

The composition, at any rate, bears all the indications of a first-class talent and a discerning musical mentality. That there are mixtures of Russian, American and other influences is hardly a matter for anxiety or blame. It is rather a reflection of the manifold influences inevitably at work in the contemporary music of every American composer capable of articulate expression.

A mixture of styles reflecting no such healthy creative process was to be observed in the elderly Gretchaninoff's *Symphony No. 5*. Mr. Gretchaninoff's earlier symphonies—hardly any one was aware there were more than two—are scarcely fixtures in the repertory, and it is unlikely that this newest symphony will occasion any break with precedent. Rimsky-Korsakoff, Moussorgsky, Wagner, Brahms, Strauss and the whole fraternity of end-of-the-century composers are represented in the course of four long and rambling movements. It is all an imitative rather than a creative conglomeration of styles and influences, and it adds up to less than nothing.

Ornstein's *Tribal Dance* turned out to be an agreeable work without special distinction. Purportedly a tone picture inspired by Harold Lamb's *Genghis Khan*, it achieves the conventional effects of Oriental color and atmosphere in a manner more notable for skill and discrimination than for originality. Shostakovich's symphony and Hindemith's suite are discussed elsewhere in these pages.

*Henry Pleasants*

## BOWDOIN COLLEGE SERIES

FOR Bowdoin College to dignify the art of music with an Institute this spring, as it had previously recognized social and political science, belles lettres and so forth, establishes almost a precedent in the history of American music and education. More remarkable still was the fact that the series of lectures and concerts given April 10 to 22, and offering a survey of the art of music during the past several centuries, should have found place for a lecture on contemporary works and a complete program of chamber music by contemporary American composers. The fussiness with which many leading colleges and universities avoid

anything resembling "practical" music was laudably absent—a tribute to the enthusiasm and enterprise of Professor Frederic E. Tillotson of the music department.

Aaron Copland, who gave the address, made it authoritative, pointed, well documented and comprehensive; refreshing, from the point of view of the professional, was its simplicity and informality. Thus a mixed assemblage of students, faculty, townspeople and visitors could be held by a discourse on a far from popular subject extending through almost twice the time of the conventional lecture.

There was much sterner stuff in prospect for these people the following night. Mr. Copland played his *Piano Variations*, driving home to the evidently unwilling listeners his uncompromising truths with inexorable logic. The *Variations* had been preceded by less troublesome music in the form of the composer's *Two Pieces for String Quartet*, played by the Curtis String Quartet, which also did duty by Samuel Barber's suave sonorities and platitudes in his *B-minor Quartet* at the end of the program.

Robert McBride's *Hot-Shot Divertimento* for oboe and clarinet (a first performance by the composer and Victor Polatschek) was obviously a joke, but a good one. There is no point in going into details about it. A divertimento is meant to please: and I liked this one, as I did the subsequent *Swing-Stuff* for clarinet and piano, played by Messrs. Polatschek and Tillotson. I have not yet been able to figure out why the composer chose to end on a blue note, after the opening excitement. Perhaps he just couldn't think of anything new to say—which is an excellent reason for stopping.

The big event of the program was naturally the premiere of Walter Piston's *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. In what seemed like an excellent performance by Tillotson and Jascha Brodsky, the *Sonata* emerged as a restatement of the composer's almost effortless humanity plus that intensity which has characterized his recent scores. The first movement is in fairly strict sonata-form, but it sounded fantasia-like. There was more than a suggestion of César Franck, an impression reinforced by Piston's occasional disposition of the instruments. Similarly the slow movement, consisting of a series of long phrases, suggested that the witty Pis-

ton may have begun to reflect with a little sadness on the current scene. The third movement, a rondo, has a brilliant touch in the form of a fugue as an episode. The allusion to Franck is intended not as disparagement but as compliment. I don't know anyone other than Piston who could summon Franck's memory without being promptly labelled an imitator or old-fashioned. It is this emotional quality, at any rate, plus the grateful virtuosity displayed that should enrich the modern American repertory of violin-piano sonatas.

*Moses Smith*