

wealth of Nations, and the New Russia. Old music, folk material, and contemporary works were well contrasted. There were choral tributes by Roger Sessions, whose *Turn, O Libertas* presented a vocal line of some power against an over-complex accompaniment, by Roy Harris, with a brief *Fanfare to Youth*, by Theodore Chanler, with a lovely, archaic setting of a sixteenth century French poem, and by Lazare Saminsky, with a vigorous chorus on a passage from Victor Hugo. Virgil Thomson conducted his simple, fresh *Scenes from the Holy Infancy*. Werner Josten's *Queene of Paradys*, which moved too much by short, chorale-like sections, and Miriam Gideon's expressive *Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount* were also heard. Instrumental works included viola pieces by Rebecca Clarke (her arrangement of an old Scottish border ballad was especially appealing), an imaginative *Capriccio on a Russian Theme* for piano by Vivian Fine, and a brace of Soviet piano pieces performed by Nadia Reisenberg. Of these a sprightly *Fughetta* by Vissarion Shebalin and a colorful *Dance* by Alexandre Veprrik stood out. Others were by Eugheny Golubev, Julian Krein, and Valery Szelobinsky. Throughout the series one was grateful for Saminsky's own excellent arrangements of folk music.

Donald Fuller

LONDON LETTER

London, April 1944

DEAR Miss L: Before I left the States, you asked me to write about what one could hear in London these days. Well, there is a feverish musical activity going on. The tremendous – though suppressed – excitement one feels around Grosvenor Square has its counterpart in the furious array of Wigmore and Albert Hall concerts (climaxed in the recent super-colossal Sir Henry Wood Memorial blow-out), in the uproar about the new Michael Tippett work, in the rumors concerning the London Philharmonic's possible American tour or the resignation of Arthur Bliss from the B.B.C. No G.I. is more sensitive to the whim of his first sergeant than are the music publishers and concert managers to the real – and imaginary – tastes of the public. Almost anything sells. Publishers are hampered only by their one-third of pre-war paper supply, while the shortage of available concert halls is breaking the heart of managers. I. Berlin and B. Britten are printed like mad; Eric Coates and Mahler share window space together, fight furiously for high honors in this hypoed – as *Variety* would say – renaissance of English musical life.

The intensity with which the English are going after their music is neatly illustrated in the case of Tippett. He is of the generation older than Britten but his music was practically unknown, even in England, until two or three years ago. Then came the war. For reasons that appear obscure, Tippett, a conscientious objector, received a severe prison sentence for refusal to take up arms, whereas Britten, among others, was excused on similar grounds from active military duty. Tippett's internment attracted wide attention in the press and among musicians. Vaughan Williams took up his battle and presently this mild-mannered, retiring college teacher, this contrapuntalist, this student of R. O. Morris, found himself, when released, a composer-with-a-name, although few people, as I have indicated, had heard his music. I do not question the integrity of the many English critics whose enthusiasm for his scores knows no bounds. To the casual observer, however, the boom must seem to be in part the result of publicity and exploitation which continue to gather a momentum that would do credit to a first-rate Hollywood press agent.

I've heard two of Tippett's major works – the *String Quartet Number 1*, revised version, and the oratorio, *A Child of Our Time*. His music has strength, is not wishy-washy, and usually convinces you that it knows where it's going. The *String Quartet* was written with an eye to textures, and throughout this work, as in the oratorio, there is evidence of a progressive, interesting musical mind. But Tippett's music lacks real melodic distinction. He is most convincing, most moving when the tunes are not his own – the settings of the Negro spirituals are really beautifully done. There is counterpoint a-plenty – much of it the kind Virgil Thomson would call irresponsible. Tippett's music is in a way like Harold Morris'; the conception is usually strong, even vital, but before the piece is finished, so many irrelevant notes have crept in that its strength is watered down, like the sun's on a cloudy day. And frankly, for that reason, much of it bores me.

It is significant that the London Philharmonic Orchestra was involved in this performance, because the L.P.O. is a self-supporting organization and considers every program from the standpoint – will it break even at the box office? The artistic values must be secondary. Now Tippett's music is not calculated to make the Hit Parade; his music is linear, not homophonic, and his harmonic idiom is certainly on the acid side. Therefore, this conclusion presents itself: either the cost of this experimental, fairly hard-to-take work must be underwritten by private sources, or the

L.P.O.'s directors – a board chosen from the members of the orchestra – feel that the new work can be made to pay. To the best of my knowledge, *A Child of Our Time* was not underwritten. The composer's peculiar name-value helped to sell the performance; too, oratorio is a form for which the English have a distinct preference, as witness the success of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* (three scheduled hearings in two months), or Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. Furthermore, every effort was made to get wide and extensive publicity. The score was the subject of a great many articles in the trade journals and newspapers; Tippett "explained" his work to various professional groups; posters in the tube station announced the concert – eight or ten inch letters for Tippett, half inch letters for Mozart who shared the program.

The wonderful conclusion of all this is that the English are ready, with a great deal of interest and support, for new music. This is true particularly of works by English composers. However, the de Gaulle French National Committee of Liberation has also, for nearly three years, presented regular concerts of French music – a recent performance of Honegger's *Second Quartet* was very fine. Even American scores, if sent over here, might make money!

In radio, new music has a place very different from its spot in the States. Being a monopoly and therefore not completely at the mercy of mass musical taste, the B.B.C. can adopt a long term progressive policy about serious music. It is happy to devote a great deal of time to living British composers. I am told that there is much red tape to swallow before scores are accepted for performance. Nevertheless, Val Drury, in charge of chamber music programs, and Arthur Bliss and Sir Adrian Boult, through their control of the B.B.C. Symphony, have managed to play scores by most of the contemporary English, the important Russians, Frenchmen and Central Europeans.

American works have not fared too well. Aaron Copland's music is only now beginning to get a hearing – occasional at that. William Schuman and Sam Barber have had a few performances; Roy Harris is heard from time to time. Drury tells me that a number of Leo Sowerby's works have been heard in his chamber music programs. But the average English musician still is inclined to think of Gershwin, and perhaps MacDowell, as the chief representatives of contemporary America. The Boosey and Hawkes American Music Concert of March 26th provided a departure with the Copland *Outdoor Overture*, Bloch's *Violin Concerto*, Sessions' *First Symphony*, Piston's *Incredible Flutist*, and the inevitable Gershwin

Rhapsody in Blue.

New also to London audiences was the performance this past winter in Albert Hall of Marc Blitzstein's orchestral *Freedom Song*, written for the concert given by a choral group taken from a company of American Negro Engineers stationed in Britain. *Freedom Song* is an effective, vigorous piece. It is Blitzstein's first purely orchestral work in a number of years. It is remarkably successful in sounding just like the Blitzstein of the stage works, and yet, though immensely dramatic, it is convincing as a piece of absolute music.

Franz Osborn put on an excellent performance of the Copland *Piano Sonata* in Wigmore Hall last month. Though he failed to give the Scherzo the percussive, highly rhythmical quality which, like so much of Copland's music, it demands, I've never heard the ending played more beautifully. The critics were not too impressed but the reaction of the audience was cordial, if not demonstrative.

Vaughan Williams and Elgar, Benjamin Britten and William Walton, are the most played of the English composers. Britten certainly is the pet of the critics, and I can't imagine what would happen if one of them should decide to pan any of his pieces – certainly nothing short of a mass protest. Gerald Finzi's *Five Shakespeare Songs*, heard at Wigmore Hall in a beautiful performance by Robert Irwin, no doubt were well written, but one cannot deny their almost anti-contemporary quality.

The most interesting work I have heard in the last few weeks remains the Prokofiev *Seventh Piano Sonata* which had its first performance here by Frank Merrick.

Does this give you some idea of London's musical life? I hope so.

Most sincerely,

Gail Kubik

COMPOSERS TO CHICAGO

ALTHOUGH they did not fare particularly well earlier in the winter, American composers had the final word in the Chicago musical season. Works by Aaron Copland, Remi Gassmann, and Virgil Thomson made up the last program in the new series of Composers' Concerts instituted this year by the University of Chicago.

Of particular value to Chicago was Copland's performance of his *Piano Sonata*. Except for single hearings of the *First Symphony* and the *Outdoor Overture*, the public here has known him only by music associated