

A NEW DAY FOR BAND MUSIC*

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THE twentieth century brought with it a strong revival of interest in idiomatic writing for wind instruments, which is reflected not only in the composition of a great many works for small wind ensembles but in the general style of orchestral writing. It has not yet extended on a vast scale to composition for bands, but a number of very substantial works have been written, and there is every reason to believe that interest in the wind band is growing.

Before the 1930's, few important band works had appeared. Gustav Holst's *First Suite for Band*, in E \flat , written in 1909, and his *Second Suite*, in F, written about 1911, are the first twentieth century band works of any consequence. Holst was a capable trombonist and had considerable experience with bands, facts which show clearly in the skill with which he handled the band medium. The music of the suites is typical of Holst at his best; it is direct yet sensitive, and shows the deep influence of English folksong. The *Second Suite* is, in fact, based on country tunes, the last movement being identical with the finale of his *Saint Paul's Suite* for string orchestra. A third band work by Holst, the *Prelude and Scherzo, Hammersmith*, was written about 1930 but has never been published. Only the *First Suite* is available in full score, and this version has been altered by the addition of flügelhorns and other instruments to suit the requirements of American highschool "contest" rules.

Two splendid compositions for band by Ralph Vaughan Williams appeared in 1924. They are an English *Folk Song Suite*, in three movements, and a *Toccata Marziale*. The latter is a solid and vigorous work, exceptionally suited in character to the wind band medium and brilliantly scored to exhibit its possibilities. The *Folk Song Suite* must inevitably be compared to Holst's *Second Suite*, which in general feeling it resembles. It is the first modern example I know* (the Wagner *Huldigungsmarsch* is the only earlier one) of a band original being later transcribed for orchestra, reversing the time-honored procedure.

* This is a chapter from Mr. Goldman's book, *The Concert Band*, which will be published by Rinehart & Company in November.

The Holst and Vaughan Williams works illustrate the national character of most band works, including those by serious composers. Although these are not patriotic anthems or marches, the national character is given by the folk idiom employed. Many of Percy Grainger's fine works for band are of the same tendency, even when actual folk melodies are not used. Grainger became interested in composing for band during World War I, when he was a bandsman in the United States Army. He has since written a large number of original works for the medium, in addition to making band arrangements of many of his famous folk settings. Grainger's scoring for band has a rich sonority and color which compares favorably with any celebrated example of brilliant orchestration. His setting of the *Irish Tune from County Derry* has a beauty of a sound which should make any listener love the band. In his later works, such as the *Lincolnshire Posy* (1937) and *Lads of Wamphray* (1938), the scoring is more daring and original. They are difficult, requiring skilful players and above all a musicianly and expert conductor, but one must hear them (as well as the suites of Williams and Holst) played by a good band, not cluttered up with extra instruments or overweighted by any special group or groups, to appreciate what a splendid medium the wind band can be.

About 1930, works for band by composers of international reputation become more frequent. Respighi, Roussel, Florent Schmitt, Toch, Hindemith, Krenek, Weinberger, Prokofiev and Miaskovsky are among the Europeans who wrote one or more compositions for wind band during the thirties. The band pieces of Prokofiev and Krenek are marches, but rather interesting and original ones. Miaskovsky has written not only a march, but a symphony (his nineteenth) as well. Florent Schmitt composed two works, both of great difficulty, for the band of the Garde Républicaine; Respighi and Roussel wrote for American bands and scored accordingly. Weinberger's band pieces were written after the composer settled in the United States and were designed for American instrumentation. Although the band works of Roussel, Respighi and Weinberger have received frequent performances in the United States, I cannot state whether they have had much circulation abroad. The Russian pieces are played by American bands in adapted versions, with added saxophones and other parts that are lacking in the original scores.

None of these need detain us, since in nearly every case they are minor efforts of well-known men. The scoring is seldom of special interest, except for the fact that it is direct scoring for wind band. One feels in some cases an unfamiliarity with the idiom. Respighi's *Huntingtower Ballad*, written in 1932, is a short sombre work with some interesting exploitation of the lower wind instruments. Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques* is perhaps the most ambitious of the works mentioned above and is notable for its bril-

liant writing. Prokofiev's *Athletic Festival March* (1935) is extremely jolly, an ideal sort of music for a popular event.

Since 1940, composing for the band has assumed the proportions of a real movement, especially in the United States. Among those who have written wind band compositions here are Arnold Schönberg, Igor Stravinsky, Darius Milhaud, Pedro Sanjuan, Henry Cowell, Roy Harris, Paul Creston, Wallingford Riegger, William Schuman, Gail Kubik, Leo Sowerby, Samuel Barber, William Grant Still, Daniel Gregory Mason, Arthur Shepherd, Morton Gould, Philip James, Robert Russell Bennett, Burnet Tuthill, George F. McKay, Henry Hadley, John Alden Carpenter, Bainbridge Crist, Ray Green, Dai-Keong Lee, James R. Gillette, Herbert Haufrecht, Joseph Wagner, Normand Lockwood, Arthur Kreutz, Robert McBride, Robert Sanders and a number of others. In other countries, John Ireland, Shostakovitch, Glière and Khachaturian have recently added works to the band repertory, and so also have many of the leading composers of South and Central America.

It is not my intention to represent this music as more than it is – a hopeful beginning of a new day for band music – or to pretend that many of the new band works are of the highest musical interest. It is always difficult to evaluate the enduring qualities of any contemporary work, and doubly so in the case of *Gebrauchsmusik*. Many of the new pieces (those of Shostakovitch and Barber, for example) are military marches, brought up to date. Others are typically light or even humorous compositions. (The Stravinsky band work is his *Circus Polka*, much transcribed since, but written originally for a circus band.)

It is important, however, for the future of bands and for the enlargement of our musical horizon, that interest in the medium has spread to a large number of composers, who represent many tendencies. Among them are many of the younger writers of talent or promise. And among the many pieces written are some few of really serious intent and skilful execution. It is true that there are no symphonies among these works, but it is also true that too many people take length and pretentiousness as their only criteria of importance and seriousness. (A great deal of pompous trash is written, called "symphonic," or "grand," or bearing some other type of inflated description, to foster a baseless illusion in the mind of the composer or the audience or both. It is a misfortune that so much "educational" music falls into this category.) Most of the new band works by the composers named above can stand on their own merits if they are taken for what they are: music written for a certain combination of instruments, to be played for a mass audience wanting to be entertained. Within that sphere, they may justly be considered "major" works.

A few of them qualify as interesting and substantial creations by any

standard. Schönberg's extraordinary *Theme and Variations for Wind Band*, Opus 43a, written in 1943, is nothing if not highly serious, undoubtedly too much so for most band audiences. An extremely complex work, rich in invention and rewarding in the quality of its ideas, it represents a landmark in the history of band literature. The only performances of the work (at this writing) in its original form have been those given by the Goldman Band under the author's direction. An orchestral transcription of the work was presented by the Boston Symphony, under Koussevitzky, and later by the New York Philharmonic under Stokowski.

Milhaud also transcribed his *Suite Française* (1945) for orchestra, but after it had been played in its original form by the Goldman Band and others. It is thoroughly ingratiating, in folk idiom like the Holst and Vaughan Williams suites, but spiced with more advanced and piquant sounds. It is scored with great brilliance and assurance, full of contrast in its five movements, and says what it has to say with economy and taste. This work may well be recommended for study. Milhaud's *Two Marches* (1945) give further proof of his mastery of the band idiom and a suitably "popular" style.

Henry Cowell's *Shoonthree* (1939), a work of great beauty and expressiveness, was also scored for orchestra by the composer after it had been often performed in its original form by wind bands. Cowell has written a number of works for band, most of them in a simple idiom suitable for school use. In *Shoonthree* and in the *Celtic Set* (1939), Cowell has tellingly exploited the tonal resources of the band, and the scores are models of skill and ingenuity in contrasting the colors of wind instruments.

Many of the other new works are noteworthy. The *Canto Yorubà* of Pedro Sanjuan (1942), a large piece in Afro-Cuban style, is a sensation-ally vigorous and compelling piece, with fine rhythmic drive and genuine mastery in band scoring. Sanjuan, like Holst and Grainger, learned about the wind band at first hand, thereby no doubt acquiring the sureness of touch which characterizes the *Canto Yorubà* and his two more recent band works. These pieces have authenticity in addition to quality, in happy contrast to the synthetic "Cuban" and "Latin" music with which we have been so mercilessly afflicted. Certainly the *Canto Yorubà* is unique in the band repertory. Paul Creston's *Legend* is in all respects more conventional, but is striking in its warmth and flow. It, too, is splendidly scored, with special skill shown in the handling of saxophones, horns and baritone. Wallingford Riegger's *Prelude and Fugue* (1943) represents still another type of music for band. It is the serious work of a fine musician, full of ingenious ideas, and very successfully cast in the band's instrumental idiom.

Among other works there are overtures and concert pieces of varying

interest. Many are pioneering efforts, in that they open up new musical values in wind band performance, while others are of more conventional content and treatment. Some give the impression of tentativeness in dealing with the band as a medium (a difficulty which will right itself when a *tradition* of band composition has been achieved); others are satisfactory except that they indefinably sound like transcriptions of works written for orchestra. Several pieces written for orchestra have been transcribed for band by their composers. Notable among these is Copland's *Outdoor Overture* which, in my opinion, is even brighter and more vigorous in the band version than in the original. It makes band music of the most suitable sort, but the band version unfortunately remains in manuscript at this writing. Another similarly successful transcription was made by Riegger of the Finale of his *New Dance*.

Besides these works by composers who have established reputations in writing for orchestra, there are many of merit by men who have specialized in the band field and who are known primarily as bandmasters or arrangers. Erik W. G. Leidzen, Charles O'Neill and a number of others write straightforward and knowingly-scored works which please audiences and players alike. Pleasing the band players is an especially important consideration, since nearly all of the organizations are composed of amateurs. While most music of this type is "practical" music designed to answer the needs of school and amateur bands, there is no reason why such music should not be substantial and honest. It is a pleasure to note that some of the musicians who write for the schools can combine practicality with taste and sound musicianship.

Of marches I think I need hardly speak. I assume a general familiarity among Americans with Bagley's *National Emblem*, Zimmerman's *anchors Aweigh*, Reeves's *Second Connecticut Regiment*, Bigelow's *Our Director*, Edwin Franko Goldman's *On the Mall* and a large selection of the works of Sousa. Each generation produces new marches to stand with the past's masterpieces in this genre. They form the unique and indispensable part of the band repertory, and there are classics among them. They are to the band what the waltz is to the salon orchestra. Each nation has its own treasury of traditional and favorite marches; nearly all of them are to be described under the heading of "original" works for band.