

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

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## RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN SEASON, 1945

EARLIER this year Prokofiev was treated to a miniature festival by our orchestras and recitalists. Now we have had two more works, both recent and one of major significance. The cantata, *Alexander Nevsky*, was brought by the Philadelphia Orchestra for its first concert performance here. Epic choral works are no novelty and their pretentious manner, still exposed as the best means to a big effect, is equally familiar. Prokofiev shows how sheer size and impact need not sacrifice swiftly paced lines. Possibly the simple directness of the original material – *Nevsky* is based on music to the film of the same name – carried over its refreshing influence. But the work is so masterful it seems obvious that Prokofiev, as usual, knew just what he was about.

He has not attempted a work on a really heroic scale since the *Scythian Suite*, which many wish had served as more of a point of departure for his whole development. The gray, poignant landscape of the opening is huge and exciting and its icy tone penetrates much of the cantata. There is a tautness in the chorus's folksong style which never relaxes into the easy, distended sentiment rarely avoided in such writing for large groups. Nor are there the usual unpleasantly calculated climaxes. Only after one has been swept to the high points is there time to realize how irresistibly one was taken there. The section depicting the battle on the ice has an especial force. The orchestration is admirable for its superb sound, but above all for its delineation of a richly allusive atmosphere, as fine in its way as Stravinsky's very different evocation in the *Symphonie des Psaumes*.

The *Piano Sonata Number 8*, given its premiere by Horowitz at the Soviet Consulate, is a good companion piece to the sixth and seventh of the series. Here too the first movement, subtly varied and full of formal complexities, is more pleasing than anything that comes later. Only the

brilliant piano writing carries off some of the sweet banalities of the waltz and conventional ado of the finale.

Lukas Foss's *Ode* had a first performance by the New York Philharmonic. It has a rare feeling for sonorities, none the less special for their derivation from Stravinsky, which is most obvious when piano, harp and percussion are involved. The sustained, elevated tone of this *Ode* expresses a more original musical thinking – Foss's influences are beginning to absorb beautifully – than he has yet offered. The warm romantic style refers freely to the nineteenth century's best, with no embarrassment about working up full, deeply felt climaxes.

By contrast one felt a severe tightness in Arthur Kreutz's *Music for Symphony Orchestra* which, though written fifteen years ago, awaited the Philharmonic's first complete concert performance this year. Only one theme forms the foundation and it is surprisingly well handled so that the air of frustrated striving appears as an achievement. This disquieting and not easily forgotten piece has an intense lyricism.

A prize-winning composition, *Symphonic Allegro* by Peter Mennin, was set among familiar American works on the First Annual George Gershwin Memorial Concert under Leonard Bernstein's direction. Mennin knows his modern music and how to draw not too literally from its sources. This and his technical facility, however, should not limit him to ideas which are mainly a given quantity for development.

Two resident foreigners were well represented on National Orchestral Association programs. Nikolai Lopatnikoff's *Violin Concerto*, with Joseph Fuchs as soloist, is a bright, capricious work which had previously been performed here with piano. The Hindemith influence gets considerably freshened up and there is an attractive gilt-edged touch to the ideas. Active harmonic progressions and melodic lines, especially developed in the slow movement, balance a squareness in rhythm. Vladimir Dukelsky's *Second Symphony*, a work from 1929 revised last year, shows what convincing music this composer wrote before he became involved with Broadway. Its astonishing flow and extroverted vigor suggest the fine late Roussel pieces. One basks in a luxurious warmth of rich sonorities and free melody.

Randall Thompson's *The Testament of Freedom*, a choral-orchestral opus on strangely chosen words by Thomas Jefferson, appeared first at a Boston Symphony concert. The sequences with suspensions, cribbed from some harmony textbook, are just a few of the pinpricks in this drab tex-

ture. When Thompson fails to get inspiration from a hymn tune, he falls back on an alma mater or bluntly patriotic song. His battle picture would suit some child's game with toy soldiers. Even this negative unity and balance are missed, however, in Leo Sowerby's *Canticle of the Sun*, a Schola Cantorum offering. The involved orchestral writing, a thickened Delius mixture, made simple shouted organum the only possibility for the chorus. Loeffler's *Canticum Fratris Solis*, a setting of the same text for soprano and small orchestra beautifully performed by the Negro singer, Ellabelle Davis, was delicate and simple in its elegance. Bombast, but not of Thompson's stiff-necked New England variety, puffed up Ernst Lévy's *Ninth Symphony* for chorus and orchestra, performed by the Dessoff Choirs with the National Orchestral Association. His organum apes Bloch's Hebraic eloquence.

At the Central Presbyterian Church Hugh Giles was assisted by the Saidenberg Little Symphony in a delightful *Concerto* for organ and strings by Poulenc. When his own *chanteuse* lyricism is varied by a serious austerity and crackling good humor spirited out of late Stravinsky works, there may be criticism. But all is affectingly emotional, an intimate experience which far surpassed anything the Boston Symphony was able to do for Hanson's *Third Symphony*. This Sibelian formality had no case, for its themes submitted no evidence on which to base it. Louis Gesensway's *Suite* for strings and percussion too could derive nothing from a Philadelphia Orchestra production. A new "theory of color harmony, based on the diatonic forty tone scale," which the work was supposed to exploit, failed to give up its secret. An impersonal, nonconductive current from Central Europe.

The Juilliard Graduate School Orchestra, under Richard Bales's direction, gave a concert which included Douglas Moore's hearty but tender distillation of rural life, *Village Music*; Frederick Jacobi's *Night Piece* for flute and small orchestra, a sinuously weaving evocation of nocturnal indecisions and forebodings; and Bernard Wagenaar's *Song of Mourning*, one long-breathed and poignant melodic line between two fragmentary sighs. Bales's own *National Gallery Suite Number 2*, after three paintings, turned out to be skillful impressions of Copland, Hindemith and Shostakovitch, respectively, somehow unified by more personal touches. Robert Ward's *Adagio and Allegro*, a little too simplified in its attitudes, yet had disarmingly direct speech.

The Shostakovitch *Trio*, given its first concert performance on Vivian

Rivkin's piano recital with the assistance of Joseph Fuchs and Nikolai Graudan, made a new, sharp decline on my cardiograph. No sooner do I experience a rehearing of one of the symphonies and reconsider the great expressive power of this composer than I am disappointed by some flat chamber music piece. Never before has Shostakovitch sunk to the unexhilarating and stale bad taste of the finale, a myopic view of Prokofiev's lovely *Overture on Hebrew Themes*. The second movement sounded rather western, but then country dances are much the same the world over.

More prize-winning pieces were two string quartets on the Chamber Music Guild's program. Robert Doellner's — his first — was highly amateurish, centered somewhere between early Schönberg and early Hindemith. The *Second Quartet* by Camargo Guarnieri had his expected integration of folk material with classical forms, which, despite the nostalgic movement, he has managed elsewhere with more ardor. Jean Bergér's *Quatre Chants d'Amour*, sung by Maria Kurenko, were pure music-hall, etched in a tiny, precious style.

A Czechoslovak chamber music evening at the Times Hall included the first performance in this country of a song cycle by Leos Janacek, *Diary of One Who Vanished*. Almost expressionistic in its intensity, this work was full of significant experimental vocal writing, developed out of the free recitative methods of his operas. The pièce d'occasion, Martinu's *Quintet* for piano and strings, is solid like many of his recent smaller efforts, toughened by methods transplanted from the orchestral pieces. But its subject matter and delivery are repetitive. Though Milhaud too does not often strike us with his novelty, one always finds in him fresh little touches to delight. The *Quatre Visages*, a group of sunny disposition on Ferenc Molnar's viola recital, offered such variations as a widespread, leaping lyricism and a spirited adaptation of conventional string figurations.

Lou Harrison's *Suite* for piano was played by Andor Foldes on an I.S.C.M. Forum Group program. The twelve-tone system is employed without the usual cramped tightness. This thinking in broad periods is especially pleasing in the first two movements. The *Aria* had a most expressive lyricism and harmonic support. Some blandly polytonal songs by Johan Franco, performed by Ilona Hagen, reflected vaguely the Irish sentiment of their texts. The *Sonata* for violin and piano by Juan Orrego, a young Chilean composer, was played by Abraham Loft and Reah Sadowsky. Popular melodies are used without provincial results. The

animated textures reflect contemporary international style and the forms are self-renewing, not limited by the length of folk tunes.

Donald Fuller

## SPRING STYLES IN NEW YORK

SEVERAL older musical styles unexpectedly burst into bud this spring and delighted everyone. They also exhibited, on the ground, a proud sapling or two which they had evidently fathered during the winter.

Thus the Cuban-American Music Group presented, at the Museum of Modern Art, a concert of works which, except for two recent pieces, were written in Cuba during the twenties. The scoring of three songs from Amadeo Roldan's *Motivos de Son* for small chamber orchestra supplemented by claves, bongos, marimbula and piano, creates a sharp, rhythmically shattered sonority. The work is a veritable tonal instruction sheet on how to break down folk material – Afro-Cuban in this instance – into usable matter for composition, how to mix classical and native instruments and how to shape the whole. But one is really not aware, in this model divertissement, of the technical address, so complete and charming is the integration of means and substance. Roldan was certainly one of the Americas' most gifted composers.

The *Primera Suite Cubana* by Alejandro Caturla (who also died four or five years ago) is a tense, rather strange sounding piece for woodwinds, brass and piano. The gloomy manner of the *Comparsa*, which is constructed around a piano ostinato, is attributable to the use of the lowest woodwind registers. The *Danza* is more brilliant but the whole lacks Roldan's clarity. Also played were Pedro Sanjuan's *Sones de Castilla*, extended pictures of Spanish landscapes, and Joaquin Nin-Culmell's lyrical *Quintet* for piano and strings, which was modelled on Falla's *Harpsichord Concerto*.

The brilliant new works were by José Ardévol, professor of composition at the Havana Conservatory, and very young Julian Orbon. Ardévol's third *Sonata a Tres*, for two trumpets and trombone, is made up of clean and lively neo-classic lines well put together. It has a slightly heady sound. Orbon's *Homage to Soler* (one of the inventors, with Domenico Scarlatti, of the Spanish style) is an especially beautiful and sharply dissonant reflection on this antique composer, using motive fragments directly out of his works.

Virgil Thomson's *Sonata da Chiesa* received its belated first New