

WHITHORNE'S SYMPHONY; DETT'S MOSES

EMERSON WHITHORNE'S *Symphony No. 2* in F-minor, Opus 56, received its first performance March 19 at the hands of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Eugene Goossens. As a matter of record, it should be stated that the same conductor and orchestra in 1934 gave the premiere of Whithorne's *Symphony No. 1*.

The second work marks an improvement over the earlier one, to which the composer now refers as a typical first symphony. His own notes about the second describe so compactly its form and content that they are well worth quoting: "The work is in three movements. The first opens with a short Lento section foreshadowing much of the thematic material utilized in the entire symphony. The second is an Adagio, while the last opens with an Adagio and subsequently passes through episodes of different moods and tempi. . . . The symphony as a whole is integrated, material from the first part appearing in various metamorphoses in the following movements. Emotionally the work builds to its climax in the Finale, this last being frequently strongly dramatic in import. . . . My aim has been to make this symphony a closely knit entity, a structural unit. There is no actual program, no incidents anecdotal or otherwise. It is rather a commentary on the pageantry of life as I have witnessed it."

This last observation is not without significance inasmuch as all three movements end in a mood of tranquillity and repose.

By constructing the entire symphony out of material found in the introduction, Whithorne does not strike out on entirely new paths. There is good precedent for this idea in Sibelius, who has done more or less the same sort of thing in his *Fourth Symphony*, to mention only one. I use Sibelius for the sake of convenience. Whithorne, in this symphony, bears no closer affinity to him than he does, say, to Stravinsky or Schönberg, who have been the other two "influences" on contemporary music. Sibelius comes to mind because he is the only one of the three who is a symphonist. Whithorne has his own individuality as a composer.

His orchestration and his ability to produce a variety of colors in keeping with the prevailing mood of the works strike one so

forcibly as to obscure the fact that underneath the color lies a finely made, closely woven texture, treated with superb contrapuntal skill. On his orchestral palette he displays some of the ingredients of the Russians and the impressionists as what modernist to some extent has not? but he has mixed them judiciously.

The symphony has no formal scherzo. Early in the third movement, however, the composer has tucked away an Allegro which hints at one. Both the second and third movements could do with a little cutting, the third in particular, which, along past the middle, rehearses some ideas already discussed at length in the second.



If Nathaniel Dett's Biblical Folk Scene, *The Ordering of Moses* (which received its premiere in Cincinnati, as part of the biennial May Festival) evokes any visual images in the mind of the listener, they are probably those of parts of *Green Pastures*. It possesses the same naive spirit and a similar if not so specifically delineated anthropomorphism. In both instances one reacts to the emotional outbursts of an undefended race. Both draw on the Scriptures and folk-lore for their material.

Dett's music has that quality which has come to be agreed upon as being characteristic of the American Negro—a strong racial flavor plus the influence of the hymn tunes which flourished during the Moody-Sankey period. These ultimately took form in what has become known as the Negro spiritual.

The Ordering of Moses may be loosely described as a sort of extended development of the spiritual, *Go Down, Moses*, interrupted by declamatory and rhapsodic passages for soloists and some interludes for orchestra. But it is predominately a choral work.

The composer has treated his thematic material with a naïveté appropriate to his drama so far as his choruses and solos are concerned. Beneath them, however, he has spread a sophisticated orchestral score. Although it adds to the effect in one way, it injects a note of inconsistency in another. Above, all is pretty straight Afro-American, with a touch of authentic Hebrew; below is the glitter and lusciousness that one associates with Ravel and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Dett knows his job whether he happens to be writing for chorus or orchestra. The choral fugue on *Go Down, Moses* can hold its own with some of the best of them. And with a driving impact, the final chorus winds up a work that gathers steady momentum as it goes along.

Eugene Goossens conducted and the work scored a popular success unprecedented in the history of these festivals.

Frederick Yeiser

SCHÖNBERG, MAHLER, AND OTHERS IN LOS ANGELES

LOS ANGELES has heard a good deal of contemporary music since the first of the year, but most of it was not "modern," and most of what was "modern" was not new.

Really outstanding were the world premieres of Schönberg's *Fourth Quartet* and the first Los Angeles performances of his *Pelleas und Melisande* and of Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*.

The Schönberg *Fourth* has already been reviewed in these pages. There remains only to say that at its first performance it was excellently played by the Kolisch Quartet early in January at the University of California in Los Angeles, through the generosity of Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. Its reception was respectful if not unduly comprehending. The Kolisch Quartet also recorded privately all four of the Schönberg quartets through the courtesy of Mr. Alfred Newman, musical director at United Artists Studios. The recordings are certainly among the finest ever made—far better than any commercial discs I know. It is to be hoped they will eventually be released through the regular channels.

The *Pelleas*, one of Schönberg's earlier works, was conducted by the composer at a concert of the Federal Music Project Symphony Orchestra on February 17. Well rehearsed, it was intelligently played to a degree exceptional with this orchestra. The richness and inventiveness of the work were fully revealed. It was repeated by request on April 14, at a concert of modern music given by the same orchestra.

Two world premieres and two Los Angeles premieres featured