

and horn! What fugitive, tenuous sonorities he would have drawn from the harpsichord!

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I DO not find that the prevailing atmosphere at a Composers' Forum Laboratory concert is conducive to the spirited performance of a composer's works or the reaction hoped for by the composer from his audience. Say what you like, there is an indefinable spirit of gloom which pervades the hall, an apathy which seems to hold both performers and audience in its grip. Discussion is encouraged at the end of each concert in the form of questions written by the audience concerning the composer and his attitude towards his work. These questions turn out to be for the most part trivial or impertinent, the idle pastime of vacant minds. I am always absent when an intelligent question has been brilliantly answered.

With all due respect to different composers for whom I have admiration, it must be said that the programs are only too often made up of works significant only because they indicate certain stages in the course of development of the composer represented. One program reads very much like another; a few piano pieces, a few songs, a string quartet. . . .

The program of the works of Marc Blitzstein was interesting, for, while made up chiefly of early works, it contained as center of gravity the *Piano Concerto* (1932), an excellent and well constructed piece of music. One feels in it primarily a preoccupation with form; the material is perhaps too thoroughly worked out, especially in the double passacaglia which constitutes the last movement. It was difficult to estimate its real value when played for two pianos. As far as I could judge from the score, the orchestra is handled with brilliance and a decidedly personal feeling for instrumentation. Blitzstein has a freshness at times which is most attractive, as I remember from the music which he wrote for Steiner's film, *Surf and Seaweed*. There is no need to obscure this desirable quality with a superstructure of elaborate technical devices.

The concert of works by Paul Bowles (Composers' Forum Laboratory) departed from routine by the inclusion of music to a "ballet-film," *Venus and Adonis*. In spite of the incredibly stupid film, both from the standpoint of photography and plot, the music carried it along in its allure and melodic individuality. It is this melodic feeling which characterizes most of Paul Bowles' music, and which, for me, was most charming in the *Concert for Flute and Piano*, the first number on the program. The songs were less successful. The characteristics of Bowles' melodic outline seem at present best expressed by instruments which are agile and have a comparatively impersonal sonority.

The program of works by Wallingford Riegger (also Composers' Forum-Laboratory) included an early trio for piano, violin and 'cello, *Dichotomy* (for chamber orchestra), *Evocation* (for piano, four hands) and *Sonorities for Ten Violins*. Most of these works have been heard in New York before, *Dichotomy* was the most interesting in the originality of its sonorities, which, though experimental, were well thought out and most effective.

Two new works by Werner Josten have been recently presented; a "ballet-pantomime," performed at the Juilliard School, and a string quartet, which was played for the first time during the last concert of the League of Composers (Pro Arte Quartet, April 13). Neither of these works need detain us long. *Joseph and his Brethern* is not ballet in any sense of the word, it is pure pantomime, and undramatic pantomime at that. The scenario was as literal an adaptation of the biblical text as any Sunday School has produced thousands of times, (with perhaps the omission of the seduction scene, which was nevertheless pure as the driven snow). The music wavers between angular pedanticisms (neo-classic?) and the sort of Oriental melodies formerly heard at the circus in the vicinity of the snake charmers. From the standpoint of phrasing and rhythm, I do not see how it could possibly stimulate the body to expressive motion. The music is pricked with dissonance like a pincushion stuck with pins. The orchestra, however, remains effective in a conventional way, just as the string quartet sounded brilliant and "grateful." But this latter work offers little more than sound workmanship.

The other quartets on the same League program were by Milhaud (1935), Henry Cowell, the *Mosaic* (1935) and the *Lyrische Suite* (1926) of Alban Berg. The Milhaud work was heard for the first time in New York, but failed to make a profound impression on this writer. It is in four movements, and seems to be animated rather by the will to be "*modéré, animé, très lent, décidé,*" than the real thing. The third movement, although too long, was by far the most expressive, with a coda reminiscent of the opening to *La Création du Monde*. But I found the gaiety of the second movement rather trying, and the force of the last seemed purely superficial. Cowell's quartet, which has been heard before, is ingenious, as usual, but purely cerebral. The Berg *Suite*, at the end of the program, supplied the warmth and emotion that up till then had been strangely missing.

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Among the new music heard for string quartet was a decided novelty, nothing less than a concerto for string quartet and orchestra. This work was written by Bohuslav Martinu (published 1932) and performed by the Pro Arte Quartet with Hans Lange this April. I suppose that for ardent lovers of string quartet sonorities, such a combination may contain much which is of interest. But for this writer, who has always felt that the string quartet was something essentially intimate (and also an *article de luxe*), there was something incongruous about its wedding to the orchestra, in the character of a soloist with four voices. The quartet had neither the elasticity of a true solo nor the solidity of the *concertino* in the concerto grosso. The contrast between the sonorities of quartet and orchestra was not pleasant. One remembered the eloquent dynamics of a string quartet when playing in a hall sympathetic to its volume. Here the quartet became a voice which was inherently weak; there was something disproportionate in the scale.

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The writer went recently to Philadelphia to hear Carlos Chavez conduct that city's symphony orchestra in music of his own and of Roy Harris. The juxtaposition of the two composers re-

vealed not only two completely different conceptions of music, but the strength which lies in the music of Chavez and its lack in Harris. To begin with, Chavez has a complete mastery of his medium. Each instrumental group is used with a fine realization of its resources, and a new conception of its relation to the rest of the orchestra. Every note in the score can be heard, because it is written with a clear consciousness of intrinsic value; its contribution to the total sonority is perfectly estimated.

None of this does Harris possess to the slightest degree. In *Farewell to Pioneers* the orchestra labored along far more wearily than did any of the most fatigued pioneers. The sonority was weak and lacking in resonance. This was often due to the fact that important melodic lines were confided—*forte*—to such instruments as flutes in their weakest register. (Although at times these parts were quadrupled for performance, it was still impossible to make them sound). The backbone of the orchestra was the string section, which was completely silent for only two measures during the whole piece. But the writing for the strings was not orchestral, but rather in the idiom of the string quartet. Why the music had been published before performance is a mystery to me, for much will have to be done to it before it can sound. The music itself is couched in rhetorical terms dear to the last century. The orchestra is once more the "voice" of the composer, holding the unwilling listener with its personal tale.

On this occasion Chavez conducted his *Antigona*, for me his finest work so far. This symphony, suggested by the Greek tragedy, is in one movement, and has great strength and eloquence. Its strength lies in its simple and elemental form, and the eloquence lies in the new and beautiful sonorities which lift the orchestra into a world of dazzling light. The opening pages, where the violins soar in the highest register possible, to the simple accompaniment of a repeated note from the harp, is unforgettable. I think I conveyed my enthusiasm for the music of Chavez in the preceding issue. The qualities which I find in the *Indian Symphony* are present in *Antigona*, but delivered in more sober terms.