

fidelities. There were members of a younger generation whose uncommon seriousness indicated that they, too, had realized the presence of something greater than themselves or the daily round; something, perhaps, holding a promise to a bewildered world that humanity which gave birth to a spirit such as Paderewski's will not let the things for which he has fought his unyielding battles—liberty and justice, honor and beauty—perish from the earth.

MAY 14, 1939



Villa-Lobos as a Nationalist Composer

"I didn't come to study with you. I came to show you what I have done."

MORE than one observer of modern society has asked what is to become of the creative power of matured civilizations when the freshness of racial energy and outlook upon life has gone from them. Hardening arteries of national consciousness have more to do with present European complications and explosions than we may realize.

In past centuries recurrent processes of emergence, rise to power, and decline and fall of peoples gave place, usually by violent means, to the influx of new blood. In the process some communities matured much faster than others; some even reached, comparatively quickly, stages of decay and an exhaustion of the will to live and look forward. When this occurred national expression in art deteriorated. What of today?

As civilization becomes world-wide and international, which no human power will be able to prevent, there will be always fewer sources of fresh racial power to draw upon. What then will be the process of the creative rehabilitation of nations? We may gratefully leave the answer to profounder thinkers, with the comforting conviction that better ways will be found than those of the various exterminations of a crude past. This matter has, nevertheless, to do with certain aspects of the very interesting series of national pro-

grams of symphonic music which have been given, and indeed are still in progress, as features of the music program of the New York World's Fair.

The symphonic programs have shown the greatest originality in production by nations which are the least sophisticated and modernized today and which have the strongest percentage of the primitive to be drawn on for inspiration by their cultured composers. This is not to imply an absence of a high civilization in centers of great nations in all parts of the world. It is simply the fact that certain nations, according to their history and environment, have direct contacts with—indeed, are permeated by—a wealth of the most advanced aspects of modern intellectual thought, while others, such as Brazil, have as natural possessions an immense hinterland of race as well as territory—a source of color, energy, forces which can be very productive of emotion and beauty. This material may be treasure beyond calculation for the native composer.

A case in point is that of the Brazilian Villa-Lobos. His whole course as a composer, and the extraordinary plenteousness and inequality of his creations, are strikingly indicative of ancestry, environment, and powerful individual genius. He is not only enormously creative, he is still naïve, a thing which is of exceptional importance in the creative field. When the artist can never lose his self-consciousness, when he cannot completely abandon self-examination because of an obsessing wonder before the fathomless miracle of the life that envelops him, his product is likely, if not certain, to become vitiated. Some of the music of Villa-Lobos is as primitive as Caliban. At the same time, he has not escaped, and did not wish to escape, the marvel of the European tonal art, so that Bach is to him a great and perhaps partly incomprehensible god, whom he worships and to whom he offers his own form of homage in his incredible *Bachiana* suites.

He is also especially aware of the principal strains of Brazilian folk music—those which arise from Portuguese, Indian, and native Brazilian sources. All these elements are discovered in the curious and arresting quality of his music.

He is a composer whom it is desirable to have the opportunity of studying thoroughly—a thing not now possible, for the number of his works is legion, and a great number of them are still unpublished. Even the four compositions variously scored for orchestra, orchestra and solo voice, and orchestra and chorus, which Mr. Burle

Marx placed upon the Brazilian programs, provide astonishing variety, naïveté, and originality of manifestation. What shall one say of these?

Chôros No. 8 is a great symphonic poem, savage and exotic, for full modern orchestra, with two pianos and Brazilian instruments of percussion that can be heard today wherever native musicians congregate. It is one of the most difficult scores to perform that we have seen in recent years. It is full to overflowing of ideas, most of them in dance rhythms. It is so gorgeous, wild, and rhythmically involved in its scoring that in places too many ideas cover each other up. And there are superfluities.

One cannot come to an opinion of this score at a first hearing—whether it is music only partly articulate in itself, or whether repeated hearings would make its whole course crystal clear to the sympathetic listener. A first impression is of something tremendous and only partially explicit; and of harmonies very harsh in places, put down with a frankness and conviction that make one think of some aspect of tumultuous, oppressive, mysterious nature. One could call this almost a *Sacre du printemps* of the Amazon forest! The piece astonished and, not unnaturally, perplexed some and annoyed others who heard it. It is one of the scores which will not subside in the memory, and which leave behind them an intense wish for further acquaintance. Yet it is probable that this is not a one-hundred-per-cent clear and complete expression on the part of the composer.

Now, on the same program was a soprano aria from the Fifth *Bachiana* Suite. Villa-Lobos, in a printed preface to these *Bachiana*, remarks that Bach is the most universal of geniuses; that his music reflects all life; that all life, in itself, can find a reflection in Bach's conception of music. Therefore, in his *Bachiana* suites, Villa-Lobos has looked to Bach as to an all-father. He has found it possible to express his own relation and that of the art of his people to this great master, this tonal mirror of the universe, by compositions which shall synthesize folk melody and his own musical thought in an individual and stylized expression.

And so with the "aria" from *Bachiana* No. 5, which Miss Bidú Sayão sang. It is an air quite beautifully chiseled, in its first part, after the character of the classic Bach line, with a contrasting section quite far from Bach, being passionate in mood and manner, and set to a text of the most lyric and extravagant sort. The semi-

classical curve of the first part of the aria is accompanied pizzicato by the lower strings, making one think of a guitar. The principal melody, first intoned on a vowel and at last hummed in a reminiscent and introspective way, had a beauty of its own, and of an unexpected kind.

Further on the same program was another *Bachiana* movement. Its name? *The Little Train*, or *Tiny Train*. Or let us say the Tooner-ville trolley—run by steam—which carries berry-pickers and other hillmen, and pants and jangles from town to town, its whistle resounding o'er height and valley, in the province of São Paulo. This piece was written irrespectively of the suite into which, when it had been orchestrated, it was inserted. In the suite it is called a "toccata"—as good an excuse as any for its inclusion in a group of allegedly "Bachian" pieces. The toccata figure is supplied, of course, by the rhythm of the imaginary wheels of the train—as it is supplied, in a much more sophisticated and also masterly way, in the chef-d'oeuvre of Honegger, *Pacific 231*, which concluded the Swiss program, given under Messrs. Gans and Schelling on a later evening, in Carnegie Hall, also as part of the Fair music season. *The Little Train*, for all its simplicity and naïveté, is laughably clear, natural, felicitous in tonal device. Villa-Lobos actually wrote it in an hour, bumping over the rails, and played it that evening, with his wife, a cellist, in the original form for cello and piano. *Hommage à Bach!*

We come to his *Chôros* No. 10, for full chorus and orchestra. It is a perfect beauty, and fascinating in its color, native eloquence, and evocative power. It is sung, in large part, over an Indian chant of the savage and roughly rhythmical sort. The text discourses of the aching heart, the burning sun, the cross of suffering. It implores the singing birds to intercede with God for that heart, and in the orchestra is such a warm and ecstatic trilling and piping as nobody else ever thought of in terms of instruments. It is, and is not, imitation. It is rather an impression inseparable from the thought and the word. The instrumental combination includes high wind instruments, as, of course, flageolet tones of the cellos, and related devices. It vividly communicates the sensation of something tropical, natural, impassioned, and ten thousand miles from a modern or urban civilization. So, one would say, a savage would sing, with all his heart, with no difficulty in finding a melody or accompanying device to convey his response to the natural world about him and his complete unconsciousness in communing with its god. To

this fundamental naïveté and spontaneousness in the present instances may be added an admirable technical address, and a form consummately adapted to the expressive purpose.

Mr. Marx tells us that when Villa-Lobos went to Paris he was perhaps arrogantly, but rather refreshingly independent of certain supercilious musicians of that city. They, it appears, assumed that he had come to the French capital to learn composition. "But," he said, "I didn't come to study with you. I came to show you what I have done." He has had that attitude, it seems, for better or worse. The policy has its virtues and its dangers, but it is certainly superior to, and reveals far more creative integrity than, that of many a gifted composer overawed by French traditions and esthetic who took to imitating Parisian models of composition and lost his own creative birthright in the process. Here, whatever he does, is a composer of genius, integrated in his spirit, fearless, with that to say which is his own, and hence significant of natural art.

NOVEMBER 24, 1939



Koussevitzky Conducts an All-American Program

Piston—Foote—R. Thompson—Harris

DR. KOUSSEVITZKY and the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave a program consisting entirely of American music at the opening concert of their New York season last night in Carnegie Hall.

To the best of the writer's recollection, this is the first time that a leading orchestra of the country has devoted two of its subscription concerts exclusively to symphonic works by native composers. Dr. Koussevitzky believes that Americans have produced enough music and to spare that is worthy of such exploitation. He himself has been exceptionally curious as to the product, and encouraging to American creative musicians, from the time of his arrival in this country fifteen years ago.

In fact, the entire program of yesterday evening consisted of works that the Boston Symphony Orchestra had already played at various concerts, although on the previous occasions they had been interspersed with European scores. These two programs of Ameri-