

decidedly in the nature of a resurrection. It had been over-promoted in 1928, talked into a too blinding light of public attention—and at the same time talked into oblivion. The piece had deserved something better than it got.

Reviving it, the composer combined able leadership with an inflammatory zeal and obvious conviction that were irresistible. The orchestra responded with eloquence, the audience with cheers. The savants, holding their post-mortem, defended Mr. Bloch as an uncanny craftsman, but rejected with distaste his choice of material. He quite forfeited their approval when, at the end, after building up his sound structure and his theme to an expected apotheosis, he revealed instead what was merely a good pedestrian tune. Perhaps Mr. Bloch would have stood more chance with the knowing ones, if he had not misled them by putting "Epic" on the cover, and sprinkling every page with ringing quotations from Whitman. Literal people (and most people are too literal) looked for a corresponding nobility in the music, and were let down. If he had let it pass as just a rhapsody, *America* would probably not have been cut off in its infancy. As a stirring rhapsody, with no more pretensions than that modest term implies, it might have had a healthy life span, as rhapsodies go.

John N. Burk

CHICAGO MOVES FORWARD

THE season of 1938-39 has provided Chicago audiences with the most varied experience in contemporary music of past years. Already there is much new curiosity about the cross-currents of modern music. Criticism for their stereotyped programs is now being directed at the firmly intrenched annual North-Western Festival and other less important but equally unprogressive musical institutions. On the other hand the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, formerly the city's principal stronghold of conservatism, has this year broadened its horizon enormously. It is obviously making a serious attempt to keep abreast of the times.

No less than seven new works in concerto form received Chicago premieres. One of these, the second piano concerto of Bela

Bartok, was given for the first time in America by Storm Bull, who had studied both piano and composition with Bartok. Ernst Krenek appeared as soloist in his second piano concerto, admittedly beyond the comprehension of most of the audience. Some who felt they understood it also felt the concert to be weak in formal construction. Must a work turn its back on all semblance of rhythmic unity, because the twelve-tone scale constitutes a denial of tonal unity? The melodic material was so continuously broken up into little three- and four-note fragments that the concerto seemed to lack both continuity and driving power. Krenek won a better response with his suite from the music to Goethe's *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*. Another atonal work, the *Violin Concerto* of Alban Berg, played by Louis Krassner, made a great success. The Lutheran chorale in the last movement offered the audience a connecting link with their previous musical experience; then too, Berg's style and his musical ideas seemed less episodic and erratic, more emotionally meaningful.

The concerto for string quartet and orchestra by Bohuslav Martinu done with the Pro-Arte Quartet, revealed great lyric warmth in its slow movement but sounded in the faster sections more like a pot-boiler than his quintet or sextet. Marcel Poot's *Ballade* for string quartet and orchestra, a strange distillation of César Franck and European music-hall jazz, maintained a quality of easy-going vulgarity which unfortunately proved quite popular. Finally there was the organ concerto of Leo Sowerby, brilliantly played by E. Power Biggs. Mr. Sowerby's musical outlook remains highly tinged with romanticism despite a conscientious effort to spice up his style with a large number of altered chords. The concerto had a certain feeling of musical genuineness, but it suffered from the strain of rising to too many climaxes.

Other novelties included David Van Vactor's prize-winning *Symphony in D*, a work of mixed power and immaturity; the neo-medieval *Mass in G-minor* by Vaughan Williams, sung with exquisite restraint by the Northwestern A Capella Choir; the closing movement of Malipiero's *Saint Francis of Assisi*, equally well done by the Harvard Glee Club; Miasowsky's *Fifteenth Symphony*, a bromidic descent into a style the composer hoped would be popular; *Hymns on Four Gregorian Melodies* by Karl

Höller, evidently one of the most promising young talents in modern Germany; and Arnold Schönberg's curious and unplayable orchestration of the Brahms G-minor piano quartet.

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The Illinois Symphony, which is the WPA orchestra that has achieved deserved national prominence under the exceptionally gifted direction of Izler Solomon, peppered its weekly programs with novelties from far and near. Notable was the first Chicago performance of Roussel's craftsmanlike *Fourth Symphony* and two items by Shostakovitch — the *Fifth Symphony* and the ballet music from *The Golden Age*. A significant WPA undertaking last month was the program of first performances of chamber works by Chicago composers — Elizabeth Carpenter Marshall, David Van Vactor, Harrington Shortall, and Florian Mueller. The Mueller string quartet was probably the best of the lot although it suffers from a style derived from too many different novelties.

This year the University of Chicago also makes a contribution in the field of modern music. Under the sponsorship of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, the Kolisch quartet is to play a May cycle coupling the five quartets of Bela Bartok with the last by Beethoven. In February, the University Orchestra and Choir gave the American premiere of Hindemith's cantata, *Exhortation to Youth To Apply Itself To The Study of Music*, drawn from the *Plöner Musiktag*. The schedule also includes the first Chicago performance of the Fauré requiem. A recent piano duet recital by Nadia Boulanger and Jean Françaix brought us our first glimpse of Françaix' neat talent in a performance of his *Concertino*.

Both the Saidenberg Symphonietta, now in its fourth season, and the recently organized Hans Lange chamber orchestra, have unearthed a number of small works. Saidenberg's group presented the *Fourth Symphony* of Darius Milhaud and gave Emanuel Feuermann an opportunity to play Hindemith's *Cello Sonata*. The Lange group included Ernest Bloch's *Four Episodes* and the world premiere of Florian Mueller's *Small Symphony in E*. Other items of interest have been scattered through the music schedule, the Ballet Russe in Hindemith's *Saint Francis*,

and Jerome Moross' *Guns and Castanets* which provided Ruth Page's federal ballet with a modernization of Bizet's *Carmen*. This might have been a thoroughly good theatre score had he been willing to finish the orchestration himself. If the progress made this year is continued, there is still hope that the city may become a vital and progressive musical center.

Cecil Michener Smith

JACOBI'S CONCERTO

Early in March the Chicago Symphony gave the premiere of Frederick Jacobi's *Violin Concerto*, with the distinguished aid of Albert Spalding. The work made a decidedly fine impression. It is divided into three movements, *Allegro con spirito*, *Andante sostenuto*, and *Rondo, Allegretto giocoso* which are played without pause. It has a well sustained feeling of continuity and a spirited melodiousness rare in these days. Three well conceived themes, the principal motifs, are linked together in closely woven harmonic patterns. (Spalding has written a final cadenza which skillfully matches Jacobi's idiom.) As a whole the *Concerto* is most impressive for the solidity of its construction and the well rounded exposition of its material. The effect of clarity is not however the result of facile simplicity. The work presents some difficulties for performers and the composer was indebted, on this occasion, to a splendid interpretation.

René Devries

NEW MUSIC FOR PHILADELPHIA

THE last three weeks gave Philadelphia more contemporary music than all the rest of the season. The contemporary crop had consisted chiefly of the belated first Philadelphia performance of Samuel Barber's *Symphony in One Movement*, and the *St. Francis* ballet of Hindemith. During February, Mr. Enesco arrived with his own *Symphony in E \flat* and minor works by Dragoi and Lipatti which he had introduced previously in other cities on his itinerary. Then Mlle. Boulanger brought along the Franaix *Concerto* and the Szalowski overture which seem to have been a regular part of her tour repertory. Things began