

MUSIC

By OLIN DOWNES.

Presenting American Composers.

The first of the Copland-Sessions concerts of contemporaneous music was given last night in the Edyth Totten Theatre. The conditions were favorable for the attentive hearing of music.

The program stated the purpose of these concerts. Their intention is excellent: To serve the interests of the young generation of American composers; to satisfy the need of these young men to hear and test their work in public performance; at the same time to serve "that portion of the public which desires an acquaintance with emerging musical personalities."

"That portion of the public" was present in such numbers as to pack the seating capacity of the place. Works by four young American composers and one Mexican were heard for the first time. A new piano sonata by Roger Sessions had been anticipated but the performance was delayed until the second concert, of May 6. Other music of Mr. Sessions, heard in this and other cities, had caused anticipation. The works heard were a violin and piano sonata by Theodore Chanler, heard in Paris in 1926; three pieces for flute, clarinet and bassoon by Walter Piston of the Music Department of Harvard University; a sonata for piano and three sonatinas for 'cello and piano, piano and violin and piano respectively by Carlos Chavez, the young Mexican composer, and "Five Phrases from the Song of Solomon," for soprano voice and percussion instruments, by Virgil Thompson. The performers were Ruth Warfield and Hans Lange, violinists; Harry Cumpson and Carlos Chavez, pianists; Percy Such, 'cellist; Lamar Stringfield, flutist; Leon Wiesen, clarinetist, and David Swaan, bassoonist.

The outstanding figures among the composers represented on this program were Carlos Chavez and Theodore Chanler. The brutal music of Mr. Chavez might be said to have taken the curse off the refined music of Mr. Chanler, while the refined music of Mr. Chanler struck the ear as a kind of palliation of the strange indiscretions of Mr. Chavez. Thus the two composers stood at extremes. Mr. Chanler was so conservative by the side of his brethren of the evening that one wondered how he arrived in such a galley. He had furthermore the effrontery to write a slow movement in his sonata for violin and piano which boasted a real melodic line and a harmonic background that could have come only from a composer of genuine gifts and poetic sensibility.

We found Mr. Chanler in other pages fluent but conventional in the modern manner. This same trait of conventionality, albeit in the acrid contemporaneous manner, characterized much of the music of the evening. For those capable of understanding the inner humor of Mr. Piston's music it was obviously intensely funny. Others, less susceptible to tonal suggestion, found it imitative of European models of allegedly humorous intent. Many were convulsed with laughter when, after puckish gurgling and giggling of three wind instruments, there were endings on common chords. This seemed, and in fact was, funny.

Mr. Copland sat behind Miss Radiana Pazmor, beating the tam-tam, the cymbals, and using wooden drumsticks on a wooden drum or gourd, while Miss Pazmor ululated in the Indian manner over his rhythms. It seemed to us that this was realistic imitation of oriental chant rather than original and inspired music, and that the imitation had not quite its proper frame. If realism, why not a stage set in the Indian manner, and a singer with a turban or a hookah or whatever it is that Indian singers of the feminine sex employ during their performances? But it was, after all, Mr. Chavez who supplied the ginger for the occasion. He used Mexican Indian themes with primitive joy, but without softness or mercy. If he did not scalp he tomahawked the keyboard, and that, as some one remarked, was counterpoint for you. It had the good, fresh bite and yelp that effete musicians of the past and reactionary critics of the present could never be expected to understand.

We emphatically commend the plans of Mr. Copland and Mr. Sessions to promote the cause of young composers of American or other nationalities, by giving public performances of their music. At the same time we found it hard to discover any very arresting personalities "emerging" from their cocoons last night. Reading ahead, we think the program for the second concert of May 6 is better selected.

Rachmaninoff Plays in Benefit.

The proceeds of the recital given by Sergei Rachmaninoff yesterday afternoon in Carnegie Hall were donated to the fund for the relief of Russian sufferers from the late war. The hall was filled to capacity; the public welcomed the opportunity to hear a great pianist at the zenith of his powers, and Mr. Rachmaninoff was enabled to contribute more than \$6,000 to the cause so near his heart. The program included Beethoven's early sonata, opus 26; Liszt's "Sonata quasi fantasia" (after reading Dante); a Chopin group; Rachmaninoff's "Elegie opus 3, and Prelude in B flat, opus 23; Liszt's "Dance of the Gnomes," "Sonnet after Petrarch," and fifteenth Rhapsodie.

A concert of which the proceeds are devoted to a cause is not the occasion for criticism, but if criticism had been the order of the day the composer-pianist would have reaped fulsome praise for his authoritative interpretations. He played Beethoven without exaggeration or attempt to read new meanings into a score which has its own claims to renown, then turned to Liszt's fantasy inspired by the poetry of Dante, and transported his listeners not only from one composer but from one musical period to another.

The classicism of the early Beethoven was thus sharply contrasted with the flamboyant romanticism of a later epoch. Mr. Rachmaninoff played the Fantasia with rhapsodic fire; he piled virtuosity upon virtuosity; he did not attempt to alembicate music which is itself an overflow of a virtuoso school. In other pages than these Liszt has better claims to enduring fame as a creative artist. In the Fantasia he struts somewhat, after the fashion of his day, and all Mr. Rachmaninoff lacked to complete the appropriate effect of his interpretation was hair reaching to his shoulders and the fashionable garb of the '30s, and the aplomb, the impresment, the glorious frenzies of the time when nothing was impossible, ridiculous or extravagant.

The program as a whole was familiar to Mr. Rachmaninoff's admirers. It was presented with his customary individuality and power. As a matter of necessity, encores were added to the list of compositions announced: