

## NATIVE NOTES IN COLORADO

A MID an assembly of painters, writers and men of the theatre, the Fine Arts Conference, sponsored annually by Colorado College and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, brought forth much new music last summer. The three-day session spotlighted certain works chosen after a national canvass of modern chamber music. Several well-known contemporary pieces were presented in the Fine Arts Center Theatre, including Charles Ives' *Fourth Violin Sonata* and the Roy Harris *Quintet for Piano and Strings*. The deeply felt slow movement of Harris' *Viola Quintet* was also given its first performance here. It showed again the ability of the composer to sustain a concentrated melodic line which has a patent and infinite variety. The core of the work, as in most Harris slow movements, harks back to the chorale prelude form. The *Piano Quartet* of Bohuslav Martinu had many tricky passages as well as several of lyric elegance. The first two movements were easily the fullest in content and the opening *poco allegro* gave admirable spatial distribution to the instruments, while the middle *adagio* of the triptych enhanced Martinu's prestige hereabouts since other works of his have been memorable more for facility than for extensive feeling. David Diamond was represented by the *Scherzo, Ritor-nello* and *Finale* from his *Piano String Quartet* in E-minor. These movements have a slap-dash feeling which added to the festive quality of the conference; the work, written during the days of his residence in France, may safely be assigned to Diamond's Paris style rather than to his more indigenous inspiration. Another new piece was the *String Trio* of Robert Gross, a member of the Colorado College faculty. This music has skill and buoyancy expressed for the most part through a continental technic. The fugal finale is more recent in date and its vocabulary boasts considerable simplification over that of the preceding movements. The rhythmic stride of Aaron Copland's *Piano Sonata* pleased even the most conservative listeners in the audience; its exploitation of pianistic resonance was among the most convincing exhibits of creative originality shown during the conference.

The night before the conference formally opened was given over to the work of several young students of Harris, who was resident this summer on the Colorado College Faculty. Two movements of the *String Trio* of John Verrall had been written and performed here the previous summer and these, in addition to the finale, not previously heard, again demon-

strated the direct quality of Verrall's materials and his ability to stretch motifs inventively through extended movements. The annual composition prize was awarded to J. Vance Fitzer for his two *Piano Trio* movements - *Prelude* and *Chorale*. Fitzer is fond of pungent rhythmic and melodic formulae which somehow never impoverish the ear, but rather give the listener a kind of glittering nugget to treasure during his auditory excavations. It can be said of this program that not one work failed to show manifest promise, even when at times the technic of writing faltered.

Before the conference also, the first performance of Harris' own *Variations on an Irish Tune* was given in a recital by Joanna Harris. The piece can scarcely be called monumental, yet it possesses much charm without sacrificing structural necessity. Originally intended as a movement for a piano sonata, it stands very well by itself. Harris had been commissioned to write one ballet for the group of Hanya Holm who was also on the summer faculty; he finished by writing a second. The first, *What so Proudly we Hail*, was the setting for an abstract dance composition which appears to be Harris' most successful stage work. It has five sections: The Girl I left Behind Me, Western Cowboy, Rock of Ages, I'll be True to my Love, and Rhythms of Today, based on folk material. A surprising interest is maintained in the seemingly sparse instrumentation of piano, three violins, viola and cello. The work also has interpolations by a chorus which vocalizes on appropriate syllables. The second ballet, *Namesake*, was a Holm-Harris collaboration in which Arch Lauterer, director-designer, formerly of Bennington College, joined. Somewhat in the *Spoon River* manner it used spoken words to supplement the choreography, music and décor. The performances of the works were greeted with open-handed applause, their regional quality evidently striking home.

One notable fact can be observed with Colorado Springs audiences. Whereas the temper of the musically interested here is predominantly conservative, there are truly no "die-hards" who remain impervious to the contemporary style. The process of bringing the audience forward to the present day has been gradual but satisfying since it has not left the composer or the performing musician subject to the whims of mere musical novelty on the one hand, or to a musical desuetude on the other.

James Sykes