

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

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## WINTER STARS AND LESSER LIGHTS

ONE of the luminous events of the past two months, remaining in the memory long afterwards, was the first New York performance by Koussevitzky of Stravinsky's *Ode* for orchestra. For me this is one of Stravinsky's most beautiful and completely satisfying works, music one wants recorded at once, in order to hear it again and again while it is still fresh. Here is the perfect blend of the later Stravinsky style with warmth, tenderness and serenity. It is both intimate and remote, fragile and firm; it casts the spell that we have responded to in pages of *Apollon* and *Perséphone*, a musical spell that is purely Stravinskian in its intelligence and sensuous beauty of pure sound.

Another bright event was the concert of Jennie Tourel, whose voice gives you the impression of something floating and shining in the sun. Her program began with arias by Stradella, Rameau and Mozart. Then came the *Trois Poèmes de Baudelaire* of Debussy, which was followed by Rossini's *Rondo* from *Cinderella*. Hearing the Debussy in this setting was a revelation. I realized as never before how much these songs needed a glorious voice and the grand manner. As you heard them between Mozart and Rossini there was a musical sequence that made you aware of the timelessness of music. Perhaps on some other program, by some other singer, the *Kid Songs* of Leonard Bernstein might have been more welcome; here their intrusion disrupted the program, I thought, most unfortunately; a charming and intimate *Song* by David Diamond was lost by its brevity and isolation.

I was not deeply impressed, either by the two-piano *Concerto* or the *Symphony Number 2* by Martinu. Curiously enough, the two pianos in the *Concerto* had less sonority than one. They played as a pair rather than as two separate instruments with a great deal of involved parallel passage-work that sounded annoyingly confused and rich rather than interesting. Somehow, one expects something else from the combination of two pianos

— more contrast between the two, more experimentation with timbre and interplay. As for the *Symphony*, it was bright but characterless; in spite of a scoring that at times sounded fresh and colorful it failed to sustain interest because it did not convey any feeling of growth and expansion.

Two Christmas pieces were heard on the Christmas week program of the Philharmonic, *A Christmas Overture* by Deems Taylor, whose music has been taken for enough rides, and Nicolai Berezowsky's *Christmas Festival Overture*. This last was ideal for such a program. The music was charming; the orchestra sparkled and blazed with gay color like a tree brilliant with lights. Alexandre Tansman's *Symphony Number 5* was heard at a recent Philharmonic concert with the composer conducting. Of this work there is little to be said other than that it belongs to the school of competent and empty music-making we have long grown familiar with in the more elaborate film-scores. Karol Szymanowski's *Symphonie Concertante for Piano and Orchestra*, played on the same program by Artur Rubinstein (first performed here in 1933) was of far greater musical interest. The piano is more an integral part of the orchestra than a solo instrument; the writing is Chopinesque and delicate. The orchestra is rather over-rich and sensuous, but the music has drive, and rises to a splendid rhythmic climax at the end. The work gained considerably by the glittering performance of Rubinstein, to whom it was dedicated. A group of brief new songs by Hindemith appeared for the first time on Lonny Mayer's Town Hall program, of which I chiefly remember *On Hearing "The Last Rose of Summer"* for its gentle poetry and veiled musical allusion. Songs by Jacques de Menasce on the same program met with the audience's approval if not especially with mine.

### III

Of the series of League-commissioned orchestral miniatures, commemorative of the war, six have been heard so far on Philharmonic programs. Only two have been satisfactory in their adjustment of material to the brief time-interval. Nicolai Berezowsky's *Soldier on the Town* was bright and jaunty, with crisp, witty orchestration. I thought Bernard Hermann's *For the Fallen* sincerely musical and satisfying, with an elegiac warmth that was perhaps rather Delian, but real and touching. *The Anxious Trumpeter* of Carpenter was vague and unconvincing, and Roy Harris' *March in Time of War*, important-sounding and unwieldy, got nowhere either with this reviewer or, alas, with the audience.

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