneity and directness of expression that indicate a warm nature. J. B. Middleton's *Sonatina for Clarinet and Piano*, though sophisticated, is quite down-to-earth. It offers clear melodies supported by a light, tripping piano background. The solo flute is not my favorite medium, but Richard Franko Goldman in his *Two Monochromes*, explored its possibilities and emerged with the necessary varied, undulating melodic lines. The slow movement of Norman Cazden's *Sonata for Flute and Piano* is rather falsely innocuous. The fast sections have nice texture and smooth movement, but are disappointingly colder than other of his pieces. The *Serenade* for piano and winds by Alexei Haieff is a knowing and witty work from the salon, done with economy and style. Harold Shapero's *Four-Hand Piano Sonata* has sonorous interest, formal invention, and a well-balanced seriousness rare in his former work. There is perhaps too much Copland here, but the bright, fresh manner has a colorful personal slant. The *Quartet for Woodwinds* by Arthur Berger is very well contrived. The fast movements are late Stravinsky in style, with an individual shy grace, the slow movement is far

more personal, and its middle section rich and original in texture.

Assorted trivia: The *Suite* for violin and piano of Antoni Szalowski performed by Roman Totenberg. This is ingratiating pretty-boy music, but since it is even more retiring and shy than Jean Françaix, it gives only a very hasty glance at the composer . . . The "American Group" for viola and piano presented by Emanuel Vardi. Messrs. Cooley, Gusikoff, and Bernstein are conservative and impersonal in style. Herbert Haufrecht's piece alone had some color . . . Paul Creston's works done by the Orchestrette of New York. In its stronger moments I was reminded of a diluted César Franck . . . At the Philharmonic: Zoltan Kurthy's *Scherzo* which dealt in such curios as whole-tone scales and "fourths and fifths, medieval fashion;" Anis Fuleihan's *Pastorale*, which has the nice mood of most of his music, but is equally pale; Gian-Carlo Menotti's *Overture to "The Old Maid and the Thief,"* which barely suffices even when the opera comes afterward . . . At the New York City Symphony: Horace Johnson's *Streets of Florence*, three impressionistic tone-poems, all similar in mood, all relying on the device of ostinato. They sound well and are judiciously brief; Courtlandt Palmer's *Piano Concerto*, which offered the 1840 brand of romanticism, without Tchaikowsky and Rachmaninoff. What it gained in freshness it lost through anemia; Vittorio Giannini's *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue*. This is nineteenth-century Bach, well-managed in a heavy-handed way.

Donald Fuller

STRAVINSKY IN BEVERLY HILLS

"FILM music? That's monkey business, and for monkey business my price is too high." Thus, Igor Stravinsky, when asked if his going to live in Beverly Hills meant what it usually does with a composer. Of course Hollywood could use his experience and resourcefulness at fitting music to action and action to music. It still remains to be seen whether Hollywood will wake up to his presence, and, if it does, whether Hollywood will let him work as he wants. Stravinsky's ideas, while they can be paid for, cannot be bought. For the present, as for the past year, Stravinsky lives in a sunny small house overlooking Los Angeles, and he teaches, or rather, as he puts it, he "experiences composition" with his students. Thus the two polar opposites of modern music, Stravinsky and Schönberg, having been torn out of their natural environments, have come to roost in Film-