

certs, which gave Prague the first chance to hear Soviet music. Shostakovitch's *Fifth Symphony*, considered in his country to be his best achievement, was a disappointment. It fails to reach the monumentality and inner expressive power of the "*Leninград*" *Symphony* or the sparkling wit and humor of the *Ninth Symphony*. But we were surprised by Kachaturian's *Piano Concerto*, with its entirely individual harmonic scheme, its neat use of popular melodies and Oriental rhythms, combined in a severe form.

The real peak of the festival, however, was reached in the French concerts under Charles Münch. Honegger's *Symphony* for string orchestra, composed in 1941, was, for its form, its full-bodied string texture, its invention and elaboration, the finest of contemporary works performed at any concert. Very remarkable also was the program of quarter-tone music, at which compositions by Haba and his pupils were played.

The closing evening of music, during which Firkusny performed Dvorak's *Piano Concerto*, was broadcast into Prague's streets because of the public's immense interest. This was the festive termination of the first peacetime display of the world's artistic efforts for us. In varying form, it will be repeated in Prague every year.

O. F. Korte

MODERNISM REVIVED IN ENGLAND

London, June 1946

THE first thing which strikes anyone returning to London after an absence of some time is the enormous increase in musical activity. Nearly twice as many concerts are being given here as before the war. Further experience however shows that, while the popular demand for music has certainly increased, the standard of performance has not always been maintained. Too many public concerts are presented with inadequate rehearsal, under mediocre conductors, and many of the new orchestras merely consist of different combinations of the same players. The loss of the Queen's Hall through bombing leaves only one orchestral concert room, the Albert Hall, which owing to its size and acoustic qualities is more suitable for circuses or boxing matches than music. As a result many concerts are now being given in theatres, which are not always adequate acoustically and in any case are only available on Sundays. The majority of these programs too follow the usual routine of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and little else. Nevertheless conditions have improved a good deal in the last year or so, and the visits of a number of distinguished foreign artists both from Europe and America have done much to encourage enterprise. In fact London music has become international again for the first time since 1939.

The composer who has chiefly come into the public eye here during

the war is Benjamin Britten. His *Peter Grimes* is the first English opera to have made a real success with the public, and, a year after the premiere still draws packed houses. Britten's second opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*, is due to open the Glyndebourne Festival. This is written for a small cast without chorus (who are replaced by two singer-narrators) and chamber orchestra.

Michael Tippett has also aroused attention with his *Symphony 1945*, and his oratorio, *A Child of Our Time*, on a theme suggested by the shooting of the German Counsellor vom Rath in Paris in 1938 by a Polish Jewish boy and the ensuing anti-Jewish pogroms in Germany. In this work Negro spirituals are introduced somewhat in the manner of the chorales in the Bach Passions, but their diatonic harmonization does not fit well with the chromatic character of the rest of the work.

Many English composers have been very much handicapped by war work. Vaughan Williams has written little except occasional music since his *Fifth Symphony*, and Arnold Bax's chief contribution has been a *Violin Concerto*, commissioned by the BBC (which did a lot to keep modern music alive during the war). Walton has been very much occupied with music for both government and feature films, including *Henry V*, but he has also written a successful ballet, *The Quest*, after Edmund Spenser, for the Sadler's Wells company. Bliss has composed two ballets, *Miracle in the Gorbals*, a story of Glasgow slum life, and *Adam Zero*, on an expressionist theme, for the same performers; and Constant Lambert has been too occupied with the musical direction of this very successful ballet company to spare much time for his own composition. Alan Rawsthorne served in the army and wrote music for a number of army films and, more recently, a gay and successful overture, *Cortèges*; Alan Bush was also in the army and has written a *Symphony in C* which is well spoken of. E. J. Moeran has composed a *Violin Concerto*, a *Sinfonietta* and a *Cello Concerto*. All have had a number of performances and achieved a good deal of success. Now that conditions are gradually becoming more normal there is no doubt that English music will get back into its stride soon.

Performances of contemporary works were rare during the war, but are beginning to increase again. Boosey and Hawkes ran an ambitious series of chamber concerts at which works by Schönberg and Bartok, (also performed by the BBC Orchestra and at last year's Promenade Concerts) were featured, as they were in another set of concerts with chamber orchestra conducted by Edward Clark last winter. The BBC has carried on a monthly series called "Music of Our Time" which has introduced many new works. In the latest of these, Constant Lambert played *Grünwald*, a symphonic poem by the Polish composer Maklakiewicz written under very difficult conditions during the German occupation of his coun-

try. It celebrates a medieval Polish victory over the Teutonic Knights, and is an effective battle piece somewhat in the manner of Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht*. Two overtures were also played, Szalowski's amusing piece and Hindemith's ballet overture, *Cupid and Psyche*. Finally the English section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, formerly a war casualty, has now revived and is giving a series of chamber concerts while it prepares actively for the ISCM Festival in July.

From all this several conclusions emerge. Popular interest in modern music has definitely increased during the war, though to nothing like the extent of the now widespread interest in the older classical music. Nevertheless some composers, particularly those like Britten whose style is not too complex to understand, have achieved a definite popular following. Interest in the more difficult styles is still confined to a comparative minority, but even here it is growing, and Bartok, for instance, has at last begun to come into his own with the general public. Lack of concert halls and shortage of labor for printing are still handicapping performances and publication. But the increasing exchanges of performers and new works with those of other countries should have an important effect on the future of English music.

Humphrey Searle

ITALY THROWS OFF FASCISM

Florence, May 1946

IF the American public has been for many years little or ill-informed about the state of contemporary music in Italy, the same might be said of the Italians themselves, had we based our knowledge on our daily papers. The quality of journalistic criticism deteriorated during the years of dictatorship to an almost grotesque point. A few isolated critics of good faith (Andrea Della Corte, to name one of them) could do little to oppose the multitude of bankrupt musicians whose "criticism" at times brought terror to its victims, at others even resulted in extortion. Helpless too was the *Rassegna Musicale*, edited by Guido M. Gatti, one review which tried to keep free of political influence, to maintain its ideals without compromise.

The Florentine Musical May of 1939 included the first performance of Vito Frazzi's *King Lear*, which was received with general approval. The next day, in *Popolo d'Italia* (Mussolini's own newspaper) the critic Alceo Toni angrily attacked the composer for daring to put on the stage a situation so divergent from the theoretical Fascist conception of a "model family." A year later my own *Night Flight* (based on an excerpt from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) was presented. And the same critic thundered, "What low altitude for a work of today. . . . Are we to send our aviators to see it, to tone up their nerve and kindle their enthusiasm?"