

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

N.B.C.'s "Shostakovitch Chamber Music Festival" included works rushed from Moscow by RCA radio-photo and airplane for two Western Hemisphere premieres. The *Trio in E Minor* for piano and strings, despite its lugubrious and inert third movement, has melodic novelty and structural variety. A rather cyclic formal plan unites four movements that have a minimum of emotional kinship. The neo-romantic style is most obvious in the opening motto with its fateful recurrences, the hysterically ironic scherzo, and, after the final rondo, quotations from the slow movement threnody.

His most recent chamber work, the *Second String Quartet in A Major*, Opus 69, has an overture of almost unrelieved tension. This tightness, often as strained as some unpleasant feat of muscle-bound strength, demands relief, but the recitative and romance which follow open with a severe and complex cadenza that provides no release from the preceding intensity. Fortunately the singing line of the romance is sustained for a space. However a rather restless flowering of this lyricism and a threatening crescendo warn of a taut climax. Shostakovitch, always rather happy with grotesque potentialities, has a spooky waltz for muted strings in the third movement. Finally comes a collection of unrelated variations, on a tune for whose skimpy materials even Beethoven couldn't "do a Diabelli." The *Piano Quintet in G Minor*, Opus 57, which opened the

three-program cycle, has intelligent tonal architecture and thematic invention, but lacks convincing development and realization of its materials.

Malcolm Sargent came to N.B.C. with a beautiful performance of William Walton's now familiar *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra*, with William Primrose as soloist. Its refinement and rare sobriety are of such subtlety that it often fails to drive home its point. But the gracious language of this concerto, enriched by imaginative wisdom, and its charming turns of speech are most elegant.

Howard Hanson also appeared at N.B.C., conducting the Rochester Symphony Orchestra in three selections repeated from his first "composers' concert" in 1925. Quincy Porter's *Ukrainian Suite*, scored for string orchestra with a cunning hand, well balanced in design and proportion, offers an innocuous and conventional kind of exoticism. The *Soliloquy for Flute and Strings* by Bernard Rogers, beautifully played by the soloist, Joseph Mariano, is a slight piece, but one of rare and genuine inspiration, notable for its concise, crystallized content and deeply felt expression. The *Cortège Macabre* from Aaron Copland's unfinished ballet, *Grohg*, owes its timeless freshness to a youthful zest and brilliant fantasy.

A more recent broadcast from Rochester over the Blue Network, again with Hanson and his orchestra, included the first public performance of Robert

Sanders' *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* with Jacques Gordon as soloist. This delightfully scored work, though not a potential war-horse for fiddlers, is a sincere lyric expression. Hanson's own *Songs from "Drum Taps"* (after Walt Whitman) and Bernard Rogers' *Drawings After Hans Christian Andersen* were also heard. The former presents a direct, familiar martial figure, introduced by solo snare drum, which develops into a rather effective medley of tunes for chorus and orchestra. This is hardly distinguished for originality or freshness of sound, but gratifyingly competent, healthy and positive in effect. Rogers' more elusive score, a miniature set of fanciful characterizations, indicated again his fine sense of orchestration.

III

Walter Piston's *Prelude and Allegro for Organ and Strings*, performed over the Blue by the Boston Symphony with E. Power Biggs as soloist, presented a bristling set of acoustical problems for radio. Heavy, majestic sonorities demand a technic for reproduction that radio has at present not perfected. The difficulty of controlling mass resonances is formidable enough in the best concert halls, theatres, stadiums and cathedrals.

The problem is especially great when that most gigantic of all wind instruments, the modern organ, is involved. Piston's work is intelligently scored, using normal registration and skillfully balancing the dynamic volumes of solo instrument and strings. It is more intellectual than spiritual, more sophisticated in its secular dignity than mystic with simple universality.

General Motors Symphony of the Air showed jazz at a really low point in Hans Spialek's *The Tall City*. In comparison, the Gershwin *Piano Concerto in F*, which followed, sounded like a monument of lofty beauty. Bernard Herrmann and the Columbia Orchestra and Chorus offered Richard Arnell's setting of Stephen Spender's poem, *The War God*, a clumsy and bombastic attempt to achieve sustained dramatic effect by sheer instrumental aggression. Ernst Lévy's *Ninth Symphony*, broadcast from a National Orchestral Association concert, was even more pretentious and obvious, with its incessant howl and clamor by choir, soloists, and orchestra. A happy contrast was made by Leonard Bernstein's *Seven Anniversaries for Piano*, an amusing little collection performed by Max Kotlarsky over WNYC.

THE TORRID ZONE

By COLIN McPHEE

THE recent Hampton concert at Carnegie Hall was one of those terrific affairs with dancing in the aisles, harassed-looking ushers and delirious applause after each number. Hampton's band not only has unbelievable energy

and drive, but bodied resonance at the same time, for his musicians are all aces. But after two or three pieces this energy began to seem slightly suspect, a matter of tested formulas and showmanship, set as the masklike smile of undying