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YOUNG COSMOPOLITAN

EDWIN CARR has become the cosmopolitan as likely to be found in Rome, as in London or Vienna. For he is not the sort of person who grows a sentimental feeling for places, who wants to stay put. Cities don't really mean much to him—he judges them simply on the quality of their musical life. Do not drag him to Cathedrals and galleries: the wet sands of some sun-charged beach are far more to his taste. All those things that are resounding and grand make little impression on him. And it is the same in musical matters. His judgments are quick, shrewd and, when you think about them, plainly true. He takes very little on trust; abhors the composer who trots out the same weary clichés slicked up with efficient gloss; and has severe standards for himself. He scrutinises his own work with a detached, fastidious eye always watchful for the flabby thought, the clumsy touch. Thus comes the clear, warmly imaginative music by which we know him.

Edwin Carr stresses the debt he feels he owes Benjamin Frankel, his former teacher. Together they made a searching study of symphonic method from Haydn to Beethoven. This focused his vision as an artist. Clarity and shapeliness in music, he found, comes from a vital, objective attitude on the part of the composer towards his material—the force of an emotion must not be allowed to cloud its expression. This is the characteristic of the classical masters and, today, Stravinsky. Even as a boy in New Zealand (not so long ago, for he is not yet 30) Edwin Carr had a devotion to the composer of *Petrushka* and the *Symphony of Psalms*. But Stravinsky's austerity and dry intensity are not to be found in Carr's own work. The recent *Piano Sonata* (1955) leans towards France. Its melodic poise and sensitive colour make one think of Ravel. But only superficially, for Edwin Carr's voice is very much his own and not to be confused with anybody else's. His music lives in a highly individual world; vivid and sinewy are the rhythms of the *String Quartet* (1954); lyrical and touched with a sad nostalgia in the slow movement of the *String Symphony* (1953); and always the light plays on his textures and makes his meaning perfectly clear.

The theatre, whether opera or ballet, pulls him. In 1955 he was studying in Rome with Petrassi, the leading Italian composer and teacher. When his British Council Scholarship ended he joined an experimental ballet group in the city, the New Italian Ballet, as musical director. His experience here was not confined to writing scores on dark subjects which plumbed the unconscious. As well as composing the music to three ballets, *Electra*, *The Outcasts* and *Design in Space*, he was, on tour, the second piano in the two-piano orchestra. If the company's finances were uncertain (he was haunted by the thought that all of them might find themselves one day stranded in some forgotten



EDWIN CARR

province without the return fare to Rome), Italian temperaments were more so. It is foolish to ask him now his opinion on the Italian way of life—he no longer cares for the happy natures brimful with *Pagliacci* and the Mediterranean sun.

«This year he has been to Vienna. When the recent politics, which have already upended the reigning Director, subside, it is hoped that the Vienna Opera Ballet may commission a score. And none of us would be surprised if before long the Sadler's Wells Ballet draws him into its net.

Edwin Carr is then coming to knowledge about the knock-about world while he builds up a body of work. Of chamber music there is the string quartet and the piano sonata; in larger forms the symphony for strings and the yet unperformed *Viola Concerto* of 1950; the various ballets and the New Zealand prize-winning "Festival Overture" of 1949.

Planned for the future is an opera to be based on an English adaptation of Sartre's novel *Crime Passionelle*. This study of violence and political intrigue fascinates him, though he himself is notably without political inclination. Like most young composers, he finds the "bread and butter" aspect of living in London tricky. He has worked both as telephone operator and clerk. He says wistfully that he hopes the time will not be far off when he may have freedom for steady composition. The careful ear can trace a note of urgency in his voice as well as the flat, lazy New Zealand vowels which pop in and out of his speech. Ideally some academic post would give him enough leisure for the writing to be done.

But his reputation is not at a standstill. Since *The Times* praised his symphony for strings the quality and invention of his music has aroused interest amongst discerning musicians. Anyway, he is philosophic on this count. We all know the established order is slow to open its ranks; the public sadly loath to extend its musical curiosity. But you feel that Edwin Carr has reached the critical point where the young man of talent hardens into the mature responsible artist.

A note on Edwin Carr by
GRAHAM PATON