

The *Stabat Mater* by Virgil Thomson, for soprano and string quartet, which was admirably sung by Mrs. Ada MacLeish, is, as music, only vaguely impressive. The vocal phrases, ranging from the sentimental to the trite or merely inept, and the accompaniment, with its purposeless meandering, its loose counterpoint whose strands begin at no particular point and break off for no particular reason, and the haphazard sequence of tonalities, all combine to give the air of a piece of "automatic writing." Indeed, its very quality of vague impressiveness reminds one of some Ouija board production—the best, say, of an evening's batch, preserved from the fire to show to one's friends the next day.

The three songs by Vivian Fine, the most "advanced" offering of the evening, with accompaniments scored for one, two, and four stringed instruments respectively, are elaborate and sticky. It is not against their atonality that one protests, since much effective music, no less atonal than this, has been written, but against their total absence of movement.

The *Andante Molto Tranquillo* for string quartet, by Israel Citkowitz, is remarkable for the fervent, sustained and singing quality of its line. Though lacking in a certain freedom—the flow is perhaps too even, too constant in density—it is effective as quartet writing, revealing in the composer an intimate awareness of the quality of sound in which he embodies his thought. In this respect it compares favorably with the quartet by Mark Wessel, for, with all the latter's superior resourcefulness and scope in instrumentation, one feels his relation to the living realm of sound to be somewhat abstract, where the other is fairly steeped in it; remote and condescending, where Citkowitz communes closely.

Theodore Chanler

THE GAIETY AND SADNESS OF HARRIS*

THE first performance of the *Overture from the Gaiety and Sadness of the American Scene* by Roy Harris in Los Angeles on December 29, 1932, aroused an excitement in the audience and in the press which is easily understood—the work is exciting in the extreme! That it provides excitement while

*This is the first of a series of reviews of new works by the conductors who introduce them which will appear in *Modern Music* from time to time. Mr. Nicolas Slonimsky gave Mr. Harris' music its premiere with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.—Ed.

preserving an almost academic purity of form is characteristic of Roy Harris as composer. I have drawn a chart of the *Overture*, using a mixed system of musical stenography, marking harmonies and poly-harmonies, contrapuntal developments and metrical changes in parallel columns. Thus dissected, the *Overture* appeared magnificently consistent, a satisfying, fitting jigsaw puzzle, with the eight-bar period as a unit. The main subject, which is our old favorite, "When Johnny comes marching home," is presented by the trombone in the tempo of a funeral march (and marked as such by the composer), which mitigates the feeling of an obvious quotation. The same subject, in the pizzicato of the basses and cellos, serves as foundation to the most romantic display of cantilena in the upper strings ever to grace a modern score. The whole episode is so treated in linear writing. If the vital, pulsating rhythms of the following section, with wood-winds shrieking on top notes at unperiodic intervals, remind some of the inevitable *Sacre*, it may be due to the common error of judgment, "post hoc, ergo propter hoc." But the F# minor phrase, built in the regularly diminishing and augmenting meters, four, five, four, three etc., is peculiarly Harrisian. Here his rhythm is the function of his melody, and harmony is the function of tonality . . . Hence the vitality of his music. It "gets" the listener, still more it gets the performer. During the rehearsal period, I began to hear the poignant thirds of Harris' trumpets in the newsboys' shouting of a current murder,—a parlous state.

Nicolas Slonimsky

GERMAN SEASON UNDER THE CRISIS

CULTURAL affairs in Germany are being forced daily into an ever more dangerous dependence on social and political forces. As is now well known the official German policy on culture since the summer of 1932, has been to war on all vanguard tendencies, particularly on "cultural bolshevism," today the favorite slogan by which are denoted all progressive tendencies in modern art and science. Modern painting, whether by Van Gogh, Picasso or George Grosz; architecture with flat roofs; the literature of large cities; pacifist poetry; atonal music; jazz