

imba. Hearing that instrument's treacley tone irresistibly calls to mind Hawaiian nights under a Hollywood spotlight.

Harrison Kerr

SOUTH AMERICA ONCE MORE

LEAVING Carnegie Hall after the Schola Cantorum's South American evening, one had the feeling of emerging from a jungle of tangled vines and fantastic foliage. Here was a confusion of bright and unbelievable birds, poisonous flowers, muffled cries, wild chatterings, hints of sinister animal life. The atmosphere, torrid and suffocating, was too much for many people. Undoubtedly it was a fascinating, exotic experience. Extravagant and original orchestral colors were lavishly applied, melodic contours derived from Gregorian modes, pentatonic scales, Portuguese folk-song, Indian incantations, even animal and bird-calls.

Approaching each piece separately one finds the result less exhilarating. More control, concentration and stronger structure are needed. The *Sinfonia Biblica* of Juan José Castro began promisingly; it was severe and archaic in mood, with a beautiful orchestral sonority; long before the work was finished it grew weak, over-dramatic, automatically pictorial. The chorus receded to the background to give way to the orchestra, which apparently had little further aim than to slavishly illustrate the text with brilliant but unpredictable episodes. The *Pater Noster* of Burle Marx, a symphonic essay in the Gregorian style, was far better organized. The choral writing, which included a boys' chorus, was beautifully done. Many found this work false and operatic, but in spite of the rich and at times over-sweet quality I myself enjoyed the music for its finish, the unfamiliar charm of the afore-mentioned chorus and the ecclesiastical modes.

Maracatu de Chico Rei, by Francisco Mignone, was a suite of gay and festive episodes from a work recounting the history of an African tribe shipped to Brazil as slaves and finally liberated. Here for much of the time, the orchestra seemed to have the percussive jitters and triangle, xylophone and company created a glitter not inappropriate to the naive, and rather pleasant noisiness of the music.

But it was the *Choros No. 10* of Villa-Lobos which made one definitely conscious that something vital was lacking, some real point of gravity. Let us see what happens in this work. The opening and following section for orchestra alone are really marvelous, new, strange, evocative. The second part especially, with its brooding, animal mutterings, is like nothing one

has heard before. Suddenly the chorus enters, chanting barbaric syllables to a wild, dynamic rhythm. The tension is so great that one wonders how it can possibly be maintained. Bit by bit a Portuguese folk-song creeps in, sugary and banal beyond words. The rhythmic pattern, so forceful and exciting at the beginning, suddenly loses its vitality, becomes automatic, a mere guitar-strumming. There is a terrific let-down and the energy appears so suspect that we feel perhaps we were deceived from the beginning. The ending of the work on a super-brilliant, strident chord from the chorus only confirms this.

What is the matter with all this music? Why are we not satisfied? Here is a wealth of material, here are personalities vivid and sympathetic. Perhaps a little more restraint, a little more logic, quite a bit more constructive imagination would turn the tide. Yet with all its weaknesses, I infinitely prefer such works to those of other South Americans who seek salvation in the dreary Esperanto of the twelve-tone system.

Colin McPhee

DANCE OF DEATH, IN BASLE

April 15

THE great event of the music season in Switzerland was undoubtedly the premiere at Basle of Honegger's new choral work, *La Danse des Morts*, written in collaboration with Paul Claudel. In the spring of 1938, after the first hearing of *Jeanne d'Arc au Bucher*, their earlier joint effort, Claudel, in his wanderings about Basle had been fascinated by various pictures of Death, especially by the famous woodcuts of Holbein the Younger. Deeply moved by the *Invitation to the Dance* which seemed to him the more striking because it celebrated the release from life's burdens rather than any aspect of the macabre, he conceived the idea of a great new poem and immediately visualized Honegger as composer of the music. In a few days after his return to Paris, he wrote the whole text which is a merging of excerpts from the Old Testament (Ezekial, 37, and the Book of Job), words from the New Testament, and his own mystic and religious thoughts. The essence of the poem may be summed up by the three exhortations of the chorus:

"Souviens-toi, homme, que tu es poussière et que tu retourneras en poussière!"

"Souviens-toi, homme, que tu es esprit, et la chair est plus que le vêtement, et l'esprit est plus que la chair, et l'oeil est plus que le visage et l'amour est plus que la mort!"