

CHALLENGE OF THE NEW AUDIENCE

HANS HEINSHEIMER

ANY survey made of the American scene today shows that musical facilities are expanding on a very broad scale. Not only are symphony concerts steadily increasing, but there is a doubling and even trebling of outdoor musical performances, of radio, choral and educational programs, and an ever-widening development in the restricted operatic and ballet fields. All the elements contributing to this growth are of course also its beneficiaries. Audiences grow daily not only in number but in knowledge and taste, while the new opportunities for performers are so obvious as hardly to need comment.

The American composer, too, appears to move with this rising tide. There seems little doubt that his position today is much better in every way than it was a generation, even a decade ago. However, it is also apparent to everyone concerned with American musical culture, and, not least of all, to the composer himself, that his rate of progress lags behind the accelerated tempo of the musical world about him. True, he has more orchestral opportunities than before, although his royalties remain low. Radio performances are more frequent though payment continues to be hard-won. A few fortunate men receive occasional commissions to write a brief ballet or incidental music for a play. Others, concentrating on instrumental music, may win a Coolidge award or League of Composers' commission. But on the whole their major efforts are still directed at a very small audience, with few exceptions they entertain no hope of making a living by composing, and they remain, as composers, quite remote from the larger movement of America's musical life.

Now in this maladjustment, or, shall I say, restriction of function, the American differs from his European prototype. The serious composer abroad has a far more realistic connection with his environment. From the beginning to the end of his career

he lives in a milieu more proportionate and responsive to his capacities.

It seems to me that the American composer's situation can be explained only by the following paradox. His cultural background is largely the same as the European's. But, whereas the European composer lives and works in an environment of which he is the true product, the American lives and works as if in an "ideal" European atmosphere, unreal because it has no actual, economic or cultural basis in this country.

For the American scene differs in every essential respect from the European. These differences are best appreciated after a certain amount of statistical comparison.

Draw an imaginary circle on the map of Europe around a territory inhabited by a hundred and twenty million people. In number this equals the audience for whom the American composer writes. Such a stretch would include Germany, Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Norway. For the moment forget geographical boundaries, political influences and other restrictions, and consider only the facilities these countries offer in relation to music. A composer who has written a new work not too difficult and not too esoteric, for example Hindemith's *Mathis Symphony*, would have, in approximate figures, the following outlets for performance:

Large, <i>first rate</i> symphony, orchestras	100
Radio stations with symphonic orchestras	30
Opera houses with ensembles active ten to twelve months a year	70

These figures have been carefully chosen and are conservative. The orchestras and opera houses were established long ago; many were already famous when America was a new country struggling for existence. Radio stations are government owned and orchestras and opera houses are well subsidized.

Now let us consider the American composer, writing the same piece and wishing to present it before the same number of people. There are only twenty-two or at the most, twenty-five, large symphony orchestras in the whole country, capable and willing to perform his work. Only one radio station has its own full size permanent symphony orchestra. As for opera houses with adequate facilities, the ability of any one is open to debate; perhaps only two can even consider a contemporary production.

Thus in physical equipment alone America is seen to be unlike Europe. And if European standards are accepted as ultimate, the outlook for the serious composer on this continent certainly holds less promise than it does in the old world.

However with a world in flux, with standards daily changing and broadening, with new resources opening up, and with the narrowing of cultural opportunity abroad as a result of political convulsion, it seems to me that the future promises more to the American composer at the present moment than to his European contemporary.

Looking over the entire field of musical organizations, we find a body of at least one hundred and seventy American orchestras. This number includes the twenty-two to twenty-five top-flight ensembles already mentioned, such as the New York Philharmonic, the National Broadcasting, the Boston Symphony, the Philadelphia and so on, but it is made up largely of important civic and WPA groups. What is even more significant is the rate at which they are increasing. Below I give a table of the dates when the symphonic orchestras were established and their ratio to the total present number.

1859-1900 (42 years)	11 or 7%
1901-1918 (18 years)	15 or 9%
1919-1928 (10 years)	46 or 27%
1929-1937 (9 years)	96 or 57%

More than half in the last decade!

Audiences have grown at a proportional rate. To cite one typical example, eighty-one thousand people came to the concerts of the Houston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ernest Hoffman in the season of 1937-1938. This was an increase of forty thousand over the previous year. Figures from the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the revitalized Pittsburgh body, the WPA groups in Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York, and indeed from every orchestra in the country would all round out a picture of rapid expansion.

To this evidence of interest in regular symphonic programs must be added the astonishing gain made recently in the outdoor summer concerts, such as those given in the Lewisohn Stadium in New York, the Robin Hood Dell in Philadelphia, Ravinia Park in Chicago and the Hollywood Bowl. Even in the radio

field, where so many competitive influences line up against the production of symphonic music, we have signs of amazing increases. The Columbia Broadcasting System recently published the figures below showing the rise in serious music played over their chain during the last five years.

	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Number of Broadcasts</i>
1933	368	643
1934	444	659
1935	441	807
1936	523	1033
1937	613	1231

Beside all the outstanding classical programs and transmissions of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra concerts, these figures include the world premieres of seven important works by American composers, eighteen world premieres, sixteen American premieres, and sixty-five first American broadcasts of important contemporary and new works. This is the record of only one network. Similar gains have been recorded in the Mutual Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting System.

But I have not marshalled these facts just to demonstrate the very exciting growth of musical appreciation and interest among the American masses. The statistics, it seems to me, also carry a message to the American composer. Here is proof that music has gained a foothold in America. Is it possible that the composer fails to see where the American audience truly exists?

For one realistic moment let him glance beyond the fixed likes and dislikes of the comparative few who make up the audiences of our best known symphony orchestras. Outside that small circle there can now be clearly perceived a vast amphitheatre in which are seated hundreds of thousands of people, listening to the music of the smaller orchestras, the bands in the parks, the ensembles of the summer stadiums; and still farther and wider, the rings upon rings of radio listeners. Such a multitude is never reached by the European composer. It makes a profound impression on anybody coming here from Europe where people are weary and bewildered and those who once listened to music no longer have the energy or interest to do so.

If this new audience is not inspiration enough then let the composer look at still another movement which indicates the potential strength of music in American life. College and school

orchestras and bands demonstrate a new consciousness in the coming generation. There are at least twenty-five thousand such orchestras each averaging fifty players, and at least forty thousand bands having even larger memberships. Three and a half million children and young people not only study music but take an active part in musical production. Music today is an integral factor of modern education.

How fruitful this field of student music can be for modern composers some already begin to realize. Two years ago Aaron Copland wrote his high-school opera, *The Second Hurricane*. Now he has just completed an overture for school orchestras. It was the school orchestra which Ernst Toch also had in mind when he wrote his *Pinocchio* overture. The next few years should see many more men responding to this new demand.

Millions of young people involved as listeners and performers, hundreds of growing orchestras, steadily increasing outdoor concerts, are, I submit, worth the attention of our modern composers. This rising tide represents an enormous potential demand for new and suitable music. It may well be said that a great open field stretches before the modern composer who is ready to meet his listeners half way.

Not every composer, I am well aware, can or will write for this vast audience. Some are by temperament, or principle, or by inflexible style, definitely removed from the field. But for those who do embark on this adventure there need be no lowering of standards. The movement in pre-Hitler Germany which engaged the efforts of such men as Hindemith, Weill, Eisler and many other established serious composers, is sufficient evidence to the contrary. The problem itself is one of extraordinary interest, involving a study of artistic and technical conditions which should bring the composer into closer relation with the tremendous, vital development of musical culture. There is a duty too which falls on him, as well as on conductors and performers, of helping to educate the taste of millions of people. A solution which accomplishes this purpose, and in which the composer plays a part, would be an important contribution to the culture of a nation destined, it seems, to become the center of the world's musical activity.