

does one betray the ballet as an art form. Stravinsky merely touches this boundary, he does not cross it and a more choreographically complete production, with a performer ideally equipped to unite dance and speech, would surely prove how fundamentally choreographic the conception of this joint art work really is.

Such is not the case with the Valéry-Honegger *Semiramis* whose premiere, received not without protest, was the second performance in the Rubinstein series. Honegger's fundamental weakness is his stylistic indecisiveness. He is always wavering between classical definiteness of form, declamatory pathos, traces of Wagner, or at least Strauss, and a purely tonal musical presentation. In his best works he has been able to come to some agreement, as in *King David*, for example. Just because he was unable to do this in *Semiramis* it ranks poorly. Not that the score lacks beauty and delicacy. Its greatest power lies in its sonority which often reveals astonishing new effects, as in the use of two Martenot apparatuses. But the music develops in a way that the interpretation of the ballet flatly contradicts. The melodic lack of form, the rhythmic vagueness give the dance an illusory aspect. A more unatmospheric music has seldom been composed for a ballet. There is a forced movement to the mythologically confused finale of the middle part of the work, where *Semiramis* holds a rambling discourse with her four astrologers and then departs into a flaming pit in the earth; while individual and unusual, it is entirely foreign to the dance. Here the boundaries of the danger zone have been crossed.

Hans Gutman

ORCHESTRAL VERSION OF HARRIS' CHORALE

I THINK Roy Harris' *String Sextet* is one of his best works, thoroughly representative of both the manner and the matter of his music. Specifically, I have no reservation about the melodious and contemplative *Chorale* which forms the second movement of the *Sextet*. It offers, like the second movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, say, or of Mozart's *G Minor*, in rhythm a period of repose, in sonority a satisfying richness, in

melody a long-breathed song, between two active, restless, at times almost panting movements.

So not even the hastiest reader should misunderstand me when I say that I think Werner Janssen made a mistake in choosing the *Chorale* as the piece with which to make his one gesture to American music of today. I have no reservations about the *Chorale* in the *Sextet*, but I have definite reservations about its being played out of its context. There are parts of even the greatest works that would lose by being played separately, e. g., the *Dankgesang* from Beethoven's opus 132. The effect that Harris' *Chorale* makes in the *Sextet* is partly the result of the tension built up in the first movement. That part of its effect was missing when it was preceded by Handel's *Fireworks Music*.

And I have equally definite reservations about the *Chorale's* being played by string orchestra. Certain passages, it is true, gained noticeably from the substitution of the orchestra for solo players—conspicuously the fifth variation, the one in the subdominant, where the theme is in the first violin and second cello with a sort of arpeggiated accompaniment, compounded of *pizzicato* and *arco* playing, in the other instruments. The orchestra made this passage clearer than it has ever been in the hands of six men. Nevertheless, the *Chorale*, conceived essentially as chamber music, runs a double hazard in the orchestra. There is the danger that the generally pleasant sonority of massed strings will be allowed to usurp the place of intensity in the execution of detail; or, on the other hand, that if the details are painstakingly executed (as they were, on the whole, by Janssen) the work will tend to seem fussy and episodic, as I think it did. Imagine the *Dankgesang* played by fifty men instead of four! In a subtly calculated and scrupulously notated chamber work, it takes endless thought and rehearsal for each man to assimilate thoroughly and in proper proportion the details of his part, and I do not think that that assimilation can be made wholesale.

Arthur Mendel