

# MODERN MUSIC

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## YOUTH LEAVES THE VANGUARD

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SEVERAL months ago, I pointed out in MODERN MUSIC the concern which is felt in responsible circles over the problem of the second generation in new music. Since then, in the rapid development that is characteristic of our time, this question has become even more acute. For it is now clear that one of the fundamental difficulties here is that the younger generation in music has abandoned us and gone its own way. The new tendencies thus run the danger of being isolated and petrified. A movement that “erupted” into existence and now boldly raises its standard in all the fields of music—the concert hall, the theatre, radio and the like—must be constantly re-infused with a fresh supply of young and untainted blood. This whole movement which is designated as the “new music” and which has seemed to us justified by artistic and sociologic conditions was, at its very start in the post-war period, the product of an extremely youthful, elastic generation. Years of war, years of the equally evil experiences which followed, had completely paralyzed spiritual intercourse between nations. Every country was scarred by the decline of artistic interests, by the decay of environmental factors that encourage the growth of the individual within a general national art.

The pre-war children, pupils or students of music, faced, without a transition, a radically altered world. The change was spiritual as well as political and technical. Several decades of development were crowded into five or six years. We must vis-

ualize this period, fast becoming history, in order to understand how at one time such an incredibly large number of men could suddenly step into the light from complete obscurity. For years any kind of expression had been impossible, all at once it became necessary to comprehend and give artistic form to an epoch that had been set completely off balance. The interdependence of political and economic conditions on the one hand, and artistic necessities on the other is beautifully demonstrated by this period.

With vehement single-mindedness the youth of the world, which had finally exchanged the soldier's tunic for the musician's coat, took this gloriously vital epoch in hand. Glancing through the magazines of 1920, 1921 or 1922, it is astounding to see fresh names appear almost every month, experiments announced, indeed, a new generation of youngsters from twenty to twenty-five become celebrated. The laboratories in which to demonstrate the experiments of these men were quickly provided. During that period, at intervals of a few weeks or months, we became familiar with the names of Krenek, Hindemith, Weill, Berg, Milhaud, Toch, Rathaus, Schulhoff, Antheil, Butting, Copland, Poulenc, Sauguet, Haba and twenty or thirty others. Nothing was too bold for these youths. It was through no mere desire to *épater le bourgeois* that Krenek, for example, ended his choral variations with a bit of jazz, that Honegger glorified a locomotive in music, that in *L'Histoire* Stravinsky did violence to the traditional opera form, or that victory over each new commonplace led to proclamations in advertisements and catalogs. Quite the contrary. It was a time when everything had to be questioned, everything condemned, everything conquered anew. We must admire this magnificent encounter of vigorous and talented youth with a new era and with a new material.



Clearly and with a rationale that will delight the future music chronicler, we can now see these men in the process of becoming reconciled to their environment. They are beginning, so to speak, to accustom themselves to the new home they have built and to settle down in it. At the same time the moment has arrived for

their advance to great triumphs, and the achievement, artistic as well as material, of a standing of which they had never dreamed and now accept with astonishment. For example, Krenek is overcome by the success of his opera *Jonny Spielt Auf*, which has brought him such fame and riches. From being a composer of the opposition and of music festivals, known only to specialists, he has become a popular and successful man. Hindemith we see as professor of the Berlin Staatsakademie, his works are produced everywhere and his name so well known that it is found in the crossword puzzles of the newspapers. Stravinsky gains entrance to the state theatres and becomes an "official" classic. Kurt Weill, a disciple of Busoni and a composer of strictly correct chamber music, runs counter to all tradition with the *Dreigroschenoper* and comes off with flying colors in competition with the most successful of light opera composers. Illustrations might be multiplied, but we are giving only a general view of the situation. The same movement may be observed among interpretive artists. The contemporaries of these composers are to be found in executive positions as directors of opera theatres, of radio stations, of publishing houses: the revolutionary Prætorian guard of 1921 has come into the possession of power.



And now let us cast our eyes around for the "new youth;" for men now twenty years old who, in newer laboratories, are constructing the bombs to be exploded under their predecessors, the latter not yet firmly established. There is, indeed, no lack of opportunity to gain a hearing. The great music festivals, international as well as national, and the prize contests offer encouragement to fresh material. The radio and the "talkies" have increased the demand inordinately, and with this broader use of music the possibility of receiving a hearing and becoming celebrated is enhanced. The likelihood of an excessive number of geniuses remaining unrecognized grows less and less each year. Genuine talent will not easily remain undiscovered in view of the keen watchfulness of publishers, concert organizers and theatrical producers.

But what is the actual situation? Let us consider the recent music festival in Oxford. Of the thirty composers whose work was given, seven were indeed under thirty years of age, that is to say, they had been born in the present century and were about twenty-five years old. But, in the almost unanimous opinion of those present at the festival, what these men had to say was devoid of significance. Indeed it was disturbing to see how precisely these youthful participants moved along well worn paths, with nothing new or bold to express, while the strong new works, even in these surroundings, came from the older generation, for example, Wladimir Vogel and Anton Webern.

Even more pointed is the situation in the music-theatre. The programs of publishers and theatre managers for the coming winter are already at hand, and we now know what opera premieres will be presented. Europe will see and hear "first times" by D'Albert (born 1864), Pfitzner (1869), Wolf-Ferrari (1876), Beer-Waldbrunn (1864), Gurlitt (1890), Heger (1886), Lilien (1895), Milhaud (1882), Graener (1872), Honegger (1892), Weill (1900), Antheil (1900), Gruenberg (1882), Windt (1897), Brand (1895), Kricka (1882), Schreker (1878), Reznicek (1861), Braunfels (1882), Wellesz (1885), Casella (1883), Kodaly (1882).

These are all without exception well-known composers who undoubtedly will delight us by important works. In no single case do we sense that promise for the future for which we are always hoping and which, in the last analysis, will be the cure and salvation of the theatre.

In this connection a word must be said regarding our own situation. In a great modern publishing house\* all the currents of new and vitalizing forces are naturally enough brought to a focus. Constant association with masters of the art leads naturally to contact with the pupils. Here, then, we have a very accurate "control" of the youthful talent which, on the one hand, discloses itself to the already successful composers, or, on the other, makes its appearance in the great conservatories of Vienna, Berlin, Paris, etc. But the most accurate and conscientious observation from this angle only confirms the impression that the

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alarming dearth of new productive talent is not due to the suppression of youth. On the contrary, the great organizations which can open the gates to publicity and success are only too ready, and follow every new development with watchful attention.



We must for the moment, then, console ourselves with the belief that there has come a pause in the development of productive talent in the musical field. Though opportunity for exploitation is more generously offered than ever before, the men who should take advantage of it are lacking. We need to acquire a future historical perspective, to recognize in what field lie the real talents of this generation for whom music seems to be merely on the periphery of the sphere of interest.

A few weeks ago I received the following letter from a seventeen-year old student at the *Gymnasium* of Dresden:

“Were I asked today what attitude the youth of the present assumes toward modern art, I should be forced to reply: an attitude toward modern music is simply non-existent. If one could take a vote among our young people, it would probably register them among the opponents of modern music. But this would be meaningless since the attitude of opposition is not the outcome of investigation based on knowledge of the subject, but rather of an extraordinary frivolity and an inexcusable sense of superiority. This snobbishness in respect to everything they encounter that requires thought and demands the making of a decision is in my opinion thoroughly characteristic of modern youth. Young people know just as much, or just as little, about the old art as they do about the new art. What we really have is a refusal to deal with artistic matters of any kind.”

Such a declaration should be recognized as a statement of fact. But though it is serious, it need cause no alarm. For we know that these phenomena are evanescent, that a new tide, new music, new creative impulses will make their appearance. Meanwhile we shall keep both eyes and ears open in order not to fail to detect them and to welcome them with the enthusiasm which they deserve.