

piano by Roy Harris is a newcomer to this city and is one of Harris' best works. In the *Soliloquy* he uses most successfully a free autogenetic form and maintains a perfect symmetry in the general melodic outline. The harmonies are extremely concentrated and move quickly along with a growing sonority that reaches a high plane of intensity. The stirring *Dance* has an effervescent rhythmic push; it uses the demanding high viola register at just the right moments. Harris' penetrating craftsmanship enables him to rid a double fugue of all inhibitions and dance a lively step.

Vincent Persichetti

## AMERICANS AND SHOSTAKOVITCH IN BOSTON

THE Boston Symphony Orchestra wound up its season with no let-down in the quantity of novel music. Quality and importance were also high. Within a few weeks we heard the newest symphonies of Samuel Barber, Walter Piston, Roy Harris and Dmitri Shostakovich. Barber's *Second* and Harris' *Sixth* were presented, under Serge Koussevitzky's direction, for the first time anywhere; Piston's *Second*, conducted by G. Wallace Woodworth, had had but a single previous hearing under Kindler in Washington; and the only earlier American performance of the Shostakovich *Eighth* was that of the Philharmonic and Rodzinski.

Neither Shostakovich nor Harris offered any important surprise, another way of saying, I suppose, that I have made up my mind about the music of both. You like Shostakovich or you don't. I do. The loose structure, the great length, the patchwork joints and the juxtaposition of serious and seemingly trivial matter won't bear close inspection. It is perhaps no coincidence that in at least two of these respects he resembles Mahler, whose melodic line has obviously made a strong impression upon him. Well, I like Mahler and I like Shostakovich. More than any other symphonic composer since Mahler, Shostakovich's symphonies have an immediate appeal to a large musical population as music and not as theory or esthetics. The great length of the first movement, to which many have objected, did not seem to me excessive. As in the case of Mahler, the length was of the essence of the music. In the only really fast part Shostakovich uses a whole bag of obvious orchestral tricks, as a Hollywood composer might. But here the showmanship amounts to genius.

Similarly you either like or you don't like Roy Harris. I do. But whereas I am willing to take Shostakovich as he is, I keep hoping that Harris will some day escape from the kind of intellectual and emotional

frustration that I detect in his music. Thus each new piece, whatever its merits, is a disappointment. The only big work of Harris in which he hit the jackpot, accomplishing the right fusion of material and means, was the *Piano Quintet*. This he did more spectacularly in parts of the *Third Symphony* than in any other work that occurs to me. He accomplishes it only occasionally in the *Sixth* which, make no mistake about it, contains some beautiful things, including the entire slow movement, which is of his best. But the second part of this Gettysburg Address symphony, the movement called "conflict," is quite naive. Anyhow, it reminded me of an accompaniment for an Indian war dance in an old-fashioned Western. The *Symphony* also seems over-orchestrated. But the obvious retort is that that is also a matter of taste. You can't really separate the Harris orchestration from the entity that is Harris.

To come now to the surprises. I have been prejudiced against Barber ever since the time years ago when I heard a gooey indiscretion for string quartet. In subsequent works, more expertly and slickly written, I have observed what seemed to me the same continued concern for surface effect. Not so in the *Second Symphony*. In this work, dedicated to the Army Air Forces, Barber strikes out boldly and admirably on a new path. The music is often harsh and astringent. It is of our time, and that means time of war. I refer to the over-all impression, not to its specifically programmatic character, about which there has been much talk, naturally. No music of the concert-hall – or the opera-house, for that matter – was ever saved or ruined by its program. Specifically, in the slow movement of Barber's *Symphony* he employs an electrical instrument to imitate the sound of a radio-beam. It was a device, and remained only a device. It made me think of blind flying, as the composer probably wanted it to do, but it added nothing to the emotional intensity of the music. At the beginning of the third movement, on the other hand, Barber has a remarkable introduction, consisting of a spiral figure for strings, played in fantasy-style. This is supposed to represent a plane spiraling earthward. But here the device, *qua* music, is engrossing and exciting.

Walter Piston's case is different. For years I have regarded him as one of our leading composers; in recent years, the master of them all, as far as sheer writing is concerned. His one big failing was self-consciousness, reserve; some people call it Harvard indifference. Even on the rare occasions, as in *The Incredible Flutist*, when his music had guffaws as well as sparkle and wit, he remained still pretty much inside of himself. He

was writing with tongue in cheek.

In the *Second Symphony*, Piston lets himself go for the first time on a large scale. At times I was reminded of César Franck (as was true in moments of the *Violin-Piano Sonata* of some years back) and I am not trying to sneer at the new work but to praise it. Perhaps the chromaticism is responsible for this impression, although it should be noted that the symphony is tonal throughout and the least dissonant of Piston's works. Perhaps it was the welcome change from so much contemporary music, a good, sound, solid, melodious bass.

The third movement is the accustomed Piston, bright and witty and politely cocky, although even here is evidence of the mellowing process. As a whole this work seemed to me the best all-round essay by any American composer in the symphonic form to date. Whether it is the "greatest" I don't know. My guess is that it is going to be popular.

Moses Smith

## THE NEW AND CONTEMPORARY IN PITTSBURGH

A REVIEW of the season's new music in Pittsburgh suggests a reevaluation of standards. Some older works by contemporaries strike us as "new" because we still feel in them the challenging quality that revolutionized trends and technics at the turn of the century. In contrast, certain novelties of young musicians seem to be old at their 1943-44 premieres. Bearing the stamp of conventionality, they are marked for eventual defeat by time – regardless of their immediate reception.

The city's symphony orchestra, under Fritz Reiner, in the deplorably short period of only sixteen weeks offered a remarkable list of contemporary works. Composers who spell progress in the history of modern music were represented rather by works of their youth: Schönberg with his sextet, *Verklärte Nacht* (in the fine new arrangement for string orchestra), Bartok with his *Second Suite* – both scores "Opus Four" in their respective list of works.

Young people hearing and appreciating these for the first time wonder what it was in such clear and tuneful music that created so much antagonism half a century ago. The musician who grew up with the scores and now experiences them anew, perceives what steadfast conviction and courage live in these truly modern masters who enjoy at least the victory of their earliest works even though belief in their more recent