

Since the *Concerto Grosso* and *Piano Quartet* we have been looking for an important work by Martinu. His productivity and equipment are impressive, on the other hand his output seems indiscriminate. The *Fourth Symphony*, written last summer, is uneven and watery, with thick scoring and grumpy changes of mood. In the first movement two germs travel in opposite directions and get together only at the careless final tonic. The Scherzo is forced into direction by its traditional form. But it moves daringly fast for one with such soft bones. Misplaced folk harmonies, below a melodic line too dull to have been a folksong, shape the slow movement. While Martinu desperately tries to sum up the entire symphony, a fresh sounding instrumentation suddenly appears, shimmering and translucent. Here is the touch of beauty that he can give us, when he relaxes his formulas and shuns over-elaborations so that we get it straight. In his *Second Cello Sonata* (Early Fall Chamber Series) there are also hints of something magical that he has not taken quite enough time to develop.

An unusual program of piano music was performed by Denoe Leedy for the Art Alliance, the contemporaries represented by Herbert Elwell and Robert Palmer. The first two movements of Elwell's *Piano Sonata* are either hurried while at the same time sluggish, or sleepy but ornamentally fussy. Better writing is found in the virile and straightforward opening of the Finale. Palmer's *Toccata Ostinato* skilfully manages virtuoso formulas to present high-powered and striking material. An extraordinary reading of Walter Piston's *Second Quartet* by the Budapest Quartet served to prepare Philadelphia's audiences for several coming Piston events.

Vincent Persichetti

LOS ANGELES INTERPRETS GENESIS

IT must have been an act of faith that led Nathaniel Shilkret to commission a single work—the seven-part musical symposium, *Genesis*—from such a heterogeneous group of composers as Schönberg, Tansman, Milhaud, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Toch and Stravinsky, with Shilkret himself supplying the second of the pieces (premiere by Werner Janssen). For certainly *Genesis* was, from the very birth of the idea, doomed to be a hopelessly insoluble mixture of styles, techniques and attitudes, especially since part of the plan was that the composers should write independently, without reference to each other's work — colloiddally suspended in The Word. The catalytic agent, as if one were possible, was a narrator who declaimed the Biblical story according to a text arranged by Shilkret. Schönberg's *Prelude*, somewhat reminiscent of his *Kol Nidre*, was the most successful piece, partly because it alone did not have to compete with the narrator, whose insistent and amplified voice constantly fought the music. Milhaud's *Cain and Abel* presented that composer's charming

profile, illumined less by piety than by the warm sunlight of Provence. Stravinsky's *Babel* referred vaguely to the *Symphony of Psalms*, but came nowhere near equalling it in nobility, in propulsion or in the inevitability of its conclusions. All the others – Shilkret's *Creation*, Tedesco's *Noah*, Tansman's *Adam and Eve*, and Toch's *Covenant* – excelled in the possession of negative virtues. Each composer appears to have been awed by the sublimity of the subject (if not by the example of Haydn) and by his own temerity in working with Holy Writ.

A set of *Variations on the Irish Washerwoman* by Mildred Couper was such cute and ingenious music that it set Janssen's audience all a-twitter. A concert version of William Schuman's *Undertow* has been Wallenstein's sole attention to contemporary repertory so far. It loses nearly all the points it tries to make by insistence and repetition, which are the composer's most irritating qualities; but the use of Americanisms in tunes and rhythms is both attractive and convincing. Tansman was invited to conduct his own *Third Serenade*, pleasant music. To Klemperer was delegated the responsibility for Berg's *Violin Concerto*, with Szigeti as soloist. This truly great music exists on a plane far removed from controversies over the twelve-tone system. It lives by its musicality, its emotional force, its personal grief and its human significance. All its theoretical problems are solved by absorption.

By way of contrast, there are no problems at all in the Khachaturian *Violin Concerto* that Louis Kaufman played in recital. The composer merely set down on paper any old rag of an idea sanctified by its derivation from Armenian folklore, so long as it could be fitted into last century's conception of what a concerto ought to be. Gardner Read's *American Circle* for violin and piano has a good tune which is emasculated by an impressionistic harmonization. Everett Helm's *Comments on Two Spirituals* has the vigor and wit of the Copland school.

III

The eighth season of Evenings on the Roof has done well with a number of important additions to its repertory. Sol Babitz played a violin transcription of Stravinsky's *Elegy* for viola solo. The work is in three parts, an introduction, a fugue in two voices and a return to the introductory material. This beautifully shaped piece is slow and solemn in the manner of the second movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*. The stretto of the fugue is particularly moving where the first voice gives the subject in its original form while the second voice uses the inversion. A small and lonely work, deeply introspective, but one that also brings its own consolation. Deriving much from Stravinsky, especially by way of Copland, was Harold Shapero's exuberant *Four-Hand Piano Sonata*, with its fine slow movement. It made a real hit. No less successful was a group

of South American pieces for woodwind quintet, some of them in transcriptions by Adolph Weiss. The composers included here were Malaga and Lanao of Peru, Valencia of Colombia, and Villa-Lobos of Brazil. A new string quartet by George Tremblay has a diffuse first movement, that apparently is not calculated to make its explorations within defined boundaries. There is more purpose in the slow movement and hence more success in communicating its message about the strange dark corners of consciousness where the passions lurk. From these regions one is returned to fresh air and light in the final Presto, but with some shackles on freedom of movement.

Perhaps the most important of the Roof's presentations has been Hindemith's *Das Marienleben*, marvelously performed by Sara Carter and Ingolf Dahl. This is music from the composer's most fruitful period, before the time of system, method and code. Such songs as *Joseph's Suspicion* and *The Annunciation Over the Shepherd* present in all their freshness the kind of material that more recently has been put into straitjackets. Wisely Hindemith has apparently rejected in many of the pieces the contrapuntal methods that produced such rigid visual patterns as the fugato of the *Marriage at Cana* and the variations of the second poem on the death of Mary, where the ear is taxed to unswerving attention and rewarded with not even a slight concession to sensory pleasure.

Lawrence Morton

HINDEMITH'S CHICAGO BIRTHDAY PARTY

ALTHOUGH Prokofiev, for obvious reasons, was not on hand for the first local performance of his *Fifth Symphony*, three composers did come to town—Hindemith, Harris and Milhaud—to officiate as conductors of their own works.

Since a man does not have a fiftieth birthday every year, it is fitting to write of Paul Hindemith first. Various events this fall brought Chicago's acquaintance with his output fairly well up to date. Isaac Stern performed a *Violin Sonata*, composed in 1939, for the first time here, and probably for the first time anywhere, but there are no incontrovertible records to establish the fact. Though the *Sonata* was printed in Germany, it was not circulated because of Hindemith's unfavorable status with the German government. When heard here, the sonata aroused great enthusiasm by the piling-up of fugal intensity in the finale.

Yet more imaginative and warmer works were heard at an all-Hindemith birthday concert in Orchestra Hall, which included *Hérodiade*, composed for Martha Graham's use last year, and *The Four Temperaments*, a theme and variations for piano and string orchestra, originally intended for a ballet with choreography by Balanchine. The former work, for all its