

Pro-Musica Quarterly (1923-1929)

The *Pro-Musica Quarterly* was published in New York City and was the official journal of the Pro-Musica Society. Its first issue appeared in September 1923, the last in October 1929. Publication was irregular: no issue of the journal appeared for the summer of 1924; combined issues appeared for the spring and summer of 1926 and 1929. Founded in 1920 as the Franco-American Musical Society Incorporated, the primary goal of the group was to facilitate greater understanding between France and the United States. In that sense it differed little from numerous organizations which were created following the First World War. But what soon came to distinguish it was its emphasis on the arts as a means both of stimulating cultural growth and of sparking interest in the work of contemporary French and American composers.

The dominant force behind both the Pro-Musica Society and its journal was Elie Robert Schmitz.¹ Schmitz was born in Paris in 1889 and died in San Francisco at the age of sixty. He studied both piano and violin at the Paris Conservatory, winning a first prize in piano in 1910. The following year Schmitz and his wife, Germaine, created the Association Musicale Moderne et Artistique, an organization which specialized in contemporary chamber and orchestral music. In 1914 the association became the Association de Concerts Schmitz. Part of the repertory included Schmitz's popular lecture-recitals, "Musical Geography." These were programs that focused on the music of a particular region. The broad range of music included—from folk to contemporary—anticipated the type of studies that regularly appeared in the *Pro-Musica Quarterly*.

During these years Schmitz was also active as a concert pianist, and was especially attracted to the music of Debussy (with whom he was slightly acquainted). But the First World War brought an abrupt end to the Association and an interruption to Schmitz's concert career. He served in the French army for three years, was wounded, and hospitalized for gassing and fatigue. The war years and his convalescence led to ruminations on the nature of music, and to thoughts on the relationship between physiology and piano technique—topics which once again later found their way into the *Quarterly*.

Schmitz resumed performing after the war, and traveled to the United States in 1918. The success of his concerts devoted to contemporary music led to the founding of the Franco-American Musical Society. But Schmitz soon realized that the name of the society did not accurately reflect its goals. In 1923 it was renamed Pro-Musica, Inc. Schmitz was indefatigable in his work on its behalf. Eventually more than three dozen chapters of the Society were formed in the United States, the most active being in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Detroit, Denver, Kansas City, Portland,

¹ For biographical information about Schmitz, see *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, s.v., "Pro-Musica Society," and, Paula Elliot, ed. *Pro Musica: Patronage, Performance and a Periodical*. MLA Index and Bibliography Series No. 28 (Canton, Massachusetts, 1997).

Minneapolis, and Saint Paul. Chapters were also created in Europe, Canada, and the Far East. The chapters in the United States regularly organized concerts of contemporary music. They also sponsored the first visits to the United States by Ravel, Bartók, and Respighi, as well as lectures and recitals by Prokofiev, Schoenberg, Milhaud, Stravinsky, and Hindemith.

In addition to the recitals sponsored by local chapters, starting in 1923 the Society sponsored a series of International Referendum Concerts. These were prestigious events, and programs for them were regularly published in the *Quarterly*. Their content was determined in an unusual manner. The Society maintained that “consensus of opinions of several competent minds” was superior to the “judgment of any single individual”—since an individual remained “always under the relative influence of his race, creed, epoch and teachers.”²

As a result, a committee was formed to recommend what would be performed, using as its basis a comparison between recent performances in the area and “lists of those works from all periods judged by musicians as masterpieces.”³ Final selection was made in consultation with an International Advisory Board. The board included “representatives of fifteen nations,” among whom were the “best conservative” and “most radical” composers.⁴ Judging from the programs, it seems that what had been intended—concerts that presented outstanding works in varied styles—too often resulted in compromise and convention.

During this period Schmitz continued to perform in both Europe and the United States, and was actively involved in fund-raising for the Pro-Musica Society. He held the office of president of the Society, and Germaine Schmitz assumed responsibilities for the *Pro-Musica Quarterly*. She was listed as editor with the third issue (March 1924)—but used the pseudonym, Ely Jade. The associate editor was the soprano, Greta Torpadie, a position she shared with pianist Siegmund Klein beginning in December 1924. Klein became the sole associate editor in October 1927. Torpadie and Klein were active performers of contemporary music. Complementing the editors were an Honorary Advisory Board (whose membership varied, and included Bartók, Honegger, Milhaud, and Berg) and a board of directors (which, except for the presence of several outstanding performers—such as Carlos Salzedo and Pierre Monteux—consisted of notables from social and financial circles).

Each of the journal's issues is approximately sixty pages in length and usually includes three substantive articles, a biographical sketch of a contemporary composer, occasional

² Anonymous, “Extracts from Annual Meeting,” *PMQ* (June 1925): 19; and Anonymous, “Aims of Pro-Musica,” *PMQ* (December 1925): 38. Not all of *PMQ*'s volumes and issues are numbered.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

reports on musical productions in major European cities (Paris, Vienna, Moscow, and Berlin), and discussion of the activities of composers and performers associated with the Pro-Musica Society, the latter divided into two categories: "Activities of Some of the Members of the Honorary Board," and "Activities of Some of the Artists Members." The activities sections are of particular interest today, especially when they shed light on works that either remained fragments or were transformed into other compositions (such as Varèse's *The Resurrection of the Idols* or Berg's *The Dybbuk*). Each issue concludes with an extensive section of advertisements listing concert tours, individual recitals and lectures of musicians associated with the journal. Both within the advertising section and the text itself are numerous photographs of musicians and reproductions of works of art. Included are photographs of John Alden Carpenter, Georgette Leblanc, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Gabriel Fauré, Alfredo Casella, E. Robert Schmitz, Walter Giesecking, Serge Prokofiev and Dimitri Tiomkin.

Among the most fascinating articles in the *Quarterly* are those written by composers: Arthur Bliss on contemporary English music,⁵ Darius Milhaud on polytonality and atonality,⁶ Charles Koechlin on sensibility in music,⁷ Alfredo Casella on diatonicism,⁸ Charles Ives on quarter-tones,⁹ and Henry Cowell on Moravian music.¹⁰ What makes their writing of unusual interest is both the personal tone adopted and the insight provided into the often complex musical language of the day.

The variety and excellence of the articles published in the *Quarterly*—coupled with the details provided into the activities of hundreds of composers and performers—are the basis of its significance today. The *Pro-Musica Quarterly* is an essential primary source for the study of early twentieth-century music in the United States.

During the half dozen years of its existence, Schmitz only contributed three short articles to the *Pro-Musica Quarterly*. But his presence can be detected in every issue. His activities as performer were always related in detail. And his students regularly advertised in the *Quarterly*, emphasizing their association with him. At times the *Quarterly* came dangerously close to becoming a publication dedicated—at least in part—to promoting Schmitz's reputation and career.

What saved the *Pro-Musica Quarterly* from becoming a publicity journal for its founder (or a mutual admiration society) was its uncompromising support for contemporary music in a wide variety of styles. The biographical sketches of composers published in each issue included those who at the time would have been regarded as conservative

⁵ Arthur Bliss, "The English Renaissance," PMQ II (December 1923): 10-13.

⁶ Darius Milhaud, "Polytonality and Atonality," PMQ IV (October 1924): 11-24.

⁷ Charles Koechlin, "On the Part Played by Sensibility in Music," PMQ VI, no. 1 (October 1927): 4-18.

⁸ Alfredo Casella, "Harmony, Counterpoint, etc.," PMQ IV, nos. 3-4 (March-June 1926): 31-35.

⁹ Charles Ives, "Some 'Quarter-tone' Impressions," PMQ (March 1925): 24-33.

¹⁰ Henry Cowell, "Moravian Music," PMQ V, no. 2 (June 1927): 25-29.

(Fauré, John Alden Carpenter), as well as many associated with more “progressive” styles (Schoenberg, Bartók, Milhaud).

Articles in the journal examined modern music from many perspectives. There were theoretical discussions of polytonality¹¹ and acoustics.¹² More speculative concepts were presented in studies of the relationship between time and music,¹³ and the spiritual evolution of music.¹⁴ Even nineteenth-century music was presented in contemporary guise: as a means of better understanding twentieth-century musical developments.¹⁵ In addition to its focus on modern music, there was one additional aspect of the *Quarterly* which helped to set it apart. At a time when it was common to ignore or deprecate American music, the *Pro-Musica Quarterly* discussed both American composers and American performers with an open mind and, when the occasion warranted, with enthusiasm. A number of studies—including ones on jazz,¹⁶ the music of Charles Ives,¹⁷ as well as articles by both Ives¹⁸ and Cowell¹⁹—emphasize the truly pioneering nature of the journal.

All these articles were intended to support the growth and development of American music. But it was also an indication of the breadth of interests exhibited in the *Quarterly*. In addition to studies of Western classical music, nearly a dozen ethnomusicological articles were published: including examinations of folk music in Russia²⁰ and Peru,²¹ that of the Pueblos and Navajos,²² and an important article on Hungarian folk music.²³

The diversity of music that it supported was one of the great strengths of the *Pro-Musica Quarterly*. However, its most significant accomplishment was more tangible: the many new supporters it created for contemporary music. The chapter news in each issue bears witness to Schmitz’s zeal and persuasiveness. “DENVER HAS LONG NEEDED THE STIMULUS OF CONTEMPORARY WORK in music,” wrote the secretary for the

¹¹ Milhaud, op. cit.

¹² Charles Koechlin, “On Some Questions Concerning Musical Acoustics, Parts I and II,” PMQ IV, nos. 1 and 2 (October and December, 1926): 4-27 and 4-17.

¹³ Charles Koechlin, “Time and Music,” PMQ IV, nos. 3-4: 16-30.

¹⁴ D. Rudhyar, “The Dualism of Musical Substance,” PMQ VI, no. 3 (March 1928): 4-11.

¹⁵ J. Herscher-Clément, “The French School of Music Since 1789,” PMQ III (March 1924): 14-19, and Olin Downes, “The Threshold of Russian Music,” PMQ (December 1925): 4-13.

¹⁶ E. Robert Schmitz, “Jazz. The Story of a Prodigal Son Who, After Many Circumvolutions Has Come Back to Make a Revolution That is Part of a Natural Evolution,” PMQ III (March 1924): 20-22.

¹⁷ Henry Bellamann, “The Music of Charles Ives,” PMQ V, no. 1 (March 1927): 16-22.

¹⁸ Ives, op. cit.

¹⁹ Henry Cowell, “Carlos Chávez,” PMQ VII, no. 1 (June 1928): 19-23.

²⁰ Philippe Stern, “The Week of Russian Ethnographical Art,” PMQ (December 1925): 18-21.

²¹ Marguerite Beclard-d’Harcourt, “Traditional Music in the Land of the Incas,” PMQ (October 1925): 7-13.

²² Jean Allard Jeançon, “Indians of the Southwest,” PMQ V, no. 2 (June 1927): 16-24.

²³ Béla Bartók, “Folk Songs of Hungary,” PMQ VII, no. 1 (October 1928): 28-35.

Denver branch.²⁴ At a time of increasing complexity and dissonance in music—and increasing audience hostility towards it—the Pro-Musica Society succeeded both in creating an audience and a market for twentieth-century music.

²⁴ Mrs. T. P. Campbell, "Report on the Activities and Growth of the Denver Branch," PMQ II (December 1923): 28.