
FORECAST AND REVIEW

THE FUTURE ORCHESTRA

BEFORE the war, the orchestra showed a definite tendency to expand and take on instruments which had no place in the make-up of the classical symphony unit and were heard only rarely even in the theatre. The alto flute, the small clarinet in E-flat, the trumpet, the bass trombone and the saxhorns came to enlarge the range of the wind instruments. It seemed inevitable that some day a work should employ complete families of wood-winds, quartets of flutes with the G or F-sharp flute, and one in low C (such as I have heard at Geneva), quartets of oboes, of clarinets, and so on. What treasures of new combinations, what unknown sonorities these enormous orchestras offered to the symphonic and dramatic composers !

Then came the war and in most European countries the existence of even the usual orchestra was threatened. Material conditions of life were so drastically altered as to favor reduction rather than increase in all artistic enterprise.

Today, long after this crisis, young composers write voluntarily for a reduced orchestra, or for groups whose composition is determined solely by whims, in which one can generally trace the influence of jazz. And though the orchestral picture may now be poorer, it is nevertheless not so muddy. The instruments have a natural tendency toward individualization, to offer a pure instead of a composite timbre. The atmosphere is lighter, the outlines more clearly defined.

This writing for the chamber orchestra will, I believe, become more and more general, and music will lose nothing thereby. Nor need such a tendency prevent the development of works for full orchestra, or even for orchestra and choir, which need such unusual combinations for performance. The addition to these groups, of instruments such as the saxhorns, the saxophones, and the greater

number of wood-winds, offers interesting possibilities provided a balance with the strings is maintained.

But there is a problem the near future will disclose which, without doubt, is attended with more serious consequences than the increase or reduction in the number of orchestral instruments. That is the introduction of mechanics into the execution of works. The machine is gradually conquering the earth, and more and more determines all the phases of our activity. Should that day dawn which sees the completely mechanical orchestra, bringing whatever marvels can be realized by a perfect machine, necessitating an altogether new technique, will it close with disaster to the art of music? This is a question which can only be raised, not settled, in any brief prophetic discourse.

By Albert Roussel

ECHOES FROM PRAGUE

THE International Society for Contemporary Music, embarked last year on the enterprise of holding festivals for orchestral music as distinct from those for chamber music in Salzburg and more recently in Venice. The first of these, held in Prague in 1924, in connection with the Smetana celebration, was followed by the one last May. At that time Prague heard three orchestral concerts, and one devoted to Czech choral works, and one evening of opera performed in the Czech theatre, another in the German theatre. It was an exceedingly interesting and delightful week, and yet I am inclined to believe that the Society has been, perhaps, a little rash to attempt so soon the arrangement of annual festivals for orchestral music.

It seems to me now definitely beyond dispute that music which is authentically modern is at its best in compositions of the smaller, more intimate type—in chamber or chamber orchestral works. Of course several of these pieces written on a larger scale had been intended for the opera and therefore sounded strange in the concert hall. On the other hand it is more likely that the reason for the general flatness lay in the determining condition, that contemporary music achieves its most characteristic expression through the smaller orchestra. Perhaps the day has passed for