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Previews
Thurs, 27 Nov.

#5

I. After Vivaldi

It is wonderful to be home again, back with all of you, whom by now I consider to be old friends — and with my dearest friends of all — those hundred-odd people in back of me. I've just returned from a swing of concerts in Paris in Milan; and I must say, that with all the joys of Paris, the three fine orchestras I conducted, the wonders of Europe, the glories of La Scala, — with all these, there's nothing like the New York Philharmonic.

[Tell about TV on Sunday?]

And now a short announcement. Owing to the highly complex nature of this program — not just musically, but from the point of view of furniture-moving — we are changing the order of works, which will save you from long waits between numbers while pianos are wheeled in and out, and 12 extra percussion players try to connect with their dozens of instruments. We will play the Schumann symphony next; and then the Varèse Arcana. After intermission, in isolated splendor, Mr. Ashkenazy will be heard in the Prokofieff Concerto.

II After Schumann

With this evening's program we enter the second phase of our survey of American music — the period of the Twenties. We've heard a lot about the Twenties in recent years; shows like "The Boy Friend" have resuscitated the flavor of that hectic decade; Dior + Givenchy have made a fortune on short skirts and waistlines down to the hips; and F Scott Fitzgerald has had a big revival. We've come to think of the 20's as the typical postwar era — free, wild, daring, rich, jazzy, + filled with flappers + bootleg whisky. But few people have troubled to tell us what happened to serious music in the 20's — at least, in our own country. Well, what happened was nothing less than the beginning of a real American music. It started, as all movements do, rather self-consciously, with avant-garde cliques + patrons, small chic groups interested in anything modern, new, different. This led to a widespread feeling among composers that originality was the sine qua non of music: do anything at all, as long as it doesn't sound like anything you've heard before. Originality for originality's sake became a password.

¶ The two aspects of this originality movement that we are going to observe this month are, first: the tremendous new interest in jazz — which was both new + American.

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We shall be hearing pieces that absorbed the spirit & sounds of jazz; like the Copland works next week, without actually being jazzy; & pieces that literally use the actual techniques of jazz, like the Milhaud & Gershwin pieces we shall hear the following week. The second aspect is that of the experimentation ~~in new sounds~~ that went on in the 20's — experiments in new sounds, in what used to be called dissonance, in new forms, and in the big noise that had been started a decade earlier by Stravinsky in his ~~Sacre du Printemps~~ Rites of Spring.

All of these experiments are to be found in the piece we are about to hear. Varese, who is now 73 years old, could well have qualified as a living American pioneer on our last series, except for the fact that he was born in Paris. But he adopted America in 1919, and has never ceased being an American since.

Arcana is one of those monster pieces that hardly ever gets played because it is both very difficult and very expensive. If you think that there are over 120 people on this stage at this moment

ready to smack away at this awesome score, you will see what I mean. But it's time it was heard again. For a piece of such importance, written in 1927, & played once in Philadelphia in 1932, it seems unfair that a full generation should have elapsed before it is heard again in America.

I guess one could say that Varese is almost the founder of modern music in this country. ~~And~~ (And by "modern" I mean ~~really~~ modern modern — the works.) Don't forget that he was 28 when The Rites of Spring ~~he fakes~~ was premiered in Paris in 1913; and when he came here, he carried ~~it out~~ the revolution with him, so to speak. He founded all those guilds, unions, leagues, societies, and ~~forums~~ associations of modern composers; & he is still at 73 as excited and eager about new sounds as he was then. Only now what excites him is electronic music — music composed on tape, & played, so to speak, by oscillators, modulators, and equalizers. And the most curious thing is that the sound of Arcana, as you ~~will~~ are about to hear, is amazingly like electronic music, only it's played by human beings. It's as though he had the sounds of this new electromusic in

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his head long before ~~the~~ electronics had even been invented. And the proof of its worth is that Arcana sounds today as if it had just been written. It is that modern. It may not delight us, & it may even scare us a little; but it can't fail to impress us. — of that I'm sure.

Leonard Bernstein
26 Nov '58

For Jerry, N.Y. Concert
Feb 17, 1962

Troy YP

Greeting.

Last year, on one of our Young People's television programs, we did a whole program of nothing but Overtures; and we had so many letters saying how exciting it was that I thought we'd do a program of overtures again for you today. There's something about overtures that all people love — even people who aren't too keen on serious music, or who don't know much about it. Did you ever wonder why? I've always wondered. When I was a boy (etc. p. 3).

(to bottom p. 5 — "Marriage of Figaro".

This is a tiny little overture, lasting only about 4 minutes, but it sure packs a lot of excitement into those few minutes. It's as fast and light-footed as a rabbit scampering across a field, and it sets up ~~up the sort of breathless~~ a breathless, playful mood that's exactly right for ~~this~~ the opera that's going to follow it — a light, ~~[illegible]~~ gay, witty opera.. ~~From the first~~ And that's just what an overture is supposed to do: put you in the right mood for the opera that's coming. So the Marriage of Figaro overture begins with a whispered rush of notes, ~~bubbling with like inside laughter that you're~~ like that awful desire you sometimes have to laugh in school or in church, where you know you shouldn't, & try to stop it,

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but it ~~[illegible]~~ breaks through in a soft giggle:

ORK – 1st 7 bars

You see how bubbling it is, just like inside laughter? But then this laughter builds up and up, till by the end it's no giggle anymore, but ~~a real thing~~ the pleasure of ~~a~~ full enjoyment. Listen to how it builds up:

ORK: 16 before (E) to (F), dbt.

Isn't that wonderful? It's such a relief when you can finally let that laughter out! Here is the whole overture now, & I hope you find it as much fun as I did when I was your age.

ORK – (Fig).

(Continue p. 11, "Now we come" ——— to bottom p. 12, with added paragraph.)

ORK – Leonore

Well, so far we've had an overture to an opera, and an overture to the last act of an opera. Now we're going to hear something even more peculiar: an overture to no opera at all. Just an overture, period, called "The Roman Carnival", by the great French composer Berlioz. This is what's called a nonsen – a big, hasty

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brilliant piece, full of the dance rhythms and the sunny skies of Italy.

Now actually, the Roman Carnival Overture once was part of an opera; it was written to be played before the second act of Berlioz's opera called Benvenuto Cellini. — (my goodness, how complicated these things are to talk about!) Anyway, that opera is never performed anymore — it wasn't much of a success; and the main thing that survives from it is this second-act overture, which is called the Roman Carnival, & which is always played just as a concert piece: that is, it's still an opening piece, only it opens symphony concerts instead of an opera. So it's still an overture. See? Very simple. And here it is.

which of course has a real overture from the Benvenuto Cellini overture

ORK — Roman.

~~Now we're going to play an overture that never had any opera attached~~

(Continue p. 15, "Now we're going to play" etc)
(to perf. of Meistersinger)

(Then:)

If any of you saw a recent television program about impressionism, when we played Debussy's great piece about the sea — La Mer, remember? How many of you (etc., ad lib.) Well, those of you who did watch it

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will be all prepared for the next piece, which is also by Debussy, and is also a prelude, but has nothing to do with an opera, and never did have anything to do with an opera. It's a real beauty, called "The Afternoon of a Faun";

(back to blue page 16: ("and if anyone asks," etc.))

Our ~~first~~ last but not by a long shot least assistant conductor, Maurice Peress, is going to play an overture with still another twist: it's the overture to an operetta — that's one thing we haven't had yet. An operetta, of course, is like an opera, but much lighter & easier; it's not so serious, it has big hit tunes, & it has spoken scenes as well as songs. We're going to hear the overture to probably the most famous operetta ever written — Die Fledermaus, or in English, The Bat, by the great Viennese waltz-king Johann Strauss. I don't think I'll have to explain a thing to you about it. Here is Mr Peress.

ORK - Fledermaus.

(continue p. 19, "Well, that's a lot..." to end.)