

(1946)



THE MODERN MUSIC

The Jerusalem Branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music gave a concert on Monday 15th July at the Conservatoire of Music.

The chief work performed ("Vivace" (Suite) by Poulenc played by Peter Wallfisch) was composed in 1920 and the newest was a Quintet for Wind Instruments written only a few months ago by Heinrich Jacoby.

I make a point of listening to the latest compositions of Palestinian composers whenever I can in the hope of finding something really good. I have not listened in vain, but this Quintet gave me the greatest immediate pleasure of any modern work that I have heard for a very long time. This does not necessarily mean that it was the best composition I have heard though it may well be, it means just that I personally was able to understand and appreciate it the first time I heard it. It was superbly played by the wind players of the PBS Orchestra and was conducted by the composer.

Heinrich Jacoby was a pupil of Paul Hindemith and there is nothing reactionary in his ideas but he stoops to make to the listener certain concessions without which that harassed person so often finds himself grouping in a sea of unrelated atonal sequences and harmonies (or dissonances). In other words he gives something into which we can get our teeth.

Appreciation of a piece of music is largely a matter of memory. Provided you are given something distinctive to recognise as a theme — it need not even be anything as primitive as a mere "tune" — it is up to you to recognise it when it recurs however it is quoted or developed.

Jacoby gives us definite themes with texture and rhythm which are the pillars upon which his edifice is built and which can be recognised as such even at a first hearing. His treatment of them is sophisticated, original and exciting and our friends of the PBS excelled themselves.

Josef Gruenthal's sonata for Viola Solo (which means "unaccompanied") just left me gasping; firstly because of the virtuosity, both technical and musical, of the performer Gideon Roehr, and secondly because I could not make head or tail of the music. To me it was a succession of notes unrelated to any key signature or fundamental musical idea. In other words it was intensely modern. How then is the ordinary listener expected to understand such music? Either he must be cleverer than I am or else he must hear the composition two or three times. This is not a criticism, it is a statement of fact. Toscanini insisted on performing one of Sibelius' Symphonies at three consecutive concerts in order to

give the American public an opportunity of getting to know the work and to understand the composer's idioms. Yet Sibelius is chicken food compared to Gruenthal. The only possible way for me to listen to this music for the first time is to take what pleasure I can from passing sequences and chords. By the next bar they will be forgotten and a new set of experiments can be swallowed. But there is nothing to chew on until repeated hearings have driven home the fundamental ideas upon which the whole piece is built. The third movement, "Tango", did actually give us something. The first beat of each bar consists of one pizzicato note, the low C of the viola, plucked by the left hand without interrupting the flow of sounds produced by the bow and the other fingers of the left hand. This gave one rhythm, a fundamental idea and almost a key on which to base one's appreciation and was sufficient to allow me to enjoy this very intriguing movement.

Musically and technically (notably in the many octave sequences) it is a piece which only a brilliant player like Mr. Roehr could make sound so smooth and easy.

Peter Wallfisch (piano) gave us two Poulenc pieces which were delightful and sometimes amusing. He also played Ernst Krenek's "Little Suite" written in 1923. This

SAAL des Pal. Konversatoriums sein... zert... ten... Werke palästinensischer Komponisten besondere Hervorhebung: Der begabte Bratschist Gideon Röhr trug eine stimmungsvolle Solo-Suite des Jerusalemer Komponisten Josef Gruenthal vor, die lebhaften Beifall fand. Von Heinrich Jacoby hörte man ein Quintett in drei Sätzen für Blasinstrumente (Flöte, Oboe, Klarinette, Horn, Fagott), das sowohl auf folge origineller, durchaus selbständiger Thematik wie auch durch die Eigenart seines Aufbaus und seiner stark rhythmischen Durchführung fesselte.

"Sonata" should be read "Suite"

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also I should very much like to hear again. The six short movements were distinctive, neat and easy to listen to. They were played fluently with obvious enjoyment which I was glad to share.

The programme contained a Sonata for Two Pianos by Arnold Cooke, but owing to the illness of the clever young pianist, horn player and composer, Moshe Lustig, it had to be omitted. Instead we were given John Ireland's Sonata for Clarinet (Karl Berendt) and Piano (Arjeh Sachs), written in 1937.

It would be expecting too much to ask any two players to perform a difficult modern work like this at very short notice faultlessly. There were no "faults" actually, but I have no doubt these two artists would have preferred to play us this work after more time for rehearsal. I do therefore congratulate them on a masterly performance of a most interesting modern work.

The writing for the Clarinet does not spare the performer. The clarinet is not a perfect instrument throughout its range and the player is responsible for hiding its imperfections. Gys Karten excels at this but Mr. Berendt is obviously on the road to becoming a very fine player. He has courage and understanding. Mr. Sachs we all know to be a sound pianist and musician. I. R. D.

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MUSICAL DIARY

Two Local Works

In his review of a recent concert of the International Festival of Contemporary Music in London, the critic of "The Times" remarks that "in the old days it was always interesting to seek, even in the most uningratiating works, for clues as to the way modern music might go. That question is largely answered now, and one can do no more than fix labels on such works as do not proclaim themselves as intrinsically interesting or exciting."

Though in agreement with this statement, the remaining duty of label-fixing does provide yet another clue to the direction modern music is taking. Heinrich Jacoby's Quintet for Wind Instruments, for instance, performed on Monday at a concert of the Jerusalem branch of the I.S.C.M. at the Palestine Conservatoire) is another example of the growing trend to return to romanticism. The piece shows the composer reaching up, his ideas freely flowing with that economy of means which is the touchstone of maturity. His ideas were admirably conveyed by Messrs. von Blaese, Thorner, Berent, Levy and Marcus. Mr. Gruenthal's Suite for Viola Solo (admirably rendered by Mr. Roehr) needs first to

be set apart from a rather well-founded idiosyncrasy against music for solo strings. After that it reveals itself as a sincere and profound piece of work, striking one as modern only by association. In the light of recent developments, it is almost conservative.

Tschaikowsky Evening

In his "Nietzsche contra Wagner" (very readable and topical as one of the earliest and most penetrating analyses of the German character) Nietzsche says "I believe that artists are often unaware of what they know best; it is because they are too vain. Their mind is directed at something which is more magnificent than these little plants seem to be which, new, strange and beautiful, know how to grow out of their earth in real perfection." Apart from some of the greatest, this applies to many composers, not least to Tschaikowsky. He is at his best when he takes a rest from being a giant, in the intimate middle movements of his symphonies and concertos, the ly-

rics of his operas and — as Tuesday's performance of the Swan Lake again stressed — his ballets. This was well conducted by Mr. Schlesinger who, in an all-Tschaikowsky programme, also rendered the Violin Concerto whose third movement is rather the worse for wear by now. The soloist, Mr. Gruenberg, will no doubt acquire that technical something needed for this particular task (there is already a shaft of brilliance in his playing) and on the whole his rendering brought out his many resources, outstanding among them being his sweet timbre.

Violin Recital

A violinist worthy of attention is Shimon Mishori, whom I heard for the first time on Thursday at the Histsadruth Hall, accompanied by Mr. Sachs. His tone, though full and round, is not yet quite clear and free. But Mishori has uncommon energy and clan, advanced technique and considerable musical acumen. He is worth watching.

R. de C.