

Williams' *Symphony in F minor*, Daniel Gregory Mason's *A Lincoln Symphony*, pleasing period music rather than any satisfactory picturization of its subject, Deems Taylor's *Marco Takes a Walk*, Villa-Lobos' second suite, *Descobrimento do Brasil*, and Abram Chasins' insignificant *Parade*, ten years old, but with a new opportunist dedication to our warriors. Alexandre Tansman's *Polish Rhapsody* offered his usual set amount of entertainment value, pretty superficial at this moment for this subject, and with far too many North and South American rhythmic echoes in the national dance forms.

Donald Fuller

NEWS FROM RUSSIA

By Cable to Modern Music from Moscow

ON "WAR AND PEACE"

SERGE PROKOFIEV'S new work, *War and Peace*, is an ambitious and spectacular contribution to Soviet music. The idea of making an opera out of Tolstoy's famous novel occurred to the composer in the first months of the war when many thought there would be no time for writing operas or symphonies. Nevertheless, Prokofiev undertook his project and carried it through to the last note, completing the score in mid-December. As in all of his previous operas, he collaborated with Mira Mendelson on the libretto, which is in prose throughout, the authors attempting to follow Tolstoy's original text wherever possible. The opera is scheduled for production by the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow under the direction of the well-known film director, Serge Eisenstein, with Samuel Samasud as conductor.

The conversion of *War and Peace* into an opera is an obvious temptation for almost any Russian composer today when the Soviet is fiercely resisting Fascist invasion, for it provides the opportunity to project in music those great images and events which have brought immortality to Russian literature, and which have come to symbolize the moral strength and the heroism of the Russian people. Out of the copious novel, Prokofiev chose as his theme the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 and the events directly preceding that year. He also set himself the task of reproducing not only the stirring episodes and historical personages of that period, but of retaining the lyrical story that is woven into the novel. It was his intention to weave the great range of emotions, the spirit of the Russian people, the beauty of the Russian soul, as Tolstoy portrayed them, into the entire content of the opera.

The opera opens with a chorus announcing the invasion. When rendered in a piano recital, the crisp, melodious tone of this overture made a profound impression upon the listeners; Shostakovitch was enamored of it. But Prokofiev's own opinion was that the symphonic overture seemed inadequate. He decided to introduce the chorus in order to precipitate the audience sharply into the atmosphere of war and to give the opera its stern, martial spirit from the very beginning.

In sharp contrast to the opening, is the lyricism of the first scene where the love theme of Andrei and Natasha is heard in the form of a nocturne. In the second, Natasha makes her appearance as the betrothed of Andrei, in the ancient, gloomy mansion of the Bolkonsky family, singing a very melodious arioso. The quickly moving script takes us next to Pierre Bezuhov's reception rooms. Through a great arc we see dancers and hear music from the ballroom and intermittent bits of conversation by amateur politicians discussing Paris and Napoleon. An arietta sung by Natasha interrupts the music of the waltzes for a fleeting moment, but then we hear dance rhythms again and see Natasha meeting the handsome young Anatole Kuragin. Now the action shifts quickly to Dolohov's study where a party is in full swing, and after that to Maria Dmitrievna's villa.

War enters the foreground with the second act where interest in the individuals gives place to expression of the peoples' movement. It is just before the battle of Borodino. The scene opens with a powerful, symphonic portrait of the austere landscape. On a large grass-covered mound of earth, Russian peasants are being organized into an armed force to help the army fight Napoleon. They are digging to erect bastions. As the men's voices die down peasant women enter singing, bringing bagfuls of food and jugs of milk. At this point Count Andrei meets Denisov, the guerilla chieftain, who is seeking General Kutuzov to propose his plan of guerilla warfare. Their conversation is drowned by the shouts of the cheering army as Kutuzov appears. Martial music sounds as the Russian regiments are reviewed, one after the other, each with its own band. Here Kutuzov utters his famous words: "Incomparable people! The beast will be mortally wounded by the might of the Russians and driven from our sacred earth." As if in confirmation, we hear the powerful chorus of the soldiers and the peoples' army. There follows a brief scene showing Napoleon during the battle of Borodino. Then comes the most solemn moment of the opera, the capture of Moscow by the French. The city is seen wrapped in flames. Grief and rage give way to the desire for revenge.

Once more the opera returns to the intimate world of the central

characters in *War and Peace*. Andrei is fatally wounded and in his delirium dreams of Natasha. She appears before him and they recall their first meeting. We hear again the lovers' duet. The end of the opera is signalized by the retreat of the French troops from Moscow. The din of battle is heard from far off. There is the distant singing of a female chorus and then a guerilla detachment of women appears on the stage. The men take up the song which gradually gains in volume with the arrival of regular troops. Kutuzov enters happy and proud, expresses his gratitude to the soldiers and the guerillas, "Glory to you through the ages." The people sing praise to their hero and the opera closes with a great triumphal hymn.

S. Schlifstein

SHEBALIN'S OVERTURE, GLIÈRE'S CONCERTO

SINCE the outbreak of war Vissarion Shebalin, one of the Soviet's leading composers, has produced three important works – a musical comedy entitled *Flight from the Embassy* (subject taken from the period of Catherine II), a *Fifth String Quartet* based on Slav folksongs, and most recently, a *Russian Overture* for grand orchestra.

Shebalin is one of Russia's biggest talents. He boldly seeks new modes of expression, while at the same time proclaiming himself in the national tradition of Russian music. The foundation of his work rests on the materials of song. His brilliant, modern, polyphonic technic has its source in Borodin, founder of the "heroic" style of Russian symphonic music.

The intonation of the *Russian Overture*, as in most of Shebalin's work, is profoundly affected by folk music. It is also permeated with orientalism, whose origin again can be found in Russia's musical classics as in the *Polovetzky Dances* of *Prince Igor*. Without using actual folklore excerpts, Shebalin has created a really national work which at the same time embodies the characteristics of his own very original style.

The *Overture* opens with a series of strong heavy chords which give the impression of stern implacability. Breaks in the last bars of a three-four movement are filled by the roll of kettle-drums. A very expressive melody – the epic introduction to the *Overture* – which grows into a tempestuous allegro, is written for strings.

