

to, how to, how to!" On the desk beside us there was also a weekly record of the publications of American publishing houses. There was a book on pirate ships done in models; a city planning book; a book of advice on how to become a success in the business world; a sentimental novel about Negroes; a novel about a young lady who refused to stay down when she was jilted; a book on how to play bridge; a book called *My Body and How it Works*; another one entitled *Enter Murderers*; two Western novels; an account of the family affairs of Queen Victoria; another Western novel; a novel of frustrated love called *Reach for the Moon*; some other works of which typical titles were *Passionate Puritans*, *Three Loves*, *Gay Crusader*, *His Majesty's Pajamas*, and so on. My friend shook his head and decided that Russia for all its fever for building

compared favorably, in the matter of its books, with our capitalist output.

Publishers are no longer leaving best sellers to chance. Best sellers are today being artificially created by prizes and book of the month selections and similar devices. English publishers are a step ahead. They are planning to institute an annual gold medal to be awarded by one of its book-of-the-month clubs, at the end of the year, to the author of the duly chosen best book of the year. This would probably then be hawked to subscribers as a special Christmas or New Year bonus. The only difficulty will be that soon dozens of other book clubs will organize their own gold medal juries and that it will not be long before it becomes a commonplace to be a gold medal author. Like so many devices of

the competitive system they overdo it. Today half a dozen publishers have their own prize winners in addition to the regular book club selections, the Pulitzer prize, and the various translations of the European prize winners. It will soon be feasible to advertise a book thus: "This book has positively not been selected by any book club, nor awarded a single prize."

Last year the business of the chain of workers' bookshops in New York City increased in two and a half years from \$300 a month to over \$11,000. This included pamphlets, books and periodicals, and the items handled numbered 150,000 a month. A few capitalist publishers began to see a possibility in pamphlet publishing and a few capitalist bookshops now are putting in a stock of Marxist literature.

Musical Life in Soviet Russia

ELIE SIEGMEISTER

THE summer was not an auspicious season in which to receive impressions of new trends in Soviet music. I was aware of that even before stepping off the gang-plank on the wooden boards of the Leningrad dock. Yet only a few days had passed before I realized that as far as music and the musician were concerned, I had entered a world totally different from the one I had left behind in New York. It was not only the magnificent singing of Red Army brigades that passed down the Nevsky, nor that of red-kerchiefed young Pioneers or groups of athletic, husky-looking young workers and students on an excursion; it was not only the conversation I had with orchestral musicians, conservatory students and professors, pianists and composers that gave me an insight into human context, the "mental climate" of Soviet musical life; it was the simple fact that in all the talks, in all the chance contacts and experiences of the first few days, no mention was made of that subject which is perhaps uppermost in the mind of an American musician these days—unemployment. It was not the scarcity of jobs, but the lack of sufficient forces to take care of those that were open that was the more frequent topic of conversation. Musicians of the hotel we stopped at—who also played in the Leningrad Philharmonic and mostly had other solo and group engagements from time to time (and who incidentally, were of the highest musical calibre)—were amused at my questions as to their standard of living. (They had a right to be, on salaries ranging from six hundred to a thousand rubles a month.) Their chief worries seemed to be the lack of good clarinet reeds and violin strings, and the possibility of not getting away for their month's vacation in the Crimea on the calculated date.

It was the same story I heard everywhere, from dozens of musicians in various cities (and, it might be added, the same story one hears in every industry, in every profession in the U.S.S.R.): enormous and constantly increasing demand for skilled forces;

opportunities for advancement broadening each year with the creation of new orchestras, conservatories, workers' clubs; chronic shortage of certain essential materials and supplies, steadily rising moral and physical conditions for the professional and worker. Paradoxically enough, musicians, together with writers, artists, scientists, and engineers, are among the most highly paid workers in the Soviet Union. Superficially, one wonders why this should be so, in a country undergoing a tremendous industrial and economic transformation, where mechanical and technological skill are at such a premium. The answer lies in the insistent appetites of the industrial and other workers for art and culture in all forms. Not only do they want to hear, see and enjoy the best in music as spectators and auditors; they wish to participate, learn how to play, sing, act, dance, themselves. It is this mass interest in music which can be observed on the streets, in the parks, in the workers' clubs as well as in its more conventional manifestation in concert halls and in the theatre that accounts for the huge amount of work and the high earning power of the professional musician. For he is called upon often to supplement his normal work in the orchestral pit or on the concert platform, by leading a workers' orchestra or chorus, or by informal, intimate performances at any one of the numberless workers' clubs. (In Moscow alone there are over 500 of these, most of which run regular concert series for their members.)

I had the opportunity of hearing some of these workers' choruses and understood the enthusiasm of the professional musicians who devote themselves to training them. One of these groups, the Chorus of the Railway Workers' Union of the Moscow-Kazan line, which performed in the auditorium of the beautiful modernistic Railway Workers' Club in Moscow, was a revelation of fiery, spirited, yet exquisitely balanced choral singing. The chorus combined fine voices, perfect discipline with a lustiness and vigor that a professional chorus would have to work hard to equal.

Their performance of revolutionary choral and mass compositions by Davidenko, Koval, Szabo, and others made one feel that "they knew whereof they spoke." Not content with these, however, they boldly plunged into a group of "classical" numbers, including choruses from *Boris Godunov* and *Die Meistersinger*. I was amazed at the perfect vocal command and fine musical intuition and understanding which these performances revealed.

No doubt much credit is due to the splendid leadership of the professional conductor (Chlebnikov); but equally remarkable are the devotion and enthusiasm of the workers themselves who must have given a large proportion of their leisure hours during the five years this chorus has been in existence to the arduous and painstaking work of building up their own musical proficiency.

This performance, only one of several I heard during the summer, was an eloquent example of that "Self-activity" in which the Soviets are constantly urging and helping the workers to engage. In an interview with the All-Union Director of Workers' Cultural Activities (which is under the guidance of the Trade Unions) I obtained much information as to the extent and manner in which this mass musical work is being carried on. There are, according to the latest figures, no less than 20,000 mass musical organizations (choruses, symphony orchestras and bands) now functioning in clubs throughout the U.S.S.R. all of which have been organized since the Revolution. The chorus which I heard is by no means the best, not even for Moscow. In the recent non-professional musician's Olympiad it ranked well below the top. Many of these organizations have begun to produce opera under the guidance of the leading singers and conductors from the State Opera Houses. All these activities testify to the cultural upsurge that has swept like a tidal wave over the Soviet Union since the revolution and has created "boom" days for the musician.

This "boom" has expressed itself objectively in the fact that there are now in Moscow, a city of close to four millions, four opera houses, and half a dozen symphony orchestras. The number of music students has increased to such an extent that the Conservatory finds itself hard put to it to handle them all. It has been compelled to open entire new sections to accommodate an entirely new type of student. Among its novel features are a special division for child prodigies (who are given special instruction by the leading professors, and who are financially supported, in many cases *together with their families*—and protected from exploitation by stringent regulations); equally interesting is the Rabfac (workers' faculty), where afternoon and evening classes for factory workers who have shown musical gifts, and are anxious to develop these gifts, are held. Many graduates of the Rabfac have left their factories and become professional musicians, in some cases well-known soloists and members of leading symphony orchestras.

The Conservatory doors are, of course, open to all. Instruction is free and all but a few of the students receive a regular stipend. I met a number of students of the Moscow Conservatory and all were enthusiastic about their work. They spoke particularly about the comradely relations among the students and between students and faculty. One girl, formerly a student at the Juilliard School in New York told me:

The most wonderful thing about studying here is the total absence of those mean and petty jealousies which most of the American music students—and musicians, too—seem to have. Back in the Juilliard you felt as if every student looked upon the next one with distrust and suspicion. Each was a potential rival, competitor whom you must do your best to outshine. There was none of the true friendliness, the mutual aid, the frank and open discussions of musical problems, the self-criticism given and received in a comradely spirit, that we students have here. Here there is absolutely no trace of that false "Individualism" which consists in trying to down everyone else. The work is so much better, more serious—and then, there is a job waiting for everybody at the end of the four years.

Of all the music workers whose conditions have been altered by the revolution, none has been so profoundly affected as the composer. As this is my own profession, I made a point of meeting as great a number of Soviet composers as was possible during the summer. Many I visited in their homes, where we played, spoke and exchanged opinions on American, European and Soviet music. Although in the course of many keenly interesting hours I spent with these composers, a great number of honest differences and even sharp clashes of opinion developed, the information I gathered as to the physical and moral conditions under which they worked was exciting to the highest degree. It impressed me at first as being fantastic, incredible, like an Arabian Nights' tale. From what I saw and heard I realized that, for the first time in history, the composer is being considered in a

realistic, truthful light: not as the "divinely inspired genius" of the romantic biographies; not as the parlor lion or salon ornament, or the plaything of aristocratic or millionaire patrons, to be burdened with exaggerated adulation and left in equally exaggerated neglect. Those Soviet composers whom I met were considered and considered themselves as productive workers. They are treated like any highly skilled, specialized and hence socially valuable worker.

In contrast to most of the composers of capitalist countries, who, unless they have patrons or an independent fortune, are obliged to devote the larger part of their time to teaching, lecturing, conducting, or more often, simple hack work to earn their living (I am not speaking of "popular" composers) all the Soviet composers I met were earning their living through their own music. As in other professions in the Soviet Union, fixed rates are stipulated in the bi-annual or annual contract which each composer gets through the Union of Soviet Composers. Besides his contract, each composer is entitled to additional revenue from the publication and performance (including radio performance) of his music. According to law, each musician is entitled to 2½ percent of the box-office receipts of any play, opera or ballet for which he has written the music. It was no wonder therefore that the composers I visited were able to entertain in lavish manner, have summer cottages, etc. The care with which the Soviet government treats them is more than sufficient to relieve them of all economic pre-occupations, and enable them to devote their entire time to actually writing music.

Another very important difference distinguishes the composers I met in the Soviet Union from their European or American confrères—that is the audience for which they write. Most composers in history have written, more or less consciously, with a particular audience in mind. It is only in comparatively recent years that music has been written "for no one in particular" or "for the composer himself." In the Soviet Union the composer, in common with every other worker, is acutely aware of the social destiny of his work. He has 160,000,000 listeners to bear in mind, an audience whose tastes, interests, and level of musical understanding he must consider. I was told by Bieli that the late composer Davidenko used to spend several weeks each year on a certain ship of the Soviet Navy, for the purpose of living with the sailors, talking, making friends with them, and getting to know at first hand what type of music would best portray their life. Each year many of the young composers study their thematic material and their audience in this way—on collective farms, new construction projects (such as Dnieprostroy, Magnitogorsk), on travels in the various Soviet republics, etc.

One has the inescapable feeling, in view of all the favorable conditions that have been established for musical composition that a great new art of music, far surpassing anything that has been created in the past is now

in process of foundation. Composers have every incentive—economic security, performance, publication of their work, and, most important, the appreciation of a huge audience of workers and farmers, unprecedented in history. And yet, so far, one must honestly confess, the great masterpiece of Soviet music is still to be written.

Perhaps it is the very magnitude of the task, that of portraying in tone the tremendous historic events of the last two decades, the dramatic conflicts, the huge flood of thought and emotion of the period of socialist construction, that has overwhelmed the musicians of the youngest generation. Only in the symphonies and in the movie music of Shostakovitch does one find a taste of the grandeur, the vitality, the all-engulfing changes that characterize this period. Perhaps it is a too literal sectarian approach to the problem of "going to the masses" what has been holding back the other composers. It was surprising to me to see how many of the younger Soviet musicians are still under the spell of Tschai-kovsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, even of Grieg and Mendelssohn—under the theory that "one must write for the broad masses." The implication being of course that the masses would not understand anything more modern. The thorough falseness of this theory is, however, demonstrated by the fact that Shostakovitch, whose musical language is easily as advanced (from the point of view of harmony, dissonance, rhythmic intricacy, etc.), as that of any western composer, is by far the best-known and best-loved of all the Soviet composers.

Although I did not have the opportunity of meeting him, I everywhere heard the praises of this remarkable young man who at the age of twenty-eight has already produced three symphonies, several operas and ballets, besides much other music. It is interesting to reflect that instead of having had to fight against ignorance and musical bigotry, instead of having had to curry favor at the hands of lordly but fickle patrons and pass through years of oblivion, of physical and mental privation—such as has been the lot of practically every great composer of feudal and of bourgeois society (one has but to think of Mozart, Wagner, Mussorgsky), this young genius has been given practical and moral assistance in every way. His new opera *Lady Macbeth* (on a historical, non-revolutionary subject), is now being performed in two cities, and will soon be published. His works are everywhere played, discussed, criticized. He is perhaps the first composer in the history of music who has worked under conditions as nearly ideal as one could hope for on this planet. In face of this will people still believe the hoary lie that "there is no individual freedom for the artist in the Soviet Union?"

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The Theatre

George S. Kaufman: Anarcho-Cynicist

MR. KAUFMAN is a symbol in the American theatre. The co-author of *Merrily We Roll Along* represents Moss Hart, Marc Connelly, Edna Ferber, F. P. A., Morrie Ryskind, Alexander Woollcott and the late Ring Lardner. He symbolizes these people, having been their collaborator at one time or another. In toto, they are one big, bright, fancy-colored balloon, well-made and polished enough to reflect with some degree of accuracy and with a considerable amount of distortion the world around it.

This new play of Mr. Kaufman's (*Merrily We Roll Along* at the Music Box Theatre) is one of the least of his balloons. Not that it isn't as well-polished as his others, or as well-blown up; it just happens that its colors are trite, mediocre, and greatly faded.

It tells the story of a playwright who sells his soul to Southampton and the Savoy-Plaza. During the deal he loses his true friends, his dreams, his Provincetown Playhouse, and his college ideals. But even Mr. Kaufman can recognize a platitude when he sees one, so he and Mr. Hart wrote the play backwards, beginning it in 1934 and ending it in 1916 with the hero delivering a high-sounding valedictory at his college commencement. By putting the story in reverse and with the addition of the superlative acting of Walter Abel and Kenneth McKenna, the commonplace theme is given a glamorous coating.

But the real annoyance is neither the mustiness of Mr. Kaufman's thoughts, nor the admittedly too-clever way he has of expressing them. Mr. Kaufman, like his own creation, has sold out a high talent and a fine imagination. The author of *Of Thee I Sing*, (I am lumping Mr. Kaufman together with his collaborators) *Once in a Lifetime*, *The Butter and Egg Man*, *To the Ladies*, *Strike Up the Band*, and *Beggar on Horseback* has shown that he has some inkling of what is going on about him. In their time and place he has set minor bombs under Rotarians, big business men, Satevepost artists, professional patriots, government, and high officials. True, the bombs he placed under their collective bottoms were no more than wet firecrackers; nevertheless, they were all we had. Mr. Kaufman has been our foremost Voltaire. (Do I hear the eminent Frenchman turn over in his grave?)

Now other anarchists throw bombs, or so I am told, but unlike them Mr. Kaufman has always been carefully protected by public opinion as well as by the mocking superior opinion of that intellectual sorority of which F. P. A. and Ogden Nash are the Pepys and the Keats. Kaufman attacked Babbitt only after Mencken had made him groggy, and every two-by-four writer had followed in his wake. He attacked the moving-picture moguls only after the man on the street had

gotten up enough courage to do some thumb-nosing of his own. He threw spitballs at Washington and high politics after the oxen stupidity of Coolidge and Hoover had made the presidency a dirty and oft-repeated joke. In short, the fact that Mr. Kaufman is our outstanding satirist should make the spirits of Petroleum V. Nasby and Finley Peter Dunne die again. A satirist makes the truth uncomfortable; Mr. Kaufman has made it respectable.

This last remark finds excellent proof in the character of Jonathan Crale, the rebel, the only sympathetic being in *Merrily We Roll Along*. Crale is a bohemian radical who heard Debs speak in 1918, picketed with the garment workers in 1928, and painted satirical portraits of the rich in 1934. He is the only person in the play who doesn't sell out. Mr. Kaufman has done the radical a fine turn, you will say. Maybe. What kind of a radical has he drawn, however? Crale is a kindly, sentimental bohemian with a Greenwich Village aura as luxurious as an oriental rug. He is as attractive a rebel as was ever lionized at a tea. Not all the honest acting of Walter Abel could buck the precocious conception which Mr. Kaufman as author and Mr. Kaufman as director have given him.

The title of the play indicates the cynical do-nothing quality of Mr. Kaufman's satire. *Merrily we roll along to hell* is his theme song. And as far as he's concerned there's nothing we can do about it. He seems to be suffering from a kind of adolescence in which a callow cynicism is fused with a liberal and respectable anarchy. But because he and his collaborators are such excellent craftsmen their plays are irritatingly good.

Credit Mr. Kaufman for exposing a small and convincing section of upperclass dirty linen albeit like a fumbling lover he has been afraid to strip naked. Credit him with expert showmanship and with impulses superior to most of his colleagues. Credit him with all this, and you might say, it's about time that Kaufman left off writing irritatingly good plays and wrote one that was good and irritating.

Anarcho-cynicism is a bourgeois complaint. Frequently those who have sold out suffer from it badly. A strong and realistic dose of class medicine sometimes restores that pink complexion.

MICHAEL BLANKFORT.

Other Current Shows

Can You Hear Their Voices. Civic Repertory, October 6. In painful contrast to its predecessor, the second of the New Theatre nights was a most dismaying affair. The chief reason being the torture which Hallie Flanagan's play suffered at the hands of the Jack London Club of Newark. In view of the excellent job which the same group did of the

mass recital *America, America* (on September 21), their unfortunate performance of the far more ambitious farm play has certain implications meaningful to the workingclass theatre. And chief among these is a fact that glared through the whole performance: the actors were foreign to their lines. Between the individual actors and their words were separating walls—the inevitable result of unfamiliarity. Vibrant and convincing in roles that were part of their experience, these same actors fumbled as they attempted to embody characters whom emotionally they failed to understand. And so, at the expense of a difficult evening the Jack London Club has learned where their chief talent lies. The audience learned that the Flanagan version of Whitaker Chambers' story is one of the outstanding possessions of revolutionary dramatic literature and that it must become a repertory piece of an acting group capable of doing it the considerable justice it deserves.

Stevedore, by Paul Peters and George Sklar. Civic Repertory. Go at once if, by some error, you have failed to see it. Without a doubt, the outstanding play in town now reopened for a four-week's run in a production on the whole better than the original of last spring. It can be seen for as little as 30 cents tax free, which is why this department makes your attendance obligatory.

Spring Freshet by Owen Davis. Plymouth Theatre. Well acted yarn about a Bucksport, Maine, grandma who controls the purse-strings and therefore the lives of her family of spineless young folk. Much maudlin love-plotting and deliberately dramatic scenes that never quite click. Once again a surplus of technical competence expended on a mediocre play.

Tobacco Road, by Jack Kirkland from Erskine Caldwell's novel. Forrest Theatre. James Barton does a superlative interpretation of the central character, Jeeter Lester—and before you know it you have heard and seen all sorts of things about the lives of poor white farmers in Georgia—things which tell a great deal (though not all) of the true situation. Well worth the 50 cents—price of the cheapest seat.

Roll, Sweet Chariot, by Paul Green. Ran for just seven performances at the Cort Theatre. It may reopen in a month—just why we do not know. The fact that it is an "experimental play about the Negro" hardly justifies its pointless muddling through which leaves one finally stranded in a wreckage of symbolical and expressionistic local color. However, the musical score and the singing were of such extraordinary beauty that they ought to be salvaged even if the script is to be scrapped. But this should not be necessary, for there is a good deal of worthwhile material in *Roll, Sweet Chariot* and Paul Green—or perhaps someone less intent on obfuscation—ought to try again.

Lady Jane. 48th Street Theatre. A feeble echo of half a dozen "problem" plays of twenty years ago. It doesn't absolutely fall to pieces, because falling implies a certain amount of motion. The competent Frances Starr is hopelessly bogged down in the script, which is all about adultery being better than divorce, provided the other party doesn't know, and even if he does, so what? There's a balcony scene and a mixup over bedrooms. G. W.

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