

*Rhapsody in Blue.*

New also to London audiences was the performance this past winter in Albert Hall of Marc Blitzstein's orchestral *Freedom Song*, written for the concert given by a choral group taken from a company of American Negro Engineers stationed in Britain. *Freedom Song* is an effective, vigorous piece. It is Blitzstein's first purely orchestral work in a number of years. It is remarkably successful in sounding just like the Blitzstein of the stage works, and yet, though immensely dramatic, it is convincing as a piece of absolute music.

Franz Osborn put on an excellent performance of the Copland *Piano Sonata* in Wigmore Hall last month. Though he failed to give the Scherzo the percussive, highly rhythmical quality which, like so much of Copland's music, it demands, I've never heard the ending played more beautifully. The critics were not too impressed but the reaction of the audience was cordial, if not demonstrative.

Vaughan Williams and Elgar, Benjamin Britten and William Walton, are the most played of the English composers. Britten certainly is the pet of the critics, and I can't imagine what would happen if one of them should decide to pan any of his pieces – certainly nothing short of a mass protest. Gerald Finzi's *Five Shakespeare Songs*, heard at Wigmore Hall in a beautiful performance by Robert Irwin, no doubt were well written, but one cannot deny their almost anti-contemporary quality.

The most interesting work I have heard in the last few weeks remains the Prokofiev *Seventh Piano Sonata* which had its first performance here by Frank Merrick.

Does this give you some idea of London's musical life? I hope so.

Most sincerely,

Gail Kubik

## COMPOSERS TO CHICAGO

**A**LTHOUGH they did not fare particularly well earlier in the winter, American composers had the final word in the Chicago musical season. Works by Aaron Copland, Remi Gassmann, and Virgil Thomson made up the last program in the new series of Composers' Concerts instituted this year by the University of Chicago.

Of particular value to Chicago was Copland's performance of his *Piano Sonata*. Except for single hearings of the *First Symphony* and the *Outdoor Overture*, the public here has known him only by music associated

with ballets, plays, and motion pictures. The seriousness of his *Piano Sonata* was at once apparent to the audience, and the range of his interests was effectively set forth by contrast with the new suite of *Music for Movies*, which received its first concert performance on this occasion. The sonata is impressive for structural cohesion and freedom from superfluous decorative or rhetorical details; it would be possible to argue, however, that the harmonic plan is on the whole rather static, and lacks the tension and development to provide a wholly adequate substratum for a telling deployment of the melodic and rhythmic materials. *Music for Movies*, drawn from scores already familiar through *The City, Our Town*, and *Of Mice and Men*, provides a model of economical craftsmanship and appropriateness seldom approached by Hollywood artisans, and has evocative lyric beauties in the slow sections.

Gassmann, whose music is not yet known in the East, was represented by his *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano* (1934), and his *Three Love Lyrics from Whitman*. A student of Paul Hindemith for six years, Gassmann has obtained a command over the problems of structure and dynamic continuity which is outstanding among American composers. The violoncello sonata, though by no means devoid of vigor and force, is remarkable for the directness and eloquence of its melodic materials, which consistently bear the marks of creative individuality without unnatural or forced idiosyncrasies. The sonata profits from its composer's understanding of the ways in which Hindemith achieves both cohesiveness and succinctness. The three Whitman songs, not always written with spontaneous sympathy for the vocalist, are likewise basically and spontaneously melodic. Their orchestral accompaniment is accomplished with an instinct for clarity and appositeness of timbres, both singly and in discreet combinations, which reminds me – the composer will be deeply irritated to learn – of nobody so much as Gustav Mahler.

Thomson, when consulted about possible works for this program, indicated that he would like to resurrect his *Sonata da Chiesa* (1925), inasmuch as it had not previously been played in America. This was therefore paired on the program with the *Stabat Mater* for soprano voice and string quartet (played, because the players were students without a great abundance of tone, by a small string ensemble). The *Sonata da Chiesa*, written in an ironic style of self-conscious dissonant simplicity, consists of a Chorale, a Tango (employing a characteristically modern dance form in place of a traditionally seventeenth century one) and a Fugue – really a double fugue. The Chorale proved to be much too long to sustain interest.

The tango and the eccentric fugue were blither musical fare, since their proportions were more aptly calculated. In the *Stabat Mater* (1931), Thomson achieves a touching expressiveness, and succeeds in compressing an effective dramatic scene, set with exemplary prosodic freedom and flow, into five or six minutes.

The third of the four concerts was given over wholly to music by Paul Hindemith. Its signal event was the world premiere of *Ludus Tonalis, Studies in Counterpoint, Tonal Organization and Piano Playing*. This monumental work, lasting forty-five minutes, was presented with spectacular technical resources and fine comprehension by Willard MacGregor. *Ludus Tonalis* consists of twelve fugues, one in each key of the chromatic scale, connected by interludes and preceded and followed by a Praeludium and a Postludium (which is the Praeludium backwards and upside down). In its scope and arrangement it may thus be compared to Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavichord*. On the purely technical level – both as an instance of a contrapuntal skill probably unequalled since Bach and as an investigation of the possibilities of the piano as a virtuoso instrument – the work is staggering, and deserves a special monograph. This aspect of Hindemith's powers probably surprises no one. But the depth of expressiveness and the variety of moods are qualities for which some, unaware of the continual ripening of Hindemith's musical personality in the last decade, may have been unprepared. The Hindemith program also included two of the composer's best sonatas, the gracious one for flute and the ebullient one for piano duet.

Igor Stravinsky provided the music, and part of the performance, in the second Composers' Concert. With Mr. MacGregor he played the *Concerto for Two Pianos*, a fine work which rests its case primarily upon the beauties of its construction rather than upon the employment of thematic materials which are alluring to a lay audience. John Weicher, concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, gave, with the composer, a superb performance of the *Duo Concertant*. Stravinsky also conducted the suite from *L'Histoire du soldat*, a work which still retains all its fascination and brilliance.

The ministrations of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, always planless and little directed toward encouragement of sound interest in contemporary music, were perhaps less conclusive than ever in the season just past. No undebated masterpieces were brought forward. With a few exceptions musical content and technical command were of equally tentative character. Desiré Defauw, the orchestra's new musical director, pre-

sented the following American works for the first time in Chicago: Carpenter, *Symphony Number 2*; Koutzen, *Valley Forge*; Kreutz, "Winter of the Blue Snow," from *Paul Bunyan Suite*; Deems Taylor, *Fantasy on Two Themes*, Opus 17. Hans Lange conducted the following works by resident American composers for the first time in Chicago: Helfer, *Overture, In Modo Giocoso*; Hindemith, *Cupid and Psyche*; Saminsky, *Three Shadows*; Shulman, *Theme and Variations for Solo Viola and Orchestra*; Wald, *The Dancer Dead*; Zador, *Biblical Triptych*. In the realm of recent European music, he unearthed Honegger's *Prelude to The Tempest* and von Webern's *Passacaglia*, Opus 1; Mr. Lange programmed the two Schönberg transcriptions of Bach chorale-preludes and, with the assistance of Isaac Stern, Szymanowski's second *Violin Concerto*. Defauw also brought the music of Respighi astonishingly back into the limelight; he treated Chicago all in one season to the luxury of *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, *Church Windows* and *The Birds*.

In February the School of Design ventured to present a program of modern music, summoning Ernst Krenek from St. Paul to play his carefully celebrated *Third Sonata for Piano* and to offer comments upon such other piano works (played by Felix Witzinger) as the Stravinsky *Sonata* (welcome after many years of neglect), immature works by Ross Lee Finney (*Fantasy*) and Carlos Chavez (*Three Pieces for Piano*), and inspirations of decidedly secondary order by Milhaud (*Four Sketches*) and Bohuslav Martinu (*Esquisses de Danses*). Except for the Krenek and Stravinsky works, the program left the impression that the composers were represented by pieces which were universally sub-standard in ideas and workmanship.

Horowitz played Prokofiev's *Seventh Sonata*, and John Kirkpatrick presented his American program of the Ives *Concord Sonata*, and works of lesser pretension. And this unhappily constitutes just about the full record of all that was done for contemporary music in Chicago in the season of 1943-1944.

Cecil Smith

## THE NEW WORKS AT ROCHESTER

THE fourteenth Rochester Festival of American music given in April by the forces of the Eastman School of Music under the direction of Howard Hanson, offered six programs. The abundance of music makes it possible to speak here only of the new works heard. There were five and