

been seen in New York in many years, was one of utter sameness—so much so that the most appropriate description can be found in the native tongue of the composer: "Sehr langweilig."

Schoenberg has been unquestionably a leader in the creation of a "modern" idiom, that is, a manner of musical speech in which a consistent use is made of dissonances, both as a result of polyphonic (many-voiced) movement, and as a result of new chord structure and progressions. But the basic lack of vitality in ideas; the unutterable sameness; the twinges and spasms of warped emotion; the feeling, with due respect for Schoenberg's sense of form, of loose ends, without cohesion, succeed finally in conveying the sense of utter futility. This feeling of complete frustration might be compared to the efforts of a sculptor who had a concept of form, of pattern, in his mind, but who attempted the hopeless task of moulding handfuls of sand into definite shape.

If anyone doubts that Schoenberg's work is evidence of the final struggle of a decadent and dying culture, let him listen to his songs. Here the subject matter deals with the same idealistic, poetic symbols which were characteristic of the "romantic" period in music. In that period, these emotions were elevated by the highly individualistic genius of such masters as Schubert, Schumann, Wolff, Brahms, and others, to such a great height of inspired attainment, that to follow in their footsteps is to retrogress. Hence, Schoenberg's much vaunted leadership has not been a spiritual one, but one of form, which, in the absence of profound impulse and impetus, degenerates into mere formalism. In short, in dealing with "spring, young and warm," "nightingales," "birds," and personal emotions connected with such matters, he is harking back to a period in music which is past. This he does not do by direct imitation of the old masters. Not at all. Being a "modernist," a "leader," he must be different. So he pours old wine into new bottles, for certainly all this poetry reeks of the old German romanticism—yet only occasionally does the old familiar, appropriately lyrical musical treatment appear in the momentary glimpses of cadences and musical phrases redolent of the past, which stalk through his pages like ghosts, ill at ease in their up-to-date garb. In spite of all this "modernism," one suspects Schoenberg of gazing longingly, like Lot's wife, behind him, and of being at the same moment petrified at his attempts to feel and express.

The piano pieces are as arid, still-born examples of creation as exist in musical literature. Here is novelty of harmonic structure, and it may be argued that, at any rate, he attains a certain interdependence of form and content. Yet the basic ideas are again of such fragmentary, spasmodic aridity, that the death knell of the value of his form is sounded with the opening tones.

In a recent article in the American Spectator, entitled "The Composers Turn Buffoons," Edward Robinson takes Schoenberg, among others, to task, for not having

picked up the "burning torch" of Schumann and Brahms, and continued their traditions. It may be evident some day that this is exactly what Schoenberg has done. But this torch burned so fiercely in the hands of Schumann and Brahms, that to the dismay of himself and others, he found himself bearing aloft not a "flaming torch," but dying embers.

In the light of certain interviews Schoenberg gave upon his arrival, one is enabled to see, more clearly than heretofore, the direction and danger of his leadership. He has said that a composer is uninfluenced by social changes and upheavals, and that he goes ahead with his work unconcerned with world affairs. In his Marxian interpretation of musical history, Tchemodanoff, the great Russian critic, observes: "An artist, as well as a philosopher, does not suspect that his creative ideas are influenced by the social conditions of this or that class. Moreover, he would deny this connection if someone were to point it out to him. He would insist that he was absolutely free in his creation and that he worked only in the name of art and his own great ideas. Nevertheless, there is not a single artist, no matter how formally free he may be, who can escape the influence of the ideological atmosphere which surrounds him."

It is not to be believed that Schoenberg has evolved his "different" chord structure merely from his inner consciousness, without his being aware of musical changes taking place in the world, whose revolutionary character may be traced to shifting social conditions to which they are indissolubly linked. His failure, in the last analysis, seems to be his self-confessed unawareness and grasp of the larger significance of inevitable changes taking place in a world of ever-present reality, in which musical utterance is a most vital phase of expression. Were he great enough to sense the profound significance of these universal changes, his work would break the bonds of mere formalism, a new transcendent spirit would imbue his creations; the "professor" would emerge from the narrow confines of his study, transformed into a real musical leader, catching the new spirit of mankind. The attempt to make

NEW MASSES

the ideal, the unreal, live, would no longer concern him; but the inspiration of the new era, the glorification of the real, would elevate his musical expression to new heights, quickening the form which has the aridity of a desert.

One is led to speculate what the influence, if any, upon Schoenberg's ideology would have been from his exile to less friendly shores, or even to the safety of Hitler's "protective custody." After all, the concurrence of Schoenberg's misfortune with the advantage to the conservatory in Boston may be Schoenberg's tragedy. ASHLEY PETTIS.

Announcements

The Film and Photo League of New York will conduct a five month practical course in the element of still photography every Friday evening, beginning Jan. 5, at its headquarters, 116 Lexington Avenue. Students may register Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday evenings between eight and ten o'clock. Tuition is scaled according to the student's ability to pay. Prominent photographers will be on the faculty of the film school.

The third evening in the NEW MASSES series of Soviet film showings will take place at the New School of Social Research, Saturday, Jan. 6. The program is devoted to the national minorities of the Soviet Union and will begin with a short lecture by Joshua Kunitz.

Sunday Evening NEW SCHOOL
JAN. 14 8:45 66 West 12 St.

THEATRE ARTS IN SOVIET RUSSIA

Mena TARASOVA	Lee SIMONSON	Julien BRYAN
Songs	Theatre	Films
Ticket: 75c—\$1.00—\$1.50—plus tax		

On Sale:
Office—Sidney Ross, 22 E. 55th Street
New York City

Telephone: PLaza 3-2422

TORGSI

orders enable your relatives in Soviet Russia to purchase all sorts of domestic or imported articles at low prices. For orders on Torgsin apply to your local bank, companies listed below, or their authorized agents.

Amalgamated Bank, New York
Am-Derutra Transport Corp.
American Express Co.
Gdynia-America Line
Hias
Icor, Biro-Bidjan Corp.
Manufacturers Trust Co.
Public Nat. Bank & Trust Co.
R.C.A. Communications, Inc.
Union Tours, Inc.
World Tourists, Inc.
Hudson Co., National Bank,
Bayonne, N. J.
U. S. Trust Co., Boston, Mass.
Lincoln Trust Co., Providence, R. I.
The Pennsylvania Co., Phila.
Union Savings Bank, Pittsburgh
Amalgamated Trust & Savings
Bank, Chicago, Ill.

In Soviet Russia

there are Torgsin stores in over 1000 localities. Torgsin orders may be sent to anyone, in any quantity.

To cities that have no TORGSI stores, Torgsin mails your order by parcel post.

Prices Reduced
About 50%



GENERAL REPRESENTATIVE in U.S.A.
c/o Amtorg, 261 5th Ave., N. Y.