

SWISS PANORAMA

WILLI REICH

THE status of modern music in Switzerland, as of all its artistic affairs, is determined by two factors: first, a participation in German, French and Italian culture; second, the sectionalism fostered by special political conditions which promote the growth of many rival cultural centers. The first is reflected mainly in the production of music, the second, in its performance.

International recognition for Swiss music was captured primarily by two composers, Arthur Honegger and Othmar Schoeck, the first of the French zone, the latter of the German.

Honegger, born in 1892, is usually included among the French modernists, because for a time he belonged to the famous Group of Six. But even then he was inclined to reconcile Latin and predominantly rhythmic elements with the stylistic principles of German music. His first important work of this nature was the Biblical drama, *Le Roi David*, written for the open-air theatre in Mézières, West Switzerland. It inaugurated an entirely new form of choral cantata, which was still further developed, with scenic investiture, in the later works, *Cri du monde*, *Antigone*, *Judith*. The definitely pictorial manner of composition, a typical Latin trait, is found not only in numerous stage and ballet compositions and film accompaniments, but also in purely instrumental works like the famous *Pacific 231*, original model for all "machine-music," and the orchestral pieces, *Der Gesang Nigamons* and *Rugby*. Honegger's latest work, the dramatic oratorio *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, written for Ida Rubinstein and soon to have its premiere in Paris, shows that the composer still holds to the same path. His original style of composition, based mainly on bold polytonality and an inclination to experiment with new tonal effects, unquestionably makes Honegger one of the most interesting modern composers.

Othmar Schoeck, born in 1886, represents the intuitive, lyric side of the Swiss musical temperament, but here too the element of color plays a great part. Schoeck, preeminently a lyricist, completed his education in Germany, and his early music approaches Max Reger's. His works, particularly the great song cycle with chamber orchestra accompaniment, *Lebendig begraben*, *Elegie* and *Notturmo*, are marked by spiritual delicacy in melodic structure and by a rich harmony. Schoeck has also made important contributions in piano music and in absolute music forms. Especially noteworthy are his *Phentesilea*, an opera on Kleist's drama, the dramatic fairy tale cantata, *Vom Fischer und sein Braut*, and his newest opera, *Massimilla Doni*, after Balzac's novel of the same name.

Emile Jacques Dalcroze, who works principally in Ghent, has influenced new music by his methods of instruction rather than by his composition. The union of rhythmic, melodic and choreographic elements which he has promoted has had a widespread effect.



The most interesting younger composers of French Switzerland are Frank Martin, Jean Binet, Roger Vuataz and André Marescotti. Their style in general has been greatly influenced by the French school; the most original is undoubtedly Frank Martin, whose *Piano Concerto* attracted attention at the last music festival in Barcelona.

The older composers of German Switzerland who deserve mention are Volkmar Andreae, Karl Heinrich David and Fritz Brun. Volkmar Andreae is noteworthy for his tuneful orchestral songs on texts by Li-Tai-Pe. Fritz Brun is primarily a symphonic musician. Karl Heinrich David has worked in all fields and we have him to thank for some very original orchestral and chamber music, a cantata on Old-German Minnesongs, and a cheerful opera, *Weekend*.

Among the younger composers of German Switzerland are Conrad Beck, Willy Burkhard, Albert Moeschinger, Robert Blum and Heinrich Sutermeister. In his early days, Beck was strongly influenced by Hindemith and Stravinsky; today he writes in an individual instrumental style which is based on rigor-

ous linearity. Willy Burkhard has an unusual gift for vocal music, his *Herbstkantata* and the oratorio, *Das Gesicht Jesajahs*, are two of the best examples of modern vocal feeling. Albert Moeschinger prefers an austere polyphonic style; he also has been influenced by Hindemith. Robert Blum has written interesting choral works. Heinrich Sutermeister, the youngest of these gifted writers, is one of the most prolific.



These few names will give some idea of the abundance of talent in the small confines of Switzerland. Not less abundant is the performance of music, which is centered largely in Berne, Basle, Zurich, Ghent, Lausanne, St. Gall and Winterthur. Active as conductors in addition to the composers already mentioned—Schoeck, Andreae and Brun—are Luc Balmer of Berne; Hans Münch of Basle; Ernest Ansermet of Ghent; Hans Haug of Lausanne; and Robert Denzler of Zurich. Under the direction of Paul Sacher in Basle, and Alexander Schaichet in Zurich, two chamber orchestras show remarkable devotion to new music.

An extraordinary place in the musical life of Switzerland, probably of the whole world, is occupied by the small provincial city of Winterthur, which has become one of the most important music centers of Europe because of the concerts of the local college of music, an ancient institution supported by wealthy patri-cians. The municipal orchestra, with which Heinrich Scherchen has labored for ten years, has presented the Swiss premieres of a number of important modern works, including those of Schön-berg, Stravinsky, Alban Berg, Ernst Krenek, Milhaud, Honeg-ger. The intense music life that exists in this city of barely 50,000 inhabitants, makes it the musical paradise of Switzerland.

A further stimulus to all kinds of composition is the fact that the country has six radio stations, a remarkably large number for a population of only 4,000,000. In keeping with the serious practise of music in Switzerland is the number of chamber music and orchestral societies excellent in quality, even in the smallest cities. The male choruses, remarkably proficient, take part every year in imposing music festivals. In this connection it is curious that despite vigorous efforts, Switzerland has not yet succeeded in producing a common, generally recognized national anthem.

Recurrent prize contests for this purpose have greatly stimulated the production of choral works by contemporary composers.

Opera is given kind consideration by a whole series of excellent theatres but its composition is in a rather poor plight; except for the music of Schoeck and Honegger, no important work by a Swiss has reached foreign lands.

Singers and virtuosi are tremendously active, too. There is a vigorous concert life which finds a place for modern music of all tendencies and countries. The distinguished pianist, Walter Frey, has given the contemporary cause special service in Zurich. Even the science of music, as taught in the universities of Basle, Zurich and Berne, is quite modern. Professor Ernest Kurth, of Berne, has been a great influence, and his works, *Linearer Kontrapunkt* and *Romantische Harmonik* are fundamental contributions too in the theory of modern music.

Set in the cultural heart of Europe, Switzerland becomes more and more the appointed state for the premieres of significant new music. One of the most important will be the posthumous production of Alban Berg's *Lulu*, scheduled for June.