

The same could scarcely be said of the *Golden Age* ballet suite of Shostakovitch given its American premiere on the program with *Erie*. It may be good ballet, but its callow striving for originality, its nose-thumbing antics, juggling of banal tunes, relics of the naughty-boy era of Prokofieff and Stravinsky present neither the freshness of a revolutionary mind nor the promise held in certain passages of *Lady Macbeth*.

Soundest of all the American novelties offered in Cleveland was the *Prelude and Fugue* of Walter Piston, performed by Rudolph Ringwall, associate conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra. The contrapuntal workmanship compels high admiration, and although one portion of the *Prelude* seemed to sag, the entire work impressed deeply by its probity, its sustaining of interest by logical expansion of a melodic nucleus and its discreet elimination of unessentials.

As laconic as its title and sententious to a degree, Vaughan Williams' *Symphony in F* heard here on Dec. 19 is very English in its neutral, non-committal coloring with here and there a sentimental vein not entirely concealed by its ascetic masque. The composer subjects himself to a rigorous discipline and builds according to D'Indy's "obsession" principle. The work generates from a four-note motive strikingly similar to B-A-C-H, which reappears insistently in innumerable forms, finally taking complete possession in a fugal epilog. Though relieved by various themes, none of which are extensively developed, this motto is like a spectre popping out at one from every corner with sinister violence.

The contrapuntal texture of the second movement smells slightly of the lamp. And if the theme in the scherzo given to bassoon and tuba is intended to be funny it is dry humor indeed. There is something unsolved in the struggle of this music to be wholly articulate, yet it is powerfully arresting and provocative.

*Herbert Elwell*

## ROCHESTER'S SIXTH FESTIVAL

THE nice thing about the sixth annual Festival of American music in Rochester, which took place the week of April 27th, was that it served both as an exposition and an exposé of

our so-called native talent. The lower depths were, for instance, well represented by Vittorio Giannini's Prix de Rome cenotaph for Theodore Roosevelt in the form of a *Memorial Symphony*. After wading through innumerable other mediocrities, we were occasionally allowed a glimpse of a higher art in the music of Bernard Rogers, Walter Piston, Quincy Porter, David Diamond, and Robert McBride. These men certainly provided us with the best music and the most hope. Mr. Rogers' *Three Japanese Dances* I consider the finest exotic music written in this country. They are perfect entities to which nothing could be added or subtracted. Walter Piston and Quincy Porter were represented by two splendid quartets, while both McBride and Diamond were heard on the chamber symphony program. We shall have occasion to discuss these works later.

Although Dr. Howard Hanson's dynamic *Drum Taps* was a feature of the symphony concert evening, this composition was so surely tied up with his former work that it gave no suggestion of the "shape of things to come." *Drum Taps* is an elaborate setting for chorus and orchestra of Walt Whitman's virile Civil War poems. The choral and orchestral writing is, as usual with Hanson, neat, well-formed, and appropriate . . . though one might (speaking of appropriateness) disagree with the suitability of the musical setting for the poems, and question the musical affinity to the spirit in which they were conceived by Whitman. There were flagrant uses of percussion and brass, more to the glorification of the obvious than a suggestion of any poetic or subtle meaning. Lyricism has a showing in the second setting, which is a composition for solo baritone-chorus-orchestra combination, but it is short lived and rather sentimental. In the entire work we are able to view the mature style of Howard Hanson: harmonies built on the higher dominant discords, solid orchestration, and inevitably romantic melodies.

To come back to the composers formerly mentioned, it would be well, in connection with Mr. Rogers' *Japanese Dances*, to speak of the sensitive choreography provided by Miss Evelyn Sabin. Miss Sabin's solo *Dance of Mourning* brought tumultuous applause from an audience nearly desensitized by the impossible choreography of the two previous ballets, Carpenter's *The*

*Birthday of the Infanta*, and Hanson's *Pan and the Priest*. A third ballet, Schelling's *Victory Ball* completed the program.

Wednesday evening of the festival, April 29th, brought, through the courtesy of the Library of Congress, the Gordon String Quartet who gave to three works, the Piston, Sowerby, and Porter quartets, the benefit of perfect and brilliant performance. Of the three, this writer preferred the Quincy Porter quartet, a composition of distinction and lyric beauty. (This work was happily commissioned by the League of Composers last year). Mr. Porter found perfect expression for his music in the four stringed instruments, giving them a wide range of color. Harmonically the music is somewhat suggestive of a lyric post-impressionism, but consistently in a strong pattern. Piston's music is best explained by Nicholas Slonimsky's statement that: "Walter Piston codifies rather than invents. . . ." His quartet showed a rich contrapuntal style built into a formidable piece of architecture, conceived intellectually rather than emotionally. The same cannot be said for Leo Sowerby's longish and indefinitely formed quartet. Here, the four instruments were brought into aimless conversation, during which, the audience showed a tendency to be bored. All three works were written last year.

Robert McBride's short, pungent, *Fugato on a Well-Known Theme* met with a singular and well-merited success. In a cluttered program of works for chamber orchestra, this piece, with David Diamond's *Divertimento for Piano and Small Orchestra* and Charles Naginski's *Suite* provided pleasant relief. McBride's *Fugato* is witty music, well wrought, cleverly orchestrated, and as natural as a folk-piece. It is exactly the proper length . . . short, but not a pastiche. One might have asked for a rather more caustic harmonic treatment in certain phases of its development, but the cleverness with which Mr. McBride handles his fugue subjects compensates for any complaint that comes to mind. The "well-known theme" incidentally, is that picturesque street song: "The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out!," the morbidity of the words being submerged in the impudent and engaging tune. David Diamond is a young composer who is steadily winning recognition for his delightful and original style. One can for-

give the occasional inclination towards harmonic thinness for the scintillating orchestration and exuberant freshness of approach. This thinness is particularly felt in the slow movement of the *Divertimento* where the piano carries rather too much of the burden of harmonic acidity; but the other two movements are exciting with ebullient motion.



Most of the music heard was an attempt of one kind or another towards American individuality. Some of this "Americanism" seemed to be national only in its close affinity with that dubious part of our American scene known as "movie-music." The concerts presented a varied picture of the musical scene in this country, for the composers included the veteran Bostonian, Arthur Foote and the more sophisticated members of our younger groups. This practice of contrast is less diverting than one might think, for it leads to very strange bed-fellows in some cases and necessitates constant attempts toward readjustment on the part of the audience.

In conclusion, this much was evident: Debussy, Ravel, Sibelius, and Schönberg still have a death-hold on a large percentage of the composers played here; it is about time that these last named gentlemen took out their musical naturalization papers!

*Goddard Lieberson*

## MODERN WORKS IN CHICAGO

THE year which has passed since notes from Chicago last appeared in these pages has not set any lover of modern music on his ear with enthusiasm over the manifestations of musical progress in that city. It offered a few orchestral novelties in the concerts of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, four operatic novelties provided by three different producing groups, and a solitary composer's concert.

The Chicago City Opera Company produced for the first time in this country Respighi's *La Fiamma* and really produced it very well. The score leans farther toward a conventional Italian operatic style than does *The Sunken Bell*. The vocal line is characterized by a reverse English conventionality in that most of the melodies turn so often in the direction you don't expect