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Radio Review

MUSICAL EXTREMISTS

AT a luncheon given a few weeks ago in honour of St. Cecilia, Patron Saint of Music, Dr. V. E. Galway gave an address which was recorded and broadcast that evening. It is doubtful if this speech obtained the prominence and number of hearers that it merited. Its main theme was contemporary music, and what ought to be said about some of it by courageous people with adequate musical background. His appraisal of some of our modern music was candid and forthright: "I think that many of us, when we hear a revoltingly cacophonous monstrosity, have become scared to say so. . . . if the history of music teaches anything, never has a great composer been out of touch with everyone but a small handful." Illustrating his point, he commented on the unintelligible later music of Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, though all three have produced admirable earlier works. The description, by Schoenberg's disciple Krenek, of the twelve-tone technique of composing, its illustration by Schoenberg's Five Piano Pieces, Op. 23, and Stravinsky's insistence on the complete banishment of emotion from music were scathingly dealt with, and it must be admitted that to most ears Dr. Galway's criticisms seem justified. To wash out, as he puts it, a thousand years of harmony, melody, and form, to scrap the past completely, and indulge in this sort of musical Esperanto may well seem the work of an idiot. There ought to be, as he stressed, enough people reasonably well acquainted with the great masters who, if they find the atonalists and polytonalists distasteful, should have the courage to say so.



Interesting comparisons can, of course, be made between this phase of music and much of modern art. Lord Elton, as Dr. Galway noted, has observed that up to a point modern art, however unreasonable, can be tolerated, but that the absurdities of modern sculpture force one to realise the necessity of becoming savagely critical.

Is there anything to be said on the other side? Yes, of course there is, as always in any controversial matter. Schoenberg has written an orthodox *Treatise on Harmony*, though his own harmony is quite distinct; in a recent number of the *Australian Canon* he contributed a well-reasoned and sensitive article in praise of Gustav Mahler, whose music could hardly be more different from his own. George Antheil, for many years the *enfant terrible* of American music, has written, "I write strongly contrapuntal and developed music today because, perhaps, I am approaching forty-five . . . but when I was less than half as old my objectives were different." One's outlook is always affected by age and personal development. There is, in fact, so much to say on the other side (apart altogether from one's personal

views) that a separate article is required to deal with it, and its radio implications. —H.J.F.

Neat Work

HAD anyone ever suggested to me that I would be able to listen with something approaching pleasure to a programme of music containing "Can I Forget You?" "Nola," "Come Back to Sorrento" and "Jealousy," I should have been more than mildly sceptical. Yet this is just what happened when I caught my first *Four Strings and a Piano* session from IYA one recent Tuesday. This fifteen-minutes of competently-played light music struck me as being one of the smoothest offerings I have heard for some time, despite the abysmal triteness of the material used. The reasons for my pleasure were mainly the neat, unobtrusive team-work of the quintet, the ingenious revitalizing arrangements of Oswald Cheesman (for instance, his pizzicato adaptation of the hoary "Nola"), and the better than average singing of Phyllis Smith, which even conquered what sounded like a badly placed microphone. It would hardly be possible to find music much "lighter" than this group presented, yet the total impression was by no means one of triviality—which shows what prodigies good musicianship can perform.

Sandwich

WAS it mere accident, or was there some satirical intent in the fact that in a recent IYC programme, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was played between Brahms's Symphony in D Major and Mozart's Quartet in B Flat? Whatever the explanation, the effect on me was to emphasize the individuality of the Brahms work, the sensuous joy of the first movement, the melancholy of the andante and the life and breadth of the finale; to point up the feeling, grace and formal beauty of Mozart's quartet and to underline the amorphous quality of Shostakovich's piece, its obviousness and its pretentiousness. Perhaps, however, Shostakovich himself is not wholly to blame for the commonplaces of this symphony, since it represents his "practical reply to just criticism" and depicts "the re-education of a human mind through willpower and reason under the influence of the new ideals." (If only we could hear Brahms's and Mozart's comments on such motives for composing a symphony!) Much more satisfying, perhaps, because less self-conscious, was the familiar Concerto for piano, trumpet and orchestra, on the same programme, with its grotesque "Poor Jenny is A-weeping" reminiscences and Eileen Joyce's barrel-house gymnastics, in which the high spirits and the Audenish mood reveal a welcome absence of ideological preoccupations. —J.C.R.

Youth v. Maturity

ANY port in a storm, any oasis in the desert, and any haven of wit in a radio discussion is prized out of all proportion to its intrinsic merits. I rather liked the remark of one schoolboy in the second half of the *ZB Citizens' Forum* session recently who commented apropos (continued on next page)