

one of the finales demands a special chorus placed in the orchestra.) Dynamic climaxes and contrapuntal leading of the voices interfere with the intelligibility of the text. There is another objection in the architectonics of the work. It is composed of seven great "pictures," some of them encompassing an act. Until the third picture there is a mounting interest and effectiveness, but the later scenes in the camp of the revolting peasants and in the workroom of the cardinal, are too drawn-out and produce a certain let-down. The vision of the Isenheimer altar, the allegory in which Grünewald, who takes on the features of the holy Anthony converses with the figures of his paintings, strains the whole structure of the opera by its tremendous dimensions (sixty-eight pages in the piano score). After that the charming, restrained finale comes as a feeble epilog.

Hindemith, pioneer of the short opera, has gone astray in writing a work of Wagnerian proportions. Extreme lengthiness dulls the total effect. The dream scenes, intended to be the high-spot of the opera fatigue the most loyal spectators and listeners. One may "quote" parts of the Isenheimer altar, but the realistic presentation of a famous painting with singing and acting figures belongs to the debatable realm of "living pictures."

And yet while these and other failings should be mentioned, they do not vitiate the artistic worth of this opera. It remains in my opinion one of the outstanding works in German music.

The Zurich premiere, on which the Municipal Theatre expended all its powers, was a great achievement of orchestral, vocal and scenic effort. Its memory will long remain fresh in the annals of the city, it is indeed a memorable occasion in the history of the music of our time.

*Arno Huth*

## FORBIDDEN OPUS — CATHOLIC

**I**T was a tragic sign of fate that Ernst Krenek should have been unable to attend the premiere of his most important and serious work. This was emphasized by the fact that, dealing with an episode from the history of the Hapsburg monarchy, it was produced just at the time that Austria lost its national and cultur-

al independence. At the very moment when the flames of conflict were raging and the grave European situation threatened to destroy the world's equilibrium the Neue Deutsche Theater of Prague was bold enough to present the opera, *Karl V*. In spite of its success there will be no repetition; the second performance was immediately cancelled for political reasons.

Those who have followed Krenek's development in the field of music-drama have seen the history of opera in the last twenty years compressed in his career as in a color movie. It begins on the note of social pathos rendered with severe expressionism in *Zwingburg*, and continues with fantasy and inner vision in *Eurydike*, set to Oskar Kokoschka's text. In both works the break with tonality is definite, the freer idiom is masterfully handled by the still very young Krenek. True, he leaves thousands of tonal problems unsolved, but the bursting of bonds make any backtracking impossible. The linear style, which Krenek used in his early chamber and piano music is here applied with severity and lack of compromise to the principle of dramatic expression. The dramatic climaxes and the chorus of the Furies astonish us by their vision and maturity, remarkable for such early works.

Next, in quick succession, come two productions deliberately aimed at success. These are *Der Sprung über den Schatten* (an operetta-like farce bearing traces of a coarsened Offenbach style) and Krenek's most famous work, the "best-seller" of post-war-opera, *Jonny spielt auf*. From the viewpoint of the musician, not much can be said in favor of either of these. The scores are inconsistent with the means employed, which were worked up in the expressionistic period of creation. They seem heedlessly dashed off, although some charming ideas are present. A sensitive ear will note that the facility of conception is not matched by facility in the hand of the constructor. Furthermore, the deliberate frivolity of *Jonny* did not completely jettison the metaphysical ballast. But it was after all just this aspect of the jazz opera which won it unparalleled success in Germany, where the problematical is prized above what is completely resolved.

With his three one-act works, Krenek again drew closer to more serious things. *Das Geheime Königreich* in particular develops out of powerful artistic and spiritual ideas. Grotesque

parody is attempted in *Schwerkewicht oder die Ehre der Nation*. In *Diktator*, Puccini-like realism is vainly taken as a pattern.

As an experiment with the classic-surrealist tendency, the biggest work of this period, *Das Leben des Orest*, is also the most provocative. Years ago, when analyzing the peculiar mélange of styles in this work for MODERN MUSIC I predicted a decisive change in Krenek's development. But it came more rapidly and more radically than we expected. Under the influence of the Vienna Schönberg group, Krenek turned to systematic composition in twelve tones.

The new radical period began around January, 1932. To it belong a large number of works, chamber-music, songs, orchestra variations, concertos, and now the opera, *Karl V*. Here Krenek in power of conception, in literary and musical quality, reaches a level that commands admiration.

The central problem, as in Hindemith's *Mathis* (which appeared later) revolves about self-justification. Emperor Karl V has abdicated and makes confession, revealing the road along which he has traveled. In every phase, the conflict with Luther, the wars and dickerings with King Francis I of France, the measures against Spaniards, Germans, Catholics, Protestants, the divine mandate is used as a touchstone in appraising the deeds of the emperor. With astonishing plastic quality, a portion of the past is brought to life on the stage. Imagination and reality unite in a drama of tense interest; as a librettist, Krenek has attained extraordinary completeness of form. There is a symbolic relationship between the four spirits in the first finale and the quartet of clocks running-down in the second and the long series of characters of the drama. Karl's death, accompanied by a ghostly requiem, brings the drama to an end on the note of proximity to God and eternity.

To this story of legendary grandeur Krenek juxtaposes a music which is essentially a mosaic of tonal aphorisms. The rigorous delineation of the *espressivo*, which he has elevated to a fundamental style principle, interferes with the construction of large dramatic forms. The result is a score which even in detail is unusually apt and even scientifically descriptive, but which is fundamentally incapable of reflecting the breadth of subject set

forth in the text. Above all, a certain aridity in the tonal quality interferes with the intelligibility of the musical proceedings. Even those who have traveled in the world of twelve-tone music and are familiar with post-Schönberg artistic materials will be astounded by its radical and non-sensual speech.

To the songs, operatically appropriate, Krenek adds contrapuntal ensembles, and choruses, purely declamatory stretches, melodramatic portions, and pieces of spoken prose. His vocal gift is clearest in the songs of Francis I and in the scenes of Eleanora, the sister of Karl. His skill in the field of music-drama is most apparent in the two finales with their polyphonic piling up of vocal and instrumental materials.

For the brilliant Prague premiere the Neue Deutsche Theater (whose further existence is now endangered) had solved the abnormal difficulties of the production by more than a half year of rehearsal. Under the leadership of the highly gifted opera head, Karl Rankl, one of Schönberg's students, and the intelligent direction of Dr. Friedrich Schramm, the performance won over its opponents and made the work an undisputed success.

H. H. Stuckenschmidt

## STRAUSS IN MUNICH; BLUM IN PARIS

**B**EFORE the drums and trappings of the German summer had passed beyond the premonition stage a memorable and curious event occurred that made a new date for operatic history. The world premiere of *Friedenstag*, a one-act opera by Richard Strauss, at the National-Theater, Munich, on July 24, not only revealed an important expression of the talents of the later Strauss, but provided that exceeding rarity, a pacifist opera.

The time selected for the action is the historic liberation from the long thralldom and horror of armed conflict, the last day of the Thirty Years' War. In this novel venture for Richard Strauss he had as collaborator a man who had never furnished him with a libretto before, though he had been a member of the literary group in Vienna which revolved around Strauss's librettist of long years' standing—the late Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This man, Joseph Gregor, has also supplied the texts of Strauss's