

performance had remarkable clarity and rhythmic vitality. But even more valuable than its precision and dash was the retention of its simplicity, the peasant and folk character, which is the fundamental aspect of the work. Ramuz, in contrast to his predecessors in the speaker's place, did not dramatize or sentimentalize his part but spoke in narrative fashion without being less dramatic or expressive. As rarely before, the secret links between the text out of Russian folklore and the music inspired by Russian folksong were revealed.

Several works by Martinu and Britten were given premieres in both Geneva and Basle on the same evening. Martinu, closely bound to his country in work and in feeling, emerges more and more clearly as the heir of the great Czech masters, Smetana, Dvorak and Janacek. His recent scores possess maturity and power of expression and reveal surprising progress. The *Tre Ricercari* for chamber orchestra which had its premiere at the Venice biennial was broadcast by Ansermet over the Swiss radio. The original instrumentation (flute, two oboes, two bassoons and two trumpets, two pianos and three groups of violins and violoncellos) is matched by the style of this splendid score, which combines balance of construction with dramatic force. Still more important seemed the *Concerto* for string orchestra, piano and kettledrums (manuscript) written for Paul Sacher and his orchestra which recorded another success for the composer in Basle. Benjamin Britten's two works have already been discussed in MODERN MUSIC; Geneva heard the *Sinfonietta* for small orchestra (1935), Basle, the new cycle, *Les Illuminations*.

Arno Huth

NEW WORKS AT THE COOLIDGE FESTIVAL

THE ninth festival of chamber music of the Coolidge Foundation was held at the Library of Congress on April twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth last. Those who came to listen to the music bear with them fresh reminder that music patronage in the grand manner, increasingly rare in our day, still survives in this unique combination of Private Wealth and National Government.

With exception of the program of American works, which was a homogeneous and well-balanced whole, the theory of the "mixed" style of program-making ruled, i.e., works of living and dead composers about balanced each other in each concert.

Readers of MODERN MUSIC will be interested primarily in hearing something of the premieres. I shall take them up here one by one.

MALIPIERO – *Quattro vecchi canzoni* (1940), for voice and seven instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, viola, double-bass). It may be that the fine, hard-hitting singing of Mr. Hardesty Johnson gave these four settings a directness, a continuity and solidity of texture that was surprising to one who has not found in the past much to admire in this composer. However that may be, a fine voice part is well-supported by the unusual instrumentation, in which the viola and bass parts were outstanding – and outstandingly played under the excellent direction of Hans Kindler. The composition deserves wider hearing – especially the fourth song, *Grifon, lupi, leon* (Boccaccio).

PIZZETTI – *Epithalamium* (1940), cantata for soprano, tenor, baritone and mixed chorus and chamber orchestra (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, kettle-drum, percussion, harp, celesta, and usual strings). A lively, uneven work, with some high spots (especially in the tenor aria) and some low ones (in the orchestral and choral parts).

One reflects, with some curiosity, upon the significance of compositions beginning with flute solos. There were three of them on this first program: Loeffler, Malipiero, Pizzetti. All three introduced settings of verse of remote authors. With the *Après-midi* and the *Sacre* in mind, one comes to feel the flute solo is almost a label to inform the audience it is about to be wafted to another world and (incidentally) to political, economic and socialite safety. The music of both Italians is, however, strictly twentieth century. Is the label perhaps a camouflage? And does it deceive?

Twentieth century settings (musical commentaries) upon texts five hundred to two thousand years old are a curious custom. The esthetic anomaly is one thing. The almost complete submergence of the text in an avalanche of commentary is another. The scholastic's rivulet of text and meadow of commentary could at least be contemplated one after the other. But our musical scholasticism gives us both at once, to the almost complete obliteration and, often, distortion of the original verse. –To continue:

FITELBERG – *Sonata for Two Violins and Two Pianos* (1938). A highly interesting and thematically well-knit work, for a fine combination of instruments. The basic material consists of a reiteration – three or more times – of a single tone. Reminiscence of the "Knock of Fate" is successfully avoided – no mean feat. The texture is consistently and implacably

harsh and biting. Of the "mosaic" type of composition, it is not sectionalized to death, nor does it go in for fancy effects. It has a fine irresistible movement throughout. Though thoroughly academic in idiom, it probably evoked more painful reactions than any piece played at the festival. It was virtually a statement that the sweetness and light of the academic tradition has been all worked out, leaving only the gall and bitterness. Out of that a composition has been made that will stand, I feel, some scrutiny.

HARRIS – *Viola Quintet* (1940). One is always tempted to say of Harris "Well, he's coming on!" Each new piece one hears seems to represent a welcome progress. The admirable intentions, the seriousness, the diligent working of harmonic and contrapuntal detail, must be granted. This particular work especially commands respect for its daring "Grand Fugue." Yet at the same time one may ask, does Harris not hold himself back by this hankering ever to try on once more the giant's robe? Does it not keep him over-bound to a past really incongruous with his announced – and clearly attempted – achievement of an American musical idiom? The fiddle-tune with which he opens the work, as also the unregenerately Gallic ostinato at the beginning of the third movement, is lost – as I feel all his expositions eventually are – in an amorphous kind of *durchführung* which he seems to think he has to write in order to be a great composer. Harris is not a brilliant orchestrator, even for string quintet. And it is in the development of thematic material that the severest demands are made on orchestrational and dramatic technic. Some people have suggested that the flat, dull type of development is purposeful. It is with Henry Cowell. But with Harris? It is hard to believe.

BEREZOWSKY – *Sextet for Three Violins, Two Violas and Violoncello*, Opus 26 (1940). This reviewer has felt for some time that Berezowsky is one of the most brilliant writers for string chamber ensembles of our day. Up to now, he seems to be tied with Bartok in ability to pull one fizzing, popping, sizzling effect after another out of a hat explored by the best magicians for about one hundred and fifty years. But in this sextet he seems to have restrained somewhat the almost tyrannous exuberance of his virtuosity and gives us a composition which, though intransigently sectional in character, has something of the architectonic, in that the orchestrational effects spring not merely from one section into another, but from the whole preceding series of sections. In other words, what

happens in section six, let us say, seems organically to grow out of the sequence one to four, through sections five and six, and on into seven and what comes after. This is high tribute, especially in a day when compositions are always falling apart in the hands of the players and, so to speak, having to be put together again as if they had not collapsed. But it must be understood this tribute is based upon only one hearing and is concerned chiefly with the esthetic effect *per se*. Perhaps it would not be supported by more leisurely study of melodic organization. Let us say, however, Berezowsky seems to have here in the way of *form*, what I wish Harris had more of (though I am not sure but that Harris has not a *content* of a more weighty sort).

I hope I have not, in the fashion of reviewers, gone off the deep end in this very cursory accounting. It is something of a stunt for an anti-pigone such as I have come to be, to say anything at all about a collection of works all of which, I feel, tend to keep alive beyond its day a style of composition suffering from serious dislocations both in technical organization and in social function. Of course, a realistic attitude toward any cultural phenomenon, be it politics, economics or art, must allow that there have always been, are, and probably always will be reactionaries, conservatives, liberals and radicals in each field, and that the equation between the various pulls and pushes of each results in "what happens." What would alarm me in any situation would be the too weak representation of any one type of viewpoint. Our musical radicals were routed almost a decade ago. And now our liberals lean strongly to conservatism, and our conservatives to reaction. All agree, I think, that if new ideas, new methods and new objectives are not *originated within* the field of music, we may expect they may be *impelled from without*. Most of us are, I take it, for gradual progress. But impelling from without tends to catastrophe. And catastrophe is often very unpleasant. It sometimes loses centuries of time (or appears to). But it can – and as we have seen in Germany does – happen.

That is why I would like to say to Harris, Berezowsky and other Americans (for they are the only ones who might conceivably listen): how about a simpler and more direct idiom, a twentieth century instrumentation, and, in general, shorter hair? Music, one may say, is so small an element in culture that such effort would not count for anything. I am not so sure. At any rate, the best most of us can do must be done within the fields we work in. But that is something!

Distribution of music through radio, sound-film and phonograph has immeasurably increased not only the number of listeners but also the number of people spurred on to make music for themselves. New handlings of both folk and popular music have resulted; but new composition of fine art music lags. I would be the last to oppose or deprecate the *recherché* in music. But I would like to see a few of our best composers turn to some other field than that of the small, select concert audience. Music occupies about sixty per cent of radio time alone. American composers of fine art music scarcely figure in this. Is this because European masters freeze them out? Not entirely. It is also because they do not yet write the music America wants to hear.

Charles Seeger

BOSTON PREMIERES

ALATE, cold New England spring has been redeemed, east of the Connecticut, by a torrent of new music bearing a handful of premieres upon its polyphonic flood. Dr. Koussevitzky has produced Hindemith's new *Violin Concerto* and Prokofieff's *Cello Concerto* for the first times in America, given the first performances of Edward Burlingame Hill's new *Concertino for String Orchestra*, repeated Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony, and brought Koutzen's *Concerto for Five Solo Instruments and String Orchestra* and Szymanowski's *Symphonie Concertante for Piano and Orchestra* to Boston for "first times." Stravinsky, conducting his sixth work with the Boston Symphony this season, reintroduced *Oedipus Rex* to a justly admiring public.

Bernard Zighera introduced Prokofieff's *Sinfonietta* (Opus 5 and Opus 48) at a concert of his Chamber Orchestra and discovered a work much in the style of the *Classical Symphony* but without its inspiration and dexterity. The *Cello Concerto* has been reviewed from New York, and its vapid lengths need not detain me here. Similarly, Boris Koutzen's *Concerto* may be dismissed as an unsuccessful attempt which never draws animate breath; Szymanowski's *Symphony*, rich in fine musical material, becomes an exercise in *pasticcio* of styles and sonorities. Hill's new *Concertino* is a slight score, requiring hardly more than a dozen minutes for its three brief movements, yet it is alert, eager music, full of vigor and that elusive quality we know as charm. As always, the composer's workmanship is impeccable, his scoring expert, his material suitable to the point of distinction. This is music that is scholarly without being cerebral; it is keenly