

FORECAST AND REVIEW

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY

THE first concert of the season by the League of Composers has turned into what seems to be a prophetic gesture. Departing from its usual custom of featuring only the latest fashions in music, the League added a few that had taken the lead some three hundred years ago. Frescobaldi and Sweelinck were presented with Roger Sessions as creators of new organ styles, and Monteverdi, Marenzio and Gesualdo with Paul Hindemith as innovators in song. The choice was interesting but too unequal to be called a sequence. In fact the two chorale preludes by Sessions and the six songs from Hindemith's *Das Marienleben* suffered considerably by the comparison. Both had an inwardness of spirit that ordinarily would have distinguished them on any modern program. It stamped Roger Sessions as the most arresting American talent since the late Charles T. Griffes, and it gave Paul Hindemith another significance than his usual one of animal exuberance. Nevertheless, the two preludes seemed feeble next to the bold invention and strength of Frescobaldi's *Toccata* and Sweelinck's *Fantasia*; while even the unwonted spiritual searchings in Hindemith's songs—due partly, one suspects, to Greta Torpadie's interpretations—flickered palely beside the rich emotional and imaginative vigor of their Italian predecessors. Indeed, to my mind, nothing so strangely new and beautiful as Gesualdo's madrigal, *Tu m'uccidi*, has been heard here this winter. Although not on so high an intellectual plane perhaps as the contemporary viol music of Tudor England, it has the same haunting quality of unearthiness,—that quality which Dolmetsch has likened unto "music heard in a dream."

Today, however, our composers on the whole sleep very soundly. No such elusive visions shadow their photography or

disturb their abstruse calculations. We have forgotten even the dreams we fought for seven years ago. The primitive cries of the Tartar Stravinsky, the inverted passions of the subtilizing Schönberg, have now given place to the acrid dialectics of a Bela Bartok.

Mr. Bartok was respectfully welcomed here this year as Hungary's leading composer. His latest work, a piano concerto, had been announced to make his debut doubly auspicious. Everybody was indignant when it failed to come off as scheduled and nobody understood it when it finally did. As in his second sonata for violin and piano, performed a few weeks earlier, the composer had discarded the folk tune which had formed the basic value of his earlier compositions, and which had given Mr. Bartok himself his position of distinction. Broken bits of themes were pounded out furiously on the piano to be answered by monosyllabic invectives from the wood winds. Those who stayed to hear listened with knotted brows. It was quite evident that Mr. Bartok was angry. It was equally evident that he was no novice in expressing it. In fact the sonata already mentioned had also its quota of bitterness. Unfortunately, this seems to be the only emotion of which he is capable. For the rest, we are told that he is "five times more difficult to understand than Stravinsky." But is not this like substituting cross-word puzzles for literature?

In the meantime the cause of the folk tune, which Mr. Bartok has so unfortunately abandoned, has found its champion in a colleague whom he seems to prize highly, Zoltan Kodaly. One could scarcely, however, call this composer "new." The same sparkling humor and clever handling of instruments that brought success to his orchestral suite, *Hari Janos*, earlier in the season lent interest and even surprise to his *Serenade* for two violins and viola. But the material itself is highly conventional. Far more charm and fantasy, I thought, informed Leo Weiner's *Carnival*, a humoresque for small orchestra.

Just why Delius should be called of today seems even more difficult to fathom. Whether it is his *Walk to the Paradise Garden*, *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* or his nocturne, *Paris*, his music seems as modern in its diffuseness, long-windedness and

romanticism as the mid-Victorian three volume novel. On the other hand, the *First Symphony* of Sibelius this year reminded us that there are certain ageless qualities of genius that will always seem newer than the latest cerebral experiments.

For the rest, one goes somewhat wearily down the line. A sonata by Eugene Goossens for oboe and piano accomplished no more than its apparent intention to show the resources of the lesser known instrument. A program of American music by the League left one wondering which did more damage to the cause,—the actual works or the verbiage indulged in by the composers. Marc Blitzstein, explaining his piano sonata, advanced the theory that “silences” instead of “transitions” would “eliminate the possibilities of padding.” The argument proved more logical than the spasmodic repetition of phrases that resulted. Quinto Maganini offered a highly banal and reminiscent sonata for flute and piano as a “release from the boredom of diminished sevenths, augmented triads, authentic cadences,” etc. As for Roy Harris, who showed a considerable lyric talent in his *Sextet* for string quartet, clarinet and piano, he did that talent no little injustice by describing the first movements as “developed from two contrasting germs.” Marion Bauer alone refrained from this precious and too often ridiculous nonsense; and it is not surprising that her string quartet, while neither as finely conceived nor as moving as her sonata for violin and piano, was invested with the only sincere emotion manifested.

One regards the list rather sadly. Is this what we fought for so hardily and at such long odds in the old days? Will even *Oedipus Rex* bring us any farther than those thrilling days of *Le sacre du printemps* and *Les noces*? Or of a *Pierrot lunaire*? The fight for modern music has been won. But oh, how tame seem the fruits of victory!

Henrietta Straus

YOUNG VOICES IN MILAN

ALTHOUGH the musical life of Milan is very active today, one can hardly say that its most promising aspects are obvious in the theatres or concert halls. These lack, for example, that