

LUKAS FOSS - A NEW TALENT

IF New York and Philadelphia were more like Paris, by which one means: if New York and Philadelphia were a little less dull, the sense of a tiny debut which took place on January 17th in the board-room at Schirmer's would long since have been the happy possession of the progressively musical in both towns.

This introduction focussed attention on the compositions and the person of a sixteen-year-old refugee composer named Lukas Foss. The lad, who was born Lukas Fuchs in Berlin in August 1922, commenced composing at the age of eight, and some of his pieces were broadcast as early as 1931 and 1932. From September 1933 to September 1937 he lived in Paris and continued with members of the staff of the Conservatoire studies in piano and theory begun with Julius Goldstein in Berlin. At the end of that period his parents moved to New York, and young Lukas at present is a student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

And New York and Philadelphia, were they more like Paris, would be chatting about him as Paris once talked about another engaging young composer, also a refugee: Igor Markévitch. A potential sounding-board was present in the board-room that January afternoon in the form of at least twenty-five New Yorkers and Philadelphians who would qualify in any local law-court as musical "experts." And the potential subject of a sensation was present in the form of the compositions performed by the composer in instances with the assistance of other musicians. The often-times extremely charming pieces, to be sure, displayed an instinctive aptitude for music-making to a larger degree than the importation of something inventive and creative. These latter qualities were not unapparent. But they were modest, and one's impression all in all was that of a decided talent. Still one could not deny the traces of inspiration. Some if not all the compositions—and they included a *Set of Three Pieces for Two Pianos*, a *Piano and Violin Sonata* and several solo numbers—were plainly "pushed from within." They not only display technical capacities and powers of construction which are not usual among musicians older than this lad. They exhibited a spontaneity and momentum not unlike that of a colt which has been let out of its

paddock: something neither elders nor teachers could unassistedly provoke. And they projected a small interior reality of some dimension and scope which indubitably is that of an healthy boy. The sixteen-year-old Lukas Foss with his fine fresh-colored face and his proud young head whose tallness seemed to betray an intention of touching the sky, thus appeared the obverse of the earnest of a good composer. Unlike many of his ambitious coeval, the fledgling definitely *was* an honest-to-god composer.

In point of harmony, his music is not dissimilar to Hindemith's, since it is couched in the chromatic scale and is rather uncompromisingly logical. It is modern-style, too, predominantly linear, in instances complexly so. The *Concertino*, the third movement of what is Foss' most recent and probably most representative, broadly conceived and richly clangorous composition, the *Set of Three Pieces* for two pianos, in passages combines as many as nine contrapuntal voices. Distinctive features nonetheless sharply emerge from the music. For one thing, its contrapuntalism, as in the *Introduction to the Four Two-Voiced Inventions*, (published by G. Schirmer) oftentimes is merely a subtle suggestion. For another, the style, particularly in its most recent instances, is dramatic in the word's best sense. It is entertainingly animated, deploying the material with considerable dash and emphasis, almost with showmanship. This dramatic manner of movement and expression is what is most European about Foss' music and is certain henceforward to distinguish it from the mass of the products of the composers among whom he has been cast by fortune. Again, his work is rich in vigorous and vivid contrasts, such for example as the one between the ambling first and suddenly dancing second themes in the *Andante* of the *Set of Three Pieces*; that between the two themes in the gay second *Invention*; and those between rhythmic variants of single themes as in the *Concertino*. Precisely the freshness and impulsiveness of these contrasts, in connection with the momentum, the frequent lyricism and the unpretentiousness of the efforts, is what is most responsible for one's feeling of the music's spontaneity. even its inspiration and derivation from a feeling of the inwardness of things. And the conviction that the experience is the composer's own and one relevant to his stage of existence is

fortified by the material itself. It seems to reflect, and certainly conveys, expectancy, determination, above all a festive sense of the joyous possibilities of life and a desire to be one with things in their festivity and acclaim them in music.

Hence it is that we look with keen anticipation to the second performance of the *Set of Three Pieces*. It is to take place at the March 26th of the three recitals presenting programs by young American composers, which the League is giving with the cooperation of the Society of Professional Musicians. Rumor has it the piece will also be repeated at a concert of the Beethoven Association. Plans to have it published also are under way. The young composer, meanwhile, is busied on an opera.

Paul Rosenfeld

THE LATEST FROM BOSTON

DR. KOUSSEVITZKY has had a great festival of brand new American works, right at the 50-yard line of the season. In the face of his uncompromising Friday afternoon audiences, he has brought out Carpenter's new *Violin Concerto*, the *Second Symphony* of William Schuman, and the *Third Symphony* of Roy Harris. And what with an all-Bloch concert on deck, we feel most grateful to him.

The Carpenter work started out as if it were going to be exciting, and got steadily drearier, cloudier, more involved, and fancier (bells, Oriental drum, vibraphone, et al.) until the pianissimo ending found several good friends of modern music asleep in their stalls. The fault lay, probably, in the lack of significant thematic material, which lack precluded any immediate recognition of thematic development. As the piece progressed (or as time progressed) one was conscious of many small sections which sounded mutually irrelevant, all plunged into a romantic bath perfumed with Debussyan orchestration. There were moments when one sat up, interested, desperately hoping for more of the same, to be rewarded only with some tone-row or other expertly dressed up with nowhere to go.

Zlatko Balokovic, the Yugoslavian violinist who has been more or less touring the country with this concerto, made an extraordinary parallel with the course of the music. He began