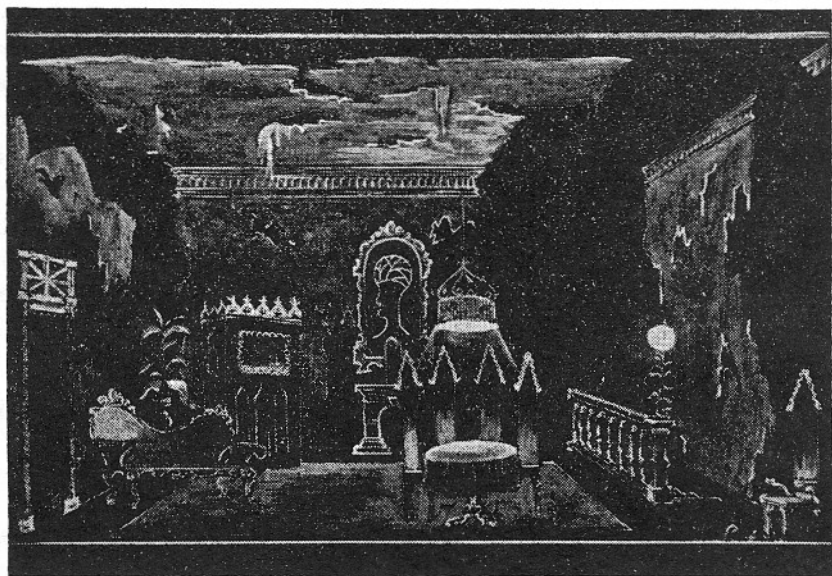


PHILADELPHIA HONORS BARTOK

CONTRARY to the impression created by recent propaganda, Philadelphia has never been a champion of Bela Bartok. No more than a slight interest was taken in his music until the city joined the procession of other civic centers currently making amends. Two major works written during Bartok's last years were given by Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, one, the *Third Piano Concerto*, played by Gyorgy Sandor – a world premiere. The monumental *Violin Concerto*, assigned to Menuhin, is one of Bartok's most important works, but the insistent strokes of the tense chords and the sharp melodic outline are lashing severity for many concertgoers. The highstrung harmonies and searching lyricism of the opening sections find their ultimate place in the reassuring finale. The movements of this work have melodic material in common which binds them together, while the *Third Piano Concerto* is made up of three independent pieces. These are tied with a fine emotional thread rather than by cyclical thematic devices. This lean and carefully carved work is in direct contrast to the full-bodied violin piece. Bartok's dissonant writing here is of the utmost refinement yet has undeviating strength because it is made up of only the choicest notes.

The first movement is a mixture of song and dance with a clarion air. Paradoxically, one notes a freedom of motion born of folklorish ornamentation mainly in the singing parts, while the arabesque dances flow quietly. Throughout the concerto there is a reserve that restrains each outburst. The dance in the opening movement, which melts into a solo flute close, typifies the serenity that inevitably wins out. The Adagio religioso is a delicate chorale prelude with the disposition of Bach. Its chorale and weaving accompanying figures have beauties that linger through the turbulence of the trio-like murmurings. The rondo-finale is vigorous and stormy, kept under control by its slow harmonic rhythm and a skeleton framework. This compact brilliant virtuoso work is so ingeniously scored that even extremely fragile piano passages manage to sound over a heavy orchestra. The piece, all but the orchestration of the last seventeen measures (done by Tibor Serly), was written just before Bartok's death, and of course brings his recent tendencies to their greatest realization. One of these was a liking for satin-finished dissonances which are so carefully arranged in a pattern of fluctuating harmonic tension as to seem almost consonant.

In John Haussermann's *Concerto* for voice and orchestra (Margo Rébeil, soloist) one sees the composer trying to justify the medium – the voice is without words – by forcing it into established instrumental forms instead of making this a form in its own right as it well can be. The orchestration is inconsistent and the soprano even bursts into Italian colo-



THE MEDIUM

Stage Design by OLIVER SMITH

For the Opera by GIAN-CARLO MENOTTI

first produced by the Columbia Theatre Associates
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ratura doodles. Nervous trills, canons that get lost and conglomerated harmonies join in during this unprofessional and anti-musical venture.

On a Symphony Club Chamber Orchestra program, Ildebrando Pizzetti's *Three Symphonic Preludes* was the most attractive item. Its harmonies are poignant and the rhythm intrigues one, even though ambient phrases tend to weigh heavily on moving lines. . . . The Art Alliance presented the winning Eurydice Chorus Award work, Karl Ahrendt's *God be Merciful*, a more effective than meaty piece, an unsteady work for women's voices by Jane Kolb and my own *Piano Trio*. Also on the Alliance roster was a lecture by Walter Piston, who sees amazingly clearly into his fellow composers' music. His spicy and well co-ordinated *Flute Quintet* was played and sounded like a Piston spree with more open space and fresh air than usual. . . . The newly formed Guild for Contemporary Music is an organization of about twenty Philadelphia composers who give performances only of their own works. After two concerts the group has already found that it cannot bask solely in regionalism and so will soon take into its fold all contemporary music. Edmond de Luca's *Viola Sonata*, one of the best works so far, shows him pioneering with ideas current in the twenties, but his piece is serious and technically sound.

Vincent Persichetti

LOCAL GENIUS IN SAN FRANCISCO

A NEW composer made his appearance in San Francisco this season, and the town sat up and took notice. His name is Halsey Stevens and he was deposited with us by the United States Navy after some years of teaching at various schools in the East and Middle West. He is a pupil of William Berwald of Syracuse University and also had instruction from Ernest Bloch.

He is a very talented man, and if you haven't heard of him already, you are going to. His *First Symphony*, which he conducted at a concert of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, was one of the most dynamic, compactly meaningful and finely shaped scores of the year, while his *Second Trio*, introduced by the Music Lovers' Society, impressed one particularly for its lightness, deftness and sure brevity of touch. At present Stevens is teaching in the University of Redlands and working on a violin concerto.

Two other local boys had their fling with the San Francisco Symphony. Charles Jones directed the first performance of his *Five Melodies for Orchestra* – tuneful, adroitly rhythmical and subtly scored music for a ballet in search of a choreographer. William Bergsma's brief, atmospheric and elegant *Music on a Quiet Theme* completes the local list except for the Big Names.