

## THE I. S. C. M. MEETS AT BARCELONA

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THE fourteenth Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music took place in Barcelona at the end of April. Thirty compositions, divided among six concerts, formed the nucleus of the festival; a special evening of Viennese composers and a final concert of Spaniards added sixteen more works to the week's total.

In the regular series there were three orchestral, one brass band and two chamber music concerts. The quota of compositions by country was as follows: Spain, six; Austria, six; the United States, three; France, three; Switzerland, two; Poland, two; England, two; Germany, Roumania, Sweden, Belgium, Hungary, Russia and Czechoslovakia one each.

As will be seen at a glance, the tenor of the festival was distinctly Austro-Spanish, quite in the manner of the old Hapsburg days. For some reason or other, German speaking people have long had an affinity with Castilians and Catalanians. We are not talking through our hat. Back in the sixteenth century, the Catalan composer Flecha was active at the court of the Emperor Maximilian II, Selma y Salaverde accepted service with the Archduke Charles at Graz in the seventeenth century, and Martin y Soler composed operas which ran for years in Austria of the eighteenth century. Besides, the famous waltz family of Strauss is supposed to have had Spanish ancestry. In short the cultural relations between the Spanish and German speaking peoples have been close during the last four hundred years. And in the twentieth century the tradition is continued by the Catalan, Robert Gerhard, who represents both Schönberg and the younger Spanish school of composers.

It is pleasant to have an International Festival which has a definite hue and is not too impersonally polyglot. Fortunate also was the combination of the International Society for Contemporary Music with the International Society for Musical Research. Compositions by Flecha, published at Prague in 1581, were performed by the celebrated Orfeo Catalans. Martin y Soler's delightful opera, *Una Cosa Rara*, written in Vienna to a libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte—later Professor of Italian at Columbia College, and also librettist of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (which incidentally incorporates a tune of *La Cosa Rara*)—was given, and given exquisitely, by a group of amateurs very similar to New York's Blue Hill Troupe.

The *Stimmung* or *Ambiente* was thus set for both Congresses. What were the modern works like? In the Austrian School, the names of Berg, Wellesz and Krenek were outstanding. None of the Viennese compromised with their theories, though the Spaniards were somewhat sentimental and retrospective.

Easily the outstanding work of the festival was Alban Berg's *Violin Concerto*, effortlessly played by Louis Krasner. It consists of two movements: Andante-Introduction, and Allegretto-Scherzo, and is in part a requiem for the untimely death of a young girl belonging to the composer's intimate circle. It is not possible to describe the concerto in detail here but mention should be made of the extraordinarily effective use Berg makes of J. R. Ahle's noble choral melody: *Es ist genug*—also adopted by J. S. Bach in his cantata: *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*. The work is really half concerto, half symphonic poem; it is absolute music and yet at the same time mysterious and moving, with something of the supernatural about it. Berg's concerto is a masterpiece which will, in the writer's opinion, take a lasting place in the output of the twentieth century. The Festival was fortunate in having the first performance of such a great a work. It made a profound impression on everyone present.

After the violin concerto, selections from *Wozzeck* were played in memory of the composer. There can be no doubt that *Wozzeck* is now part of our musical history and is here to stay.

Albert Roussel's *Fourth Symphony*, Bela Bartok's *Fifth String Quartet* and Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques* for brass band,

which were also performed, will be played for many years to come but as they have been frequently heard and written about, let it be sufficient to say that they enjoyed their usual success.

Among the other works it was difficult to feel much enthusiasm for the *Violin and Orchestra Concerto, quasi una fantasia* of Marcel Mihalovici (Roumania) or the *Second Violin Concerto* by Karel Szymanowski (Poland). The latter is ably written but despite its studied variety seems to lack originality. Szymanowski can do a great deal better than this.

The piano concertos of the week, one by Frank Martin (Switzerland) and the other by Federico Elizalde (Madrid) were both inclined to be noisy, romantic and long winded. Elizalde's showed promise but was too facile and not sufficiently digested. He is still young, however, and bears watching.

Like a breath of fresh air in a room of confused closeness was Jacques Ibert's alto saxophone *Concerto da Camera*. Unpretentious, demanding of the solo instrument only what it can give and nothing more—thoroughly idiomatic—this concerto deserves a hearing in a land where the saxophone has bloomed and flourished so prodigally. It is a piece that one cannot help liking.

Among the Spanish compositions, Robert Gerhard's *Ariel Ballet* was outstanding. In the first place his technical equipment exceeds that of most of his compatriots and secondly he has ideas and discipline. Gerhard has not yet fully arrived but he is one of the most promising of the younger generation in Spain.

Karl Alfred Deutsch's *Symphony* was much heralded but, like Lennox Berkeley's *Overture* and Edmund von Borck's *Prelude and Fugue*, Opus 10, did not make a lasting impression. None of these three orchestral works was dull or uninteresting, however, and that is saying a good deal in these days.

Carl Ruggles' uncompromising *Sun-Treader* found great favour with the advance leftist group—Alois Haba for example—but the Spanish press was less convinced. Incidentally it was amusing to compare the accounts of the local journal on the festival. There are nine morning and four evening papers in Barcelona which pay some attention to music. The American Mark Brunswick, like Gerhard of the Austrian School, had his music categorized as *asperas sonoridades* by *La Vanguardia*—whereas

*La Noche* declared his string quartet: *la música más interesante y más lograda de cuantas se interpretaron en este concierto.*

The outstanding chamber music works of the festival were Walter Piston's *Sonata for Flute and Piano* and Egon Wellesz's settings for soprano and string quartet of five sonnets by Elizabeth Barret Browning in the translation of Rainer Maria Rilke. The flute sonata is a concise, modest piece which says what it has to say deftly and piquantly in three short movements. This work ought surely to enter the repertoire of flutists. Wellesz could cut the number of sonnets from five to three and gain a better effect. His style is dramatic but never trite. The music was excellently rendered by Leonore Meyer and the Galimir quartet.

One word perhaps should be said for Benjamin Britten—a clever but extremely young man from England. His *Suite for Violin and Piano* (Op. 6) showed decided promise and a sense of humor—at least we hope that's what the composer intended.

To sum up the remaining odds and ends, Krenek's *Fragments* from his opera, *Charles V*—some with voice—lie half way between *Wozzeck* and Wellesz's *Sonnet Settings*. The orchestral sections seemed more successful than the vocal. It is very much to be hoped that Krenek will continue to develop for he should succeed the late Alban Berg as the leading middle-European composer. The voice and orchestra pieces of Robert Blum (Switzerland) and Vaclav Kapral (Czechoslovakia) were quite different—the former consisting of *Psalms* the latter of *Folk-Songs*. We preferred the fresh and unpretentious cradle songs to the *King David* treatment of Mr. Blum.

Rodolfo Halffter's *Don Lindo de Almeria* was a pot-pourri of Manuel de Falla and the eighteenth century. The *Sonatina* of Ernesto Halffter was much abler although it paled before the *Sombrero de Tres Picos* of Falla which followed it and the Albéniz-Arbós *Triana* and Granados' *Goyescas* which were also on the program. Oscar Esplà's *La Nochebuena del Diablo* had a good deal to recommend it and might well stand a performance in America.

Compositions of Vladimir Vogel (Russia), Jose Maria Ruera and Ricardo Lamote de Grignon (Spain) were given world premières by the Banda Municipal de Barcelona. Vogel's poly-

phony, Ruera's vigor, and Lamote de Grignon's youth characterized the new contributions—none of which could compare with Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques*.

Most curious of the Spanish pieces was Felipe Pedrell's lyric poem: *El Comte Arnau* for solo voices, chorus and orchestra. It is extraordinary how Wagnerian this Spanish nationalist and folklore specialist sounded, even when he was trying to be most Iberian. Of course Pedrell died in 1922 and cannot be classed as a contemporary—but we would not have missed the *Comte Arnau* for anything. Pedrell is the arch priest of modern Spanish music, just as César Franck is—even to those who do not follow him—of the French.

The Spanish Committee is to be heartily congratulated for giving such an interesting Festival. The President of Catalonia, the Director General of Fine Arts from Madrid, the Catalanian Minister of Culture, the Mayor of Barcelona and other officials were on hand welcoming members of the Congress, giving receptions and generally making one think that Barcelona is the pleasantest spot in Europe.