

# MODERN MUSIC

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## NEGLECTED WORKS: A SYMPOSIUM

By inertia or common consent, the repertory of performing organizations has been rigidly standardized. Do we already accept such a restriction on today's music? To air this question, several well-known composers and critics were asked to list the ten most neglected contemporary works. Below we publish letters received before going to press.

. . . RANDALL THOMPSON

THE war put a stop to performances of Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* and of Berg's *Lulu* in Europe. Something more than excerpts from these two operas by two leading composers of our time deserves to be heard. . . . Many works of Bartok have been overlooked. Perhaps *The Palace of Prince Bluebeard* is not one of the most important, but we know virtually nothing of Bartok's way with the lyric stage, and an American performance of the work would surely evoke interest. . . . When Sessions' *First Symphony* was first played, over fifteen years ago, it was acclaimed as a masterpiece of American music. Like his *Violin Concerto* it survives today only in the form of a published score.

Why does one never hear Satie's *Socrate*? Its simplicity and moderation would be as salutary now as when it was written. It is just the right length for an album of records.

We occasionally hear the shorter works of Ives. What of the longer orchestral scores? They remain so veiled in obscurity that one can scarcely say which should be the first to be brought to light. The *Fourth Symphony* perhaps. All these pieces are so unfamiliar that one can only conjecture.

Malipiero's undeviating adherence to the spirit of early Italian music and his rejection of the meretricious and sensational should not now stand in his way in this country. Of all his choral, orchestral, chamber and dramatic works we hear almost nothing. To cite one, *The Crucifixion*, a sequel

to *The Last Supper*, and perhaps even more moving, deserves performance.

Twelve years ago Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* enjoyed a popular success here unique in modern music. Charming, skilful, unostentatious, it belongs in the current repertory. Why is it not mounted again? And why is it not recorded, at least in part?

In view of the widespread interest in Shostakovitch and his development as a symphonist, could we not have now a performance of his legendary *Fourth Symphony*?

Much of Stravinsky is performed repeatedly but what of "little *Renard*?" And what of his "poor *Mavra*," which he refers to as marking a turning point in the evolution of his musical thought?

### . . . CECIL MICHENER SMITH

IT is doubtful whether there are as many as ten universally acclaimed modern masterpieces which are really neglected, in the sense that scarcely anyone has an opportunity to hear them on phonographs or to study the scores. On the other hand dozens of admirable pieces are overlooked by virtuoso conductors and touring performers, most of whom have the habit of choosing the music they perform because it suits them, not because it ought to be heard.

Stravinsky's *Symphony in C* was written five years ago. It is almost never played unless the composer is on hand to conduct it. Yet it is a score of serious, not to say classical purpose; its workmanship is flawless. Many of its materials are inviting even to the lay audience, and when it has been performed it has been an unflinching success. . . . An important and in many ways similar companion to the Stravinsky work is the *Symphony in E<sub>b</sub>* by Paul Hindemith. Since its premiere a few seasons ago it has been left alone so unanimously that scarcely anyone knows it at all. Yet the composer regards it as his most sustained and significant effort to achieve large symphonic form.

Perhaps the peaceful, nostalgic mood of Vaughan Williams' *Pastoral Symphony* and its limited harmonic vocabulary become a trifle monotonous, but it is all in all the best symphony stemming from the neo-archaic folksong and madrigal tradition.

In the field of chamber music two top-flight compositions urgently deserve more frequent performance: the masterful *Octuor* of Stravinsky, which presumably remains unplayed because of performance difficulties, and the equally difficult and original *Pierrot Lunaire* of Schönberg. These pieces should not be brushed aside as ancient history. Because audiences have never had a chance to become familiar with them, their idiom and content still seem quite novel. Although one or another of the six Bartok