

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, CHICAGO STYLE

ARRESTING new works still continue to come to Chicago at such widely spaced intervals that each gives a new shock to the nervous organism of this cautious musical community. If the taste of orchestra patrons is an index of local appreciation, the full-blown, oratorical works of the late romantic period make up the repertory that can be most spontaneously enjoyed and understood. Gliere's spread-eagle third symphony, *Ilia Mourometz*, which is played nowhere but here, or Dohnanyi's *Suite for Orchestra*, Opus 19, never fail to win that public approbation which is withheld say, from Stravinsky's *Jeu de Cartes*.

However, as it approaches its fiftieth season (next year), the Chicago Symphony orchestra has made a move to keep abreast of the time. When Frederick Stock visited Europe just before the outbreak of the war, he induced several prominent composers to promise scores in celebration of the golden jubilee. Whether or not international conditions will permit their completion and delivery remains to be seen. Commissions have been awarded to Miaskowsky, Gliere, Casella, Kodaly, Milhaud and William Walton, and, rumor now says, even Stravinsky. The orchestra is also holding a contest (which closes July 1) for one or more new scores, not to exceed twenty minutes in length, by American composers; any that are performed during the season will be awarded modest cash prizes. Already there are some two hundred entrants.

During the present Symphony season Stravinsky appeared as guest conductor for one week, bringing *Jeu de Cartes* to the city for the first time, but otherwise restricting himself to *L'Oiseau de Feu*, *Petrouchka*, and the second and third symphonies of Tchaikovsky. The third, incidentally, was a Chicago premiere! Prokofieff could not, of course, fulfill his American commitments this year, but Dr. Stock went ahead with *Peter and the Wolf* anyway, presenting the work with high humor and a mastery of all the implications of the score.

Aside from these fairly obvious premieres, the most important venture of the Orchestra was the first American performance of the first symphony of Vano Muradeli. The composer, a pupil of Miaskowsky and Gliere, is a Georgian, from Stalin's own territory, and said to be highly favored by the Russian leader. The symphony is not very new in content, but it bears many marks of distinguished talent. Following the recent trend of Miaskowsky, in response to the demand that new music be made intelligible

to the mass public, Muradeli has employed a style and a symphonic structure not far removed from Glazounov's. The work served to announce the advent upon the scene of a well-groomed craftsman, and to arouse some wonder as to the direction he may follow when he arrives at artistic maturity.

The Illinois Symphony orchestra, conducted by gifted young Izler Solomon, was saved from the wreckage of the WPA projects last summer, and continues to function in stimulating fashion under state supervision. While its contribution of first rank novelties has not been large during the present season, this orchestra is Chicago's best example of the value of an open mind, and of the capacity of an experimental organization to attract a continuing and enthusiastic audience.

Among American works, Roger Sessions' new *Concerto for Violin* represented this orchestra's most significant contribution. Robert Gross of Colorado Springs played the solo part. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the performance, and so must report on it only from hearsay. Evidently the *Concerto* was admired more, on the whole, than it was understood. I heard enthusiastic words for its disdain of obvious and easy mannerisms, its concentration upon integrated, if rather stern, linear construction, and its resourceful idiom for the solo instrument. If the proof of the pudding is in the audience's response, then the fact should be noted that Mr. Gross was warmly received and recalled several times. . . . I was also forced to miss one other Illinois Symphony premiere, that of Benjamin Britten's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, Opus 13, with the composer playing the piano part. The piece was generally regarded by my fellow-reviewers as light and rather frolicsome stuff, full of good humor, but as no torch blazing new trails.

Of the Illinois Symphony novelties which I did hear, there were several which in various ways, were interesting: Poulenc's *Concert Champêtre* for piano and orchestra, brightly neo-classical in its first two movements and running to uninspired dullness in the finale; Milhaud's brilliantly scored and organized *Suite Provençale*; Honegger's *Nocturne*, a sort of jaded reworking of the formula of *Pastorale d'Eté*; Pizzetti's high-spirited and folksy *Rondo Veneziano*, and, if you like easy pabulum, Emile Blanchet's *Concert Piece* for piano and orchestra. Minor American efforts of the season included Radie Britain's *Southern Symphony*, Leo Kopp's *Six Sketches of St. Paul* (the city, not the apostle) and Ernst Bacon's second symphony.

These two orchestras do not naturally, hold a monopoly upon novelties. A few other premieres have been worthy of notice: Pizzetti's *Canti della Stagione Alta*, for piano and orchestra (Woman's Symphony Orchestra, Izler Solomon, conductor, with the late Alexander Kelberine as soloist); Weinberger's *Variations and Fugue on an Old English Theme* (Mr. Barbirolli and the Philharmonic-Symphony orchestra; later repeated by Dr. Stock); Bernard Rogers' *The Supper at Emmaus* and Otto Luening's *Prelude on a Hymn Tune by William Billings* (both by the Civic Orchestra, Hans Lange, conductor); Leo Sowerby's *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra*, decidedly one of his best conceived recent works (Saidenberg Symphonietta, Daniel Saidenberg, conductor); Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's frothy and disappointing *Four Movements for Piano and Strings* (played by the composer with the Saidenberg Symphonietta). Also for purposes of record, it should be noted that the Chicago Symphony orchestra gave the first Chicago performances of Bruckner's *First Symphony* and Busoni's *Concerto for Piano and Male Chorus*, with Egon Petri assisting brilliantly in the latter.

Cecil Michener Smith

VILLA-LOBOS IN WASHINGTON

OF the few new works presented to Washington this season, most notable perhaps was Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Momo Precoce* for piano and orchestra given its first North American performance by Guiomar Novaes and the National Symphony Orchestra. This brilliant and engaging fantasy, built upon themes from a previous piano suite, is a series of short tone-pictures connected by ingenious cadenzas for the solo instrument which also has a highly important part in the texture of timbres. The music describes a typical Brazilian festival, the Carnival of Children, which lasts for three days in Rio de Janeiro and other centers under the auspices of Momus, the god of merrymakers. Taking advantage of the license of his subject, the composer disports himself with humorous instrumentation. The work displays, as outstanding characteristics, an amalgam of naivete (in theme and rhythms) and sophistication (in harmony and scoring); also a very original treatment of the piano. This remarkable pianistic writing demands virtuosic qualities. Although *Momo Precoce* pleased with its breeziness and scintillance, it did not leave so deep a musical impression as did Villa-Lobos' *Third String Quartet* which had an invitation performance at Dumbarton Oaks, the home of Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss. To