

minent. Glancing through Gilbert's personal notes, one finds a prophetic anticipation of this American emphasis, which has since led to so many different and even conflicting modes of expression. Because Copland possesses imagination, craftsmanship and spirit, an encounter with his music is always a satisfying experience. The Gilbert score as well as other new works were convincingly interpreted by Vladimir Bakaleinikoff, assistant conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony.

The vintage of modern instrumental concerti was poor. Only Artur Schnabel brought with him a score unknown to Pittsburgh audiences, the piano concerto of Aram Khatchaturian. Its mood and pictorial substance hit the average listener at the right spot – touching off dreams of a beautiful landscape and romance anywhere between the Caucasus and Hollywood. The choice of Schnabel (and for that matter, of all the other pianists and violinists who play in Pittsburgh), does not satisfy the discriminating segment of our audience, which wants to hear significant new concerti. Important scores have recently come to the fore, but are inexcusably neglected by the soloists' refusal to bet on anything but a sure success.

*Frederick Dorian*

## DIMINUENDO IN THE WEST

THE orchestra season drew to a close in Los Angeles with a diminuendo for new music. During the final weeks Alfred Wallenstein gave us performances of the suites from *Hary Janos* and *Billy the Kid*, and William Schuman's *A Free Song*. The audience which heard the Copland music was there principally for the debut of a charming young local violin prodigy; that is to say, it had come to be enchanted by a Saint-Saëns concerto in an aura of rosebuds and organdie. After this vision of Victorian loveliness, *Billy* proved too rude a reference to some episodes of frontier life and it was received with amused tolerance.

Schuman's cantata on a Walt Whitman text appeared in more congenial company and it had a correspondingly warmer reception. This music is full of faults. There is first of all the tendency to build up a composition of length by stringing together a series of miniatures; one hears a thirteen-bar piece on the words "Long, too long, America;" while the altos continue that admonition as a pedal, the other voices reiterate the next phrase until it dies of exhaustion. After a few bars, "crises of anguish" are

worked over in a rather hysterical vein, and we proceed similarly for the balance of the movement, each group of three or four words having its own musical structure. In the second movement, after the orchestral fugue, "O a new song, a free song" gets its own little A-B-A setting. Then we relapse into twenty-four repetitions of the single word "flapping." From here on we do better, with the re-entry of the fugue material, finally moving into a march-like passage which continues to the end. The whole procedure might be described as the setting of words to music, not the setting of a poem.

Having said the worst first, one is the more willing to acknowledge that for all its weaknesses of structure, the cantata has an undeniable strength and power. It gives the singers a chance to sing expressively, to confirm with their voices the nobly-patriotic sentiments of the poet and the conviction of the composer that those sentiments are valid and applicable for Americans today. Even in Schuman's least successful music there is a quality of contemporaneity that makes it urgent for its listeners. It is as if the composer were saying, "Listen! I have something to tell you about here and now." Such an attitude is both naive and aggressive but it indicates a healthy vitality that is much needed in American music. In a comparatively successful piece like *A Free Song*, the call to attention must be heeded. You feel that even if the composer has not revealed to you an Ultimate Truth, he has at least pointed out some lesser truth that has so far escaped detection by many of his more technically accomplished colleagues.

Martinu's *Concerto* for two pianos, for instance, seemed to me to be utterly irrelevant to any problem except the one of providing a serviceable virtuoso piece with much glitter and no content for an excellent team of pianists. The labors of the soloists, the conductor and the orchestra showed that this was very intricate music, and the restlessness of the audience that it was also very dull. Its barrenness was further pointed up by the Piston *Sinfonietta* which Janssen played on the same program. This music has no more of a "message" than has the Martinu work; but it has the wit and thoughtful earnestness which mark the attainment of a rather wise humanity. It is, of course, somewhat remote, as wisdom and humanity are remote from most of us. It is no longer needful to speak of Piston's workmanship. Nonetheless one cannot deny himself the pleasure of communicating to others his own delight in the skill with which he has recorded his perceptions of formal beauty.

"Evenings on the Roof," in past seasons the very ante-room to modern music in this community, continues this year to concentrate upon the classics. But its plans for next season revolve around the celebration of two seventieth birthdays, those of Arnold Schönberg and of Charles Ives. Of Schönberg we are to hear all the piano works, some songs, and the second, third and fourth quartets. And we are to hear all of the Ives chamber music. Let us hope that other organizations will observe the anniversaries of these two masters whose influence has been so extensive and so beneficial.

Lawrence Morton

## WAR BRINGS MORE MUSIC TO THE CAPITAL

**P**ASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE by Wallingford Riegger, the last premiere selected by Hans Kindler for the National Symphony Orchestra's season, met with the kind of spontaneous response that delights a composer. Anything but a dull and pedantic essay in traditional forms, the work begins with a snare-drum roll that would have startled Bach or Handel as would the biting dissonances in the brassy clamorous introduction. The passacaglia proper has a staccato theme announced by the 'celli and basses with a syncopation suggestive of a Negro funeral procession; an undercurrent of ironic humor beneath the canonic and other technical devices of the form emerges dominantly in the lively fugue on a jazzy theme in 2/4 time – the celebration after the solemnity. It is original and striking in treatment, expertly instrumented for color contrasts and has besides an engaging quality of frank emotion.

The Chamber Music Guild has opened a series of spring concerts here with a program of local first performances: Joseph R. Wood's *String Quartet Number 2*, an angular, cubistic work with a promising second movement whose elegiac mood fell short for lack of an expressive melody, Samuel Barber's finely wrought *Serenade*, and four quasi-medieval *Chants d'amour* for soprano and string quartet by Jean Berger, delicately scored and evocative songs, particularly *Blanche comm' lys*. At the second concert, the Guild gave an all-Russian program.

Under sponsorship of the Brazilian Embassy, the Camp Lee Symphony Orchestra of soldier musicians, organized and conducted by Corporal George Hoyen, gave a very creditable concert at the Pan-American Union. The program contained three novelties: *Bachianas Brasileiras Number 4* by Villa-Lobos, *Primeira Fantasia Brasileira* for piano and orchestra by