

mention Debussy in connection with this quartet is perhaps unfair to both composers, yet the comparison is the only one at hand; this nostalgic music might well have been written by a Claude Achille born in Rio.

Hans Kindler, who frequently lends a hand to resident composers, recently gave the premiere of La Salle Spier's *Symphonic Visions* at a National Symphony Orchestra concert. In this introspective and emotionally cogent score Mr. Spier has taken a long step forward from the facility he has shown in descriptive music. The work is cast in the difficult cyclic form, and the theme upon which it is built has a germinative force excellently displayed in proliferation. While speaking of resident composers, I must not forget Mary Howe's ballet, *It's Hell on Women*. The music, even in its present two-piano scoring, is clever and witty, in a style which takes side-glances at Poulenc and Françaix.

Ray Brown

PHILADELPHIA PREMIERE OF BARTOK WORK

PHILADELPHIA continues to be something less than a hotbed of modern music, but recent weeks have at least seen the local premieres of Bela Bartok's *Deux Images* and a *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra* by Edward Burlingame Hill. Both works were presented on the same program by the Philadelphia Orchestra with Mr. Ormandy conducting.

The *Deux Images* were written in 1910 and are thus exactly thirty years old. The amazing thing about them is that they sound very much like brand new music. At the age of twenty-nine Bartok was already going his own way and these pictures — one is a "pastoral," the other a "village dance" — are hardly reminiscent even of music written since 1910. The composer's handling of orchestration and of thematic materials is peculiarly his own, and apparently has not lent itself easily to imitation. Or possibly the blank record of previous performances of the *Deux Images* in Philadelphia is duplicated generally in the other musical capitals of the world outside Hungary.

At all events it is hard to understand why the *Deux Images* are not comfortably established in the general repertory. The melodies have a striking vitality, and they are exploited skilfully and colorfully in the orchestra. The development is more original and individual than radical. It has a simplicity and directness which may have been perhaps a little surprising in 1910 but which are not far removed from what seem to be contemporary tendencies. At the risk of generalizing dangerously, one

might say that the *Deux Images* were written about thirty years ahead of their time. Whether Bartok's latest works are thirty years ahead of them is another matter. In any case it is devoutly to be hoped that it will not be thirty years before they attain some sort of general circulation. It would do no harm if conductors would now and then give their audiences a peek into the future.

Mr. Hill's *Sinfonietta* is an expansion of a string quartet, Opus 40, written some five years ago. It is neither very substantial nor very adventurous, but it is at least orderly and concise. One suspects that in transit from quartet to orchestra it rather outgrew itself.

Henry Pleasants

MORE ABOUT MUSIC IN BRITAIN

London, February 27

THE London Contemporary Music Centre's first concert since the war was not really a great success. The only music of importance was Britten's *Les Illuminations* for soprano and string orchestra. Though rather mixed in style (from Schubert to Stravinsky by way of Fauré) this is a sensitive and sincere work and one of Britten's best so far. It was also excellently performed by Sophie Wyss with the Boyd Neel orchestra. But it hardly conveyed the full meaning of Rimbaud's works — a task no French composer has as yet even dared attempt. The rest of the program was hardly on the same level. Herbert Howell's *Concerto* was an uninspiring piece of post-Elgarian stodge, and Lennox Berkeley's *Serenade*, though effective and well written, was not of great moment. Lord Berners' *Adagio, Variations and Hornpipe* seemed to be a rehash of pieces from his Diaghilev ballet, *The Triumph of Neptune*, but would be effective and amusing if well played, which it was not on this occasion. It's a pity the Roussel *Sinfonietta* was omitted as this would have tautened up a diffuse and not very distinguished program.

It seems in fact as if the C.M.C. has recently become subject to reactionary influences. None of the works chosen by them for the 1940 I. S. C. M. festival, now scheduled for New York (originally for Budapest) can be called progressive. Vaughan Williams' *F-minor Symphony*, for instance, is now four years old and has had over two hundred performances. The best of the bag is Herbert Murrill's *Quartet* which, though unpretentious, has a definite character and interest of its own. No further