

FORECAST AND REVIEW

COLUMBIA'S FESTIVAL; HINDEMITH'S LILACS

COLUMBIA University's Second Annual Festival of American Music opened with a classic, as all good festivals should. Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, danced by Martha Graham and her company, is just two years old, yet has already been elevated to stardom. And a fine introduction it makes to such an occasion, for the eloquence, simplicity and tenderness of both the music and the dance represent what is most distinguished and moving in American art. Unfortunately the second half of Miss Graham's program not only failed to sustain this broad placidity but was irritating from lack of any sustained quality of its own.

Serpent Heart, choreographed to a score by Samuel Barber on commission from the Alice M. Ditson Fund, is just Miss Graham all over again – as she used to be. Hectic, thwarted, hysterical, it is even unhappy, but not after all really tragic, not touching. Only when Yuriko, the Daughter of the King, dances like a child or One Like Jason (Erik Hawkins) stands strong does the work have direct appeal. And there is one moving episode of Miss Graham's: her retreat to the mysterious and bare golden cage at the close. Barber's usual craftsmanship is limited here to aptly supplying a demand, the counterpart to Miss Graham's frenzy. Thus we are treated to an interminable series of nervous, gasping phrases, which strive for no real goal and seem to insinuate wickedly but unconstructively. Barber has certainly thrown back the point with a devastating realization of the emotional climate, but one misses his sense of the long line and the broad period, his lyrical gift.

Simplicity again was the mood in which the orchestral concert opened with Leon Barzin conducting the NBC Symphony. Ernst Bacon's *From These States (Gathered Along Unpaved Roads)* uses folk material in a most refreshing way. Despite his rather fancy program notes, these brief pieces are in truth arrangements, but in the best possible sense. Each tiny tune is placed like a gem in its own utterly appropriate setting, fitted to it with sensitivity, invention and wit.

William Schuman's *Piano Concerto* (Beveridge Webster, soloist) appeared in a re-orchestrated version for full orchestra. Obviously Schuman needs mass for proper self-expression. The piece now has real drive; formerly, as a chamber work, it seemed ragged and unconvincing. The breathless continuity of the opening carries through with a very new-sounding excitement to the second theme. And the lyrical passages, if heavy, do have fulness and intensity. Yet Schuman seems less to compose with invented elements — melodies, rhythmic or harmonic schemes out of which he builds a structure — than to conceive an emotional attitude which he fills out with appropriate music.

The *Toccata* by Louise Talma shows us a mind clearly aware of all these elements and their possibilities. But with her the common denominator seems to be merely the wish to compose a piece impeccably in a given style. Here we have the usual neo-classicism, enlivened, not very originally, by the gay folk discoveries of Copland.

The gloomy but poignant expressionism of Roger Sessions' suite from *The Black Maskers*, which completed the program, is quite magical; the work should be heard more often.

The biggest secret on the evening of Ives music had already been revealed a month before, in a premiere conducted by Lou Harrison. The *Third Symphony* remains the most evocative and satisfying of Ives's works yet performed. The songs, with their rich variety, have of course been known for a good while. Of the two chamber works, the *Second Violin Sonata* seemed the most interesting. The ease with which Ives passes from the elegiac to the rustic and back again shows how natural these moods are to him. No other composer expresses the simple act of faith with such convincing sentiment or depicts the common man so understandingly. In the *Second String Quartet*, which often distressed me by its needless confusion, these same qualities give the work life, keep it moving and saying something. The opening movements, *Discussions* and *Arguments*, have much real humor, but I find that the mystical and over-elaborate sections represent less a commentary on the more ordinary events, as some interpret them, than a strange and rather unconvincing dichotomy. Two chamber orchestra works, *The Unanswered Question* and *Central Park in the Dark*, make use of a small group of instruments on stage, which speak against a quiet string background emanating, unseen, from behind a curtain. Despite the daring of this conception, I was once again made conscious of how Ives is most effective when most simple and direct.

In the concert of orchestral and choral works by the High School of Music and Art, Copland's familiar *Outdoor Overture* and David Diamond's vigorous *Concert Piece* met with Morton Gould's precise and unworried *Folk Suite* and Paul Creston's shoddy *Fantasy* for piano and orchestra.

A new *Melody* by Roy Harris, commissioned for the program, exposed this musical element quite barely as a succession of intervals, for which no rhythmic variety was considered necessary to sustain the breath of life. Another commissioned work, for chorus, was Norman Dello Joio's *A Jubilant Song*. Though this piece owes much to Schuman's style of choral writing, Dello Joio's own typical vitality is present throughout. The deft handling of a quite extended plan and a simple but inventive piano accompaniment keep up one's interest during some rather flat choral sections. Schuman himself was represented mainly by unusually sober works for chorus. Randall Thompson's *Alleluia* and an expressive *Let Down the Bars, O Death* by Barber were heard too. This clear indication of how contemporary styles can be introduced to the young provided a rather warming and optimistic close to the festival.

Another concert in the Columbia neighborhood was the ISCM's final program of the season, presented in conjunction with the Columbia Theatre Associates. An early work by Krenek, the *Symphonic Piece for Nine Instruments* gave us in its first movement his typical march-like vigor, which is less motory and fresher than Hindemith's at that period. The extended and far-flung outline continued through the moody Adagio and eventually became tiresome; the sense of direction was lost. A new *Divertimento* by Walter Piston for the same combination, commissioned by the ISCM, showed that composer in his most light-hearted and assured style. Piston's gay themes now have a quite striking profile; the superficial aspects of his earlier fast movements have gradually disappeared. Though one missed some of the rich feeling of his recent scores in the slow movement, its confident tranquillity was memorable.

The second half of the program, a stage presentation of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire d'un soldat*, had the advantage of the remarkable conducting by Mitropoulos, and the charming direction by Frederick Cohen, very much in the Jooss Style. The revised version of the words, which allowed participation by the instrumentalists and provided a sort of Orson Welles narrator, the attractive method of miming the story on its own plane of the stage, and the spirited performances, with Atty Van Den Berg a most graceful Princess, were all entertaining factors. Toward the end, however, one had the feeling that Stravinsky's score was being unbearably stretched out to perform a background function, when it is after all the real center of interest.

An exciting world premiere, Hindemith's setting of Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* as a requiem for soloists, chorus and orchestra, appeared on the Collegiate Chorale's concert. The Poulenc group which preceded it consisted of a little cycle, *Petites Voix*, and *Litanies à la Vierge Noire*. Though Poulenc's range is not really very broad – the gay

and the tender, the stark severity, with its vibrant sonority, when he writes a religious piece – he always seems to ring new changes on these sentiments. The freshness of his inspiration remains a matter for wonder.

No other work of Hindemith has impressed me so for its imagination. Strict formal devices are always used with a purpose, not as an easy means of getting across a given tract of space. Hindemith, generally denounced for his prosody, was hardly less successful than others who have attempted Whitman settings. At any rate the poem is really projected. And I found it not at all disturbing that in his battle scene he used several well-known musical tricks to suggest armed conflict. This seemed only another indication of the humanization in the expressive message which Hindemith strives for throughout. Too much recitative in the solo parts occasionally stops the flow of this large construction. But its broad measures are generally exposed with command and great power. Donald Fuller

MODERNISM "SACRED AND PROFANE"

LAZARE Saminsky's *Requiem* for chorus, soloists and orchestra (National Orchestral Association), commissioned by the Alice M. Ditson Fund, is an ambitious work, fragmentary in construction. In seven shortish sections Saminsky lays bare his meditations on the subject of death. The third piece, *A World Beyond the Uplands*, is an instrumental interlude to a poem by his wife, Lillian Morgan Saminsky (in whose memory the *Requiem* was written), beautifully scored for upper register instruments and very imaginative in design. Parts of the work dealing with death-the-skeleton were nasty-sounding and murky in color, frequently cut off short. Saminsky's detail throughout was of far greater interest than his somewhat unstable layout. His work has, however, an imaginative warmth and resonance. The same concert also offered first hearings of Robert Ward's vigorous *Jubilation, An Overture*, and George Kleinsinger's *Fantasy* for violin and orchestra.

An English program by this same orchestra introduced the overlong *Violin Concerto* by Richard Arnell (Harold Kohon, soloist), which was "stream of tunefulness" in idiom. Stanley Bate in his *Sinfonietta Number 2* is the composer primeval who scorns such civilities as counterpoint or variation. His ideas are given out in unpremeditated chunks by a forcefully scored orchestra. None of them can stand such cruel treatment. Another premiere, by Dean Dixon and the American Youth Orchestra, was David Block's *Symphonic Poem* – based on *The Tale of a Pogrom* – which I found fuller of catsup than gore. But Henry Brant's *Dedication in Memory of a Great Man* was a skilled and curiously stirring piece. A personality of surprising breadth lay behind its frank agonies, one capable of an unusually