

will be heard. In Geneva the Grand Theatre has been hard hit, for although it has a permanent ensemble it must engage French or Belgian soloists and cannot depend on getting them this season. Many pieces of the French repertory have therefore been withdrawn; and the projected Spanish and Russian works are now cancelled. Nevertheless there will be at least thirty productions. All in all a big season.

Arno Huth

AMERICAN FESTIVAL IN BOSTON

WHILE ASCAP was conducting festivities in Carnegie Hall, the Boston Symphony Orchestra undertook two special pre-season Boston concerts "in honor of the American composer." The public was admitted free, but barely one third of some fifteen thousand applicants could be allotted seats. Dr. Koussevitzky conducted a fairly representative group of works that formed a rough cross-section of American music, though many important composers were omitted.

The first concert began with Arthur Foote's *E-major Suite for String Orchestra* — a work which sounds increasingly fresh and contemporary with the years, both for the precision of its technic and the breadth and boldness of its thought. Movements from Taylor's *Through the Looking Glass* and Hadley's stuffy *Third Symphony* preceded an extraordinarily well contrived performance of Carpenter's *Skyscrapers* with the voice parts admirably sung by Dorothy Maynor and Leonard Franklin, colored soprano and tenor. Certainly no score better pictures the mid-twenty metropolis. The jazz sections have already acquired a nostalgic charm that lends a warmth to this etching of the tawdry opulence of a wide-eyed decade. Howard Hanson's *Romantic Symphony* (Number 2) concluded the program. In spite of a performance which wrung every drop from the symphony's self-styled "romantic" texture, Dr. Hanson's musical posturing seldom more than brushed the frontier of sincerity. Perhaps the music tries too hard to make its points, perhaps it overflows the boundaries of its possible expansions.

The second program began with the one brand new work of the two concerts — an *American Festival Overture* (1939) written for the occasion by William Schuman. It proved to be an exuberant score, ingeniously orchestrated, and ably constructed. It is based on a three-note figure which the composer identifies as the "call to play" — "Wee-Awk-Eee" — by which the gang was assembled for some festive occasion in the streets of New

York City. This subject matter and what succeeds it, however, is of too little intrinsic significance to match the brilliant scoring of the overture. It needs more solid material.

Gershwin's *Concerto in F*, very sympathetically interpreted by Abram Chasins and Dr. Koussevitzky, was as engaging as ever. Like *Skyscrapers* it showed how the old term "symphonic-jazz" must be reversed to be accurate. Both these works are cast in a symphonic style the material for which is here and there derived from a jazz technic. The result is rather "jazzic-symphony" than "symphonic-jazz." How much more swiftly perspective changes in music than in all the other arts! So the gentle song of the slow movement of Randall Thompson's unadventurous but very well made *Second Symphony*, which concluded the program, sounded much more modern than at the symphony's introduction in 1932 — a further reflection upon our progress.

Roy Harris' *Third Symphony* followed the *Concerto*. It was introduced last spring by Dr. Koussevitzky, played on this program, and repeated at the regular Boston Symphony Concerts late in October. So far, it is safe to say, there is no work to equal it in American music-making. For significance of material, breadth of treatment and depth of meaning; for tragic implication, dramatic intensity, concentration; for moving beauty, glowing sound, it can find no peer in the musical art of America. Here is music of the bleak and barren expanses of western Kansas, of the brooding prairie night, and of the fast darkensses of the American soul, of its despair and its courage, its defeat and its triumph, its struggles and its aspirations. From the great sweep of the opening phrases in the lower strings, through the pastoral middle sections to the importunate plangencies of the dirge and the final climax, there is a sense of inevitable compulsion. The symphony still shows roughnesses of workmanship in awkward transitions and uncertainties of technic, but these infelicities matter little beside the new lyricism and the new organization of his music.

There has been only one other novel event on the Boston musical scene this autumn: two works for saxophone and orchestra were introduced by Sigurd Rascher and the Boston Symphony in October. Ibert's *Concertino* was the more engaging; the other was Debussy's *Rhapsody* — an inferior score despite many pages of subtlety and beauty. Ibert's *Concertino* is as well written for Adolph Sax's instrument as Debussy's is not. It separates a witty first movement from a hilarious finale by an unpretentious and uninteresting slow movement. As always, Ibert's music shows a clever,

industrious mind, full of wit and not without charm and sensibility. Whatever can be accomplished without inspiration, he accomplishes.

George Henry Lovett Smith

NEGRO AND NON-NEGRO MUSIC

OF the two evenings in which Negroes figured at ASCAP's Festival of American Music, no one could say with fairness that either offered more than a few bright flashes in a series of horrors. In both, the musical element wandered and lost itself in a sea of sentimentality, pretentiousness, banality and just plain bad taste. It is important to note, however, that wherever there was good music, its value went just as far as the degree to which the truly Negro elements therein had been left alone and not subjected to whitening.

The program "devoted to compositions by our Negro Composer-Members" was excellent evidence of the effect chauvinism can have upon musical culture. The music was considered a thing apart because Negroes had written it, which would have been valid if the material had shown any connection with Negro music. In reality what one heard was not too good Radio-City-Music-Hall. For these particular composers it would certainly have been better if Ferdie Grofe had never been born. The symphonic pieces were unsavory dishes served with utter disregard for the listener's receptive faculties. Thus William Grant Still conducted a long slow number, followed by the equally long and slow second movement of the *Afro-American Symphony*, by which time even the academic cuteness of the third movement was welcome.

The fact that a Negro writes or plays music is no guarantee that the result will be "Negro music." However, when Negro music is to be produced, it is a Negro who in most cases will give the best result. Juanita Hall led her group in a choral number whose form and content sprang directly from a Negro religious service. The piece was *Go Down, Death*, with text by the late James Weldon Johnson. I can think of no finer Negro choral number. Its vocal line is a carefully considered succession of solo and group speech, shouting, Negro-preacher *recitativo* and melody couched in true Negro prosody. There is also a quality of improvisation present which gives the music tremendous spontaneity and strength. Parts of the ensemble speaking will call to mind effects in Milhaud's *Choéphores*, not because of any inherent resemblance, but simply because the field of comparison for this truly unexploited medium is so small. Its racial