

FORECAST AND REVIEW

THE SEASON OPENS —1943

THE first performance here of the *Violin Concerto* by Bela Bartok appears to be the musical event of the season, as this issue goes to press. The *Concerto* is built on a large scale, and is one of Bartok's major works. It is warm and lyrical, and the fluctuations in tempo throughout give a rhapsodic quality that sometimes turns highly romantic. The violin soars above an orchestra that is rich with new resonance and acoustic surprises. The tutti passages are magnificent. But in spite of the eloquence and beauty of the music I was left, at the end of my first hearing, with a feeling of dissatisfaction. The work seems over-elaborate, episodic, formless in spite of the carefully worked-out construction. Perhaps this was due to the constant variations in tempo from beginning to end, perhaps to what seemed a lack of contrast between the three movements. Riches are scattered throughout the work, but one movement sounds very much like another in orchestral texture, tempo and general mood. Each movement is perfect in itself, but they do not seem to complement one another, and I had no feeling of the music passing through a series of inevitable phases, of an inevitable finale. I can only hope that this feeling will pass as I hear the work more often, for there is too much that is immediately beautiful in this music for me not to want to listen for more.

This year the League of Composers commissioned seventeen short works by different composers, commemorative of the war. The first of these to be heard was Bernard Rogers' *Invasion*, played recently by the Philharmonic. The work made a curious impression, for it was six minutes of suspense in which nothing seemed to happen other than a series of thematic entrances, distant and furtive at first, gradually crowding one another, growing more decisive, until at the moment when you would normally expect the music to begin, it stopped, and the piece was over. It was an introduction to a symphony left to the imagination. Martinu's

Memorial to Lidice, the second of these works, performed on a later program, made a much more satisfactory impression. It is a brief prelude in the nature of a religious chant, constructed along the lines of prayer and response in the style of ancient Czech church melodies. There was nothing especially unfamiliar about the actual music, but it had gravity and dignity, and the elegiacal note was restrained and touching.

Of chief interest on the program of Soviet music at Carnegie Hall was the new *Piano Sonata* (Number 2, Opus 64) of Shostakovich. I did not find it very exciting or interesting. It was on broad lines, in three movements, and made me think in some ways of a piano score to one of the composer's symphonies. But without the sparkle and freshness of the Shostakovich orchestra style it sounded very long, in spite of the sympathetic and intelligent performance by Vera Brodsky. The rest of the program was devoted to short songs and violin pieces by various young Soviet composers which gave a sort of cross-section of musical creative life in Russia today.

Claudio Arrau ended his Carnegie Hall concert with a group of piano pieces by South American composers – *Suburbio* by Juan Lecuna (Venezuela), *Toccata* by Juan José Castro (Argentina) and *Vigñeta* by Domingo Santa Cruz (Chile). The audience seemed to like them for their involved "pianistic" style, especially the virtuoso *Toccata*, which recalled an era of writing for piano that I had hoped was over.

THE LEAGUE IN THE PARK

The new project of the League of Composers, a series of concerts devoted to music "by and for the people of New York" which took place last summer in Central and Prospect Parks, turned out to be very popular with the casual audiences of the Mall (I didn't hear the Prospect Park repeats). People listened to programs of unusual music in silence and attention, programs that included music from modern China, spirituals, African tribal drumming and band works by contemporary American composers. They applauded with enthusiasm, and you felt that a definite step had been taken to wean the audience from Strauss, Rossini and Sousa.

The series opened with a concert made up of music by groups of different racial and cultural backgrounds (of which more later), and was followed by concerts in which bands, choruses, orchestras, soloists and dancers presented musical material that included purely folk expressions, army songs, popular repertory, traditional musical works and new experi-

mental music. Some of the groups were amateur, others professional; all gave their services.

I enjoyed the program given by the Sperry Orchestra (an employee organization of the Sperry Gyroscope Company) and Carol Brice, a young Negro contralto. The Sperry men insisted on performing *Les Préludes*, and the performance was a bit shaky in tempo and intonation (it was the second time in public). But I liked their enthusiasm, and admired the relish with which the horn solos and tutti passages were attacked. The audience enjoyed it too, particularly the singing of Miss Brice, which I found good enough but not sensational. The voice is sombre, and the temperament earnest but rather phlegmatic at present. The Hall Johnson Choir appeared on another program, together with the Columbia University Band, and sang with their customary stream-lined perfection. The same program included Cowell's *Quaint Minuet* and a suite of *Negro Dances* by the colored composer, Florence Price.

One of the chief events of the series was the first performance of Douglas Moore's new *Prayer for the United Nations*, for chorus and orchestra set to words by Stephen Vincent Benet, a sincere and deeply felt work that seemed to really impress the audience. I, unfortunately, was near the back, beside a defective loud-speaker, and was unable to get a final impression of the piece as a whole. Leon Barzin conducted this concert, and another feature of the evening was a "rehearsal" which preceded it, that went through two *Symphoniettas*, one by Norman delo Joio, the other by Stanley Bate.

With the exception of the second Barzin evening, the programs left something to be desired. The first concert, which so provocatively included the Chinese People's chorus, Effiom Odok's African group, the Russian Radischev Chorus and Folk Dance Group and the Puerto Rican Chorus, was musically disappointing. The Chinese chorus was well trained in the American YMCA style, with every trace of Orientalism carefully wiped out. The folk-and-war-songs of new China were samples of the new musical esperanto which is to aid in uniting an enlightened world; the African groups recalled a night-club rather than the Dark Continent. The best work on this program was done by the American People's Chorus and the Russian groups, especially the dancers, whose folk-dances were authentic, colorful and charming.

But I thought the series of concerts got off to a good start, and showed possibilities for important developments. The idea of different

folk-musics, for one, is excellent, particularly if more dynamic and authentic groups can be found to contribute their services. To see an audience listen straight through with concentration to such a series of programs is an indication that open-air concerts can have a real cultural influence. It is to be hoped that this series will be continued next summer.

Colin McPhee

SUMMER AND EARLY FALL, NEW YORK

NATURE is perhaps our most irresponsible music patron and she caused many a scene this summer. Between storms, however, much modern music was played by the Goldman Band and by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Dr. Goldman has pursued the policy of encouragement to living composers for years. The results of this enlightened idea were evident in the general rather high standard of new works written directly for band. He is to be commended and thanked for their selection and for the manner of performance as well.

Pedro Sanjuan's *Cante Yoruba* treated the band as a giant sonorous body and made an exciting sound out of very simple material. The piece suffers from a surplus of dead-stop climaxes but it does preserve an air of intense vigor and seemed one of the most original of the pieces. It was also gratifying to hear the percussion section scored in a much more interesting way than usual.

At the other end of the pole from the rowdy archetype of band music stood Henry Cowell's *Shoonthree*, a delicately scored, continuously lyrical piece, outstanding for its restraint. This work (which appeared on a program dedicated to the League of Composers) is constructed of very simple and warming counterpoint and has several passages that suddenly usher one into that rich, confident world usually felt in the Bach chorales. The "music of sleep" (which is the English translation of the Gaelic title) could hardly be more ingratiating than this piece itself.

Wallingford Riegger's well-made *Prelude and Fugue* was the most advanced sounding composition presented. It is a very fine work. The *Prelude* is in the form of a passacaglia on a curious and provoking subject; very staccato and with an air of expectancy about it. A series of variations leads directly into a witty fugue on a semi-jazz subject. The impression left was that intelligence and wit had produced a work for band, modern in materials and scoring, yet transparent and pleasurable.