

The other work, by twenty-four year-old Gardner Read seemed as if it had been written before the war rather than last year. It is a sorry thing to see a young man so unadventurous. If however, he had been bolder he might not have won his prize. The work is a "motif" symphony in four movements with constant developments of undistinguished material. Read never relaxed into a tune for a moment; he was either working up or calming down to "entrances" of little fragments that were weak and did not merit the fuss he made to bring them in. Although the work was empty and unoriginal, it is quite evident that Read has true musical feeling. This showed itself most often in his orchestration. If he had stuck more tenaciously to a unifying expressive conception, instead of to an intellectual one, his work might have had greater coherence. A more personal and challenging style would not be out of place.

Roy Harris and Elie Siegmeister opened the Fall concert series at the Composer's Forum Laboratory. That remarkable organization has been improving steadily. The standard of performance this year is much higher than last, and the concerts promise to be more interesting. It is too bad that because of its isolation the good works discovered by this unit do not reach wider audiences. But that will certainly come.

Elliott Carter

COOLIDGE FIESTA IN MEXICO

THE first festival of Pan American chamber music, sponsored by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge at Mexico City, was held from July thirteenth to the twenty-fourth, in the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Compositions from the Americas were presented in six concerts under the direction of Carlos Chavez, Mexico's leading conductor and composer. He not only arranged the fête but, with Hugo Kortschak and Carl Engel, also acted as a judge of the two works which won the Coolidge prize and honorable mention for 1937.

Distinction for performance went to the visiting artists Jesus Sanroma, and members of the Coolidge quartet who, with Mr. Chavez, were responsible in a large degree for the musical in-

tegrity in interpretation that held the occasion at festival standards. Honors among composers repeatedly went to those whose works had been tried in the fires of previous performances.

The new music of Jacobo Ficher (Coolidge prize winner) and Francisco Casabona (honorable mention) did not carry the weight of Roger Sessions' quartet; two chamber music works by Villa-Lobos; trios by Roy Harris and Walter Piston; three pieces in memory of the Spanish poet, Garcia Lorca, by Silvestre Revueltas; the sextet by Edward Burlingame Hill and *Music for the Theatre* by Aaron Copland.

Donald Tovey, distinguished musicologist in Scotland, refuses a hazard of analysis by saying that only a performance by his Reid orchestra will extract an opinion from him as to the worth of a composer or a particular composition. Without benefit of score or more than one hearing, members of the audience in Mexico City could not be as exacting in passing judgment on the 1937 Coolidge prize quartet or the honorable mention. Over sixty entries were said to have been examined by the judges before handing down their verdict. The wonder was what the other fifty-odd might have contained.

Mr. Ficher, born in Russia in 1896 and long since transplanted to Buenos Aires, had his prize quartet No. 2, Opus 55, placed at the end of the fifth concert as a climax to the festival. It is enlightening to know that he is a former pupil of Glazounov. As composer and teacher he has been the head of the conservatory in Buenos Aires for a number of years. The list of his published music reads imposingly.

This quartet was written in the usual four movements—allegro molto, adagio, scherzo and allegro molto. It commanded a sympathetic reading from Mexico's Ruvalcaba string quartet. Significant to the listener seemed to be the point that an academic composer was trying valiantly to be modern. Dissonances that are unacceptable, however, are those that cloak anemic musical ideas and obvious sentimentality, for lack of stronger means to gain attention. Even a high degree of technic which included excellent form, strong facility in polytonal writing and a certain dramatic intensity in the concluding movement did not overbalance the weaknesses.

Mr. Casabena whose *Quartet in C-minor* was played during the fourth of the six concerts might have been dubbed the "Malipiero of the Pampas" if he had lived in the Argentine rather than Brazil. The opening measures of his quartet contained a theme of descending motion played in unison. The effect was striking in the first few repetitions. Later it became tedious and in the last movement its return gave the audience the impression that "fate was knocking at the door" of another South American composer.

Wheat found in the chaff was present more frequently in North American music. There was also a disturbing mediocrity in ideas and treatment that came from the same northerly direction. The former description applies unreservedly to Roger Sessions' quartet reviewed in these pages last year. Closely knit and complex, it remained in the memory through the entire festival as something of a yard-stick.

Both Harris and Piston who contributed their trios for violin, piano and 'cello, cannot escape a second evaluation. The Harris trio remains astounding for its unevenness and unsustained flashes of vitality. The Piston work was also consistent in confirming the original impression that it was carefully etched and balanced in design but held musical ideas of less weight than those of his colleague.

The mounting pedantry that threatened at times to engulf the festival, received a temporary set-back when three movements from Aaron Copland's *Music for the Theatre* were conducted by the composer. Suspect was the trivial material that found its way into unaccustomed high places through shrewd usage. But that the music had drawn blood was evident from both the hisses and the stout applause that greeted its concluding note.

Edward Burlingame Hill was represented by the *Sextet for Piano and Woodwinds*, which had its first performance at the Berkshire Festival in 1934. Mr. Hill's scholarly approach to creativeness sometimes uncovered real beauty in the meandering phrases of the music. Painstaking to the point of losing perspective, the music was overlong and many times extremely thin from material overworked.

It was fitting in a land of Indian and Latin background that the

composer displaying the calibre of genius should be Hector Villa-Lobos. In that setting his *Settimino* and *Choros No. 5* continued to be ripe fruit for the musical markets of the world. Another genius in matters of chamber music education was unable to attend this meeting—the sponsor Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge.

Alma Goudy

INTERNATIONALISM À LA VENICE AND FLORENCE

IN Italy, where every opera performance is something of a municipal occasion there are also, in the course of each year, a score of special Music Days and Music Weeks. But real international programs of new music are rare, despite Marinetti and "Futurismo," despite the state's official encouragement of the composer. I am familiar with only two such celebrations, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, held every two years in Florence on a grand scale and more modestly in the intervening years, and the International Music Festival of Venice, now an annual institution.

The Maggio Musicale is not exclusively dedicated to new music, but merely welcomes it. It is really a great international exhibition at which, for quite understandable reasons, a late opera by Verdi, this time *Otello*, rubs shoulders with an older work; Bruno Walter and the Paris Grand Opera are invited, and naturally, an opera ensemble from the Third Reich. This year Paul Hindemith had a hearing, but so did Alfred Cortot. One of the younger Italian moderns, Mario Labroca, has been the director of the Maggio for several years, so it is a modern music festival too. While there was an opera cycle in memory of Ottorino Respighi, Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and Alban Berg's *Violinkonzert* also had their first hearing here, more to the astonishment than the joy of the audience who were mostly Florentines and Tuscans. An orchestral concert on a grand scale gave us the beautiful and penetrating *Passione* of Malipiero, a work which deliberately goes back to fifteenth and seventeenth century style; Goffredo Petrassi's *Concerto for Orchestra*, well-formed and full of life; a pair of Luigi Dallapiccola's choruses, rhythmically energetic and original although rather haphazard from an orchestral and harmonic viewpoint.