

machine, especially those pulsing, bounding, alive feet of hers; her mind is clear, "modern" in the sense of being radical and not aiming to please, and while not deep, still bold and challenging. She projects herself extremely well. There is a strange and persistent Oriental note; the trance motif is overworked; when it is absent, Wigman is pretty cold emotionally.

Marc Blitzstein

WINTER CHRONICLE NEW YORK

Schola Cantorum Concert, Jan. 29

A program of modern works in place of the usual choral-society repertoire is something of an event in New York, for it happens rarely enough that one of the larger organizations devotes an entire evening to modern music. The music in this case was at least alive, if not representative of the most significant contemporary composers. In the *Stabat Mater* of Szymanowski, the outstanding work, ardent devotion and faith form the keynote to the music. Unfortunately many of the dissonances seem purely arbitrary, and the melodic line, though modal, is often obscured by complicated harmonies. The work suffers from lack of harmonic conviction; the modulations rarely seem inevitable, and the polytonal passages give less the impression of the play between different keys than that of a single key with overtones. The religious mood is well sustained throughout the work, although I find the orchestral color at times a bit too sensuous for the austerity of the Latin text. On the whole this is an addition to choral literature, which has not been greatly enriched within the last decade.

The Lambert *Rio Grande*, a setting of a poem by Sacheverell Sitwell for chorus, piano solo, and orchestra, is gay and trivial. It seems to have created quite a sensation in England, where it is considered the poetic apotheosis of jazz. As a matter of fact its syncopated rhythms are much more Latin-American. It contains rhythmic and harmonic devices that Gershwin and many others among our popular writers have long abandoned. Its vitality depends on high speed rather than interesting rhythmic structure. The music is fluent and glib, abounding in quotations from a motley crowd of composers, a shining example of much brilliant

and dishonest music that is being written by talented composers of today.

Chamber Orchestra of Boston at the New School, Feb. 7

Nicolas Slonimsky, the young conductor of this organization, is the valiant champion of contemporary American music. The program included works by Brant, Ruggles, Ives, Cowell, and Caturla. The works of Cowell and Ives coming from two extreme, antithetical points of approach, provided a valuable object lesson in economy. The only definite thing in Ives' *Three Places in New England* is the minute geographical location of the three movements—1. *Boston Common*, 2. *Putnam's Camp, Redding, Connecticut*, 3. *The Housatonic at Stockbridge*. The music is vague and mystical, heavily overcharged with complex poly-rhythmic patterns that are often indistinguishable, due to lack of contrast in orchestral color. In fact this work, in spite of its many independent rhythmical streams, lacks what is most vital of all, a main rhythmic backbone. It bears such a burden of notes that no one musical idea prevails. In pleasing contrast was the *Sinfonietta* of Henry Cowell, distinguished by its admirable economy of thematic material. Formal and orchestral clarity are its chief virtues; the themes, brief and concise, are developed to their utmost. By far the best movement is the third, ingeniously constructed from a motif of three notes. The pages evolved from the derivatives of this theme are well written and extremely satisfying.

The chilly variations by Henry Brant seemed to lack the spontaneity of his music heard last year. Ruggles' *Men and Mountains* is vigorously alive, its melodic outline sure and vibrant, its telling dissonance achieved by remarkably simple means.

Theremin at the New School, Feb. 17

The demonstration of Theremin's new key-board instrument was provocative but unsatisfactory. The sounds Theremin is able to produce electrically are so harshly overpowering that it seems as if only a tone-deaf scientist would be able to stick with him through his experiments and profit by his contributions. Henry Cowell, presiding that evening, explained that this instrument can demonstrate by beat-tones the out-of-tunedness of the tempered

scale, and can itself be tuned at will to various scales in which the beat-tones are satisfactory. Thus in theory, two part counterpoint might be played on such an instrument with a third part played by the beat-tones. But the subsequent demonstration was nebulous. I am glad to see Theremin's experiments taking the direction of more exact control over the note produced, for the tremolo and sliding effects of his ether-wave instrument seem inappropriate to the contemporary musical situation, in which exactness and not expressionism is the desideratum.

The League of Composers, Feb. 4, March 1

The two League of Composers' concerts at the Art Center on Sunday afternoons did not reveal much unappreciated genius. Most of the music seemed to be composed as a pleasant pastime. Viewed from the distance of several weeks, a few works stand out in my mind—the calm and enigmatic flute pieces by Ruth Crawford, the dynamic *Toccata* by Wladimir Vogel, and an adroit fugue from a *Piano Sonata* by Tolbie Snyderman, a young girl of decided musical talent. Her imagination is at present restricted by a too thorough knowledge of piano technic.

New Opera at the Metropolitan

What is there to be said about *Peter Ibbetson*? The Metropolitan in its clamor for American opera has seen fit to order two from Deems Taylor within the last four years. These operas are written to librettos as far removed as possible from the American scene. The first, with its uncouth text and false medievalism, reminded one of a statue of *Tristan* in imitation polychrome. The second text is from a sentimental novel of the nineties by a foreign author, with the motto "dreaming true" as the emotional leitmotif. Interior decorators have made the nineties the fashion these last years. After having had their innings on the New York and Hoboken stage it is only to be expected that "the nineties" should ultimately reach the Metropolitan.

Deems Taylor brings no new point of approach to the art of the opera. He is content to keep to the conventions accepted fifty years ago. One does not feel in listening to *Peter Ibbetson* that there was any reason for writing the opera other than that it should last two and a half hours. No apparent attempt has been

made to surmount the difficulties of the recitativo passages, which are often depressing in their commonplace realism. From the occasional symphonic surge of the orchestra one is led to believe that something is about to happen. But it never does. Harmonically and melodically, the music is without style, individuality or vitality. Unfortunately this opera is bound to sell out the house for some time to come, due to the unbridled passion of the New York audience to hear old music in new guise.

Stravinsky's *Symphonie des Psaumes*, Boston Symphony, Mar. 5

The Symphonie des Psaumes, an eclectically religious work with Latin text, is, despite its remote appeal, strangely moving in its sombreness. At times it rises to solemn grandeur. Stravinsky is always the virtuoso, even in asceticism, and the curiously limited combination of instruments he has allowed himself in this work creates a completely new color, mordant and acid. One of the happiest results from this combination is the introduction to the second movement, in which the contrapuntal use of the five flutes alone produces a refreshingly pure and impersonal tone. The choral writing is simple and beautiful and the *Alleluia* phrase for chorus, a single cadence three times repeated in the beginning, the middle and the end of the last movement, gives one a sensation of inexpressible tranquility and peace. The work abounds in passages of sober beauty for both chorus and orchestra. The final pages are without doubt among the finest Stravinsky has yet written. The performance of this work in New York by the Boston Symphony and the Schola Cantorum, was the bright spot in a month otherwise rather uneventful.

Colin McPhee

SCHÖNBERG'S SUPER-FILM MUSIK

SCHÖNBERG'S *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtbildszene*, for small orchestra, was given its Berlin premiere in the early season by Otto Klemperer at the second of his symphony concerts. It is a "modern" work but meaningless in any relation to the problem of music for the films. Threatening peril, terror and catastrophe are depicted, it is true; indeed it is music for a kind of super-production—but only for an imaginary, not a real,