

.....TRANSCRIPT.....

of the Twenty-Ninth Program

May 19th. 1937

COMPOSERS' FORUM-LABORATORY
(Second Series)

JOHANNA BEYER....and....WALTER HELFER

Composers

At the WPA Theatre of Music
254 West 54th Street
New York City

Composers' Forum-Laboratory
Ashley Pettis, Director

On May 19, 1937 at 8:45 P.M. - the 38th and 39th composers of the Second Series of the Composers' Forum-Laboratory were presented in the Federal Music Theatre, 254 West 54th Street.

Ashley Pettis:

May I remind you that the Forum starts immediately at the conclusion of the musical part of the program. You will find slips in your program on which you may write questions for both Miss Beyer and Mr. Helfer. Will you please make the questions very much to the point, concerning the music played, and not of undue length.

Thank you very much.

I have to announce that Miss Beyer's "Quintet for Woodwinds" will not be played. We go at once into the "Quartet" of Mr. Helfer's.

At the conclusion of the program:

Ashley Pettis:

Will you please pass your questions to the ushers who will go through the auditorium, and will Miss Beyer and Mr. Helfer come forward?

FORUM-DISCUSSION

After a program by Johanna Beyer and Walter Helfer.

1. Question:
B

Do you know how your music will sound before you actually hear it performed or do you merely see it as "design"?

Answer:

I actually hear it but of course not with the different instruments. Quite a different factor enters then.

2. Question:
B

Are these works mere brain children or do they also emanate from the heart?

Answer:

I think they are from both the heart and the brain. I believe that the heart and the brain should go hand in hand.

3. Question:
B

Who are your contrapuntal forbears?

Answer:

All of them. (laughter)

4. Question:
B

Are you an admirer of Gertrude Stein? (amusement)

Answer:

Yes! (laughter)

5. Question:
H

Will you please say something about modern music? Your "Quartet" is beautiful.

Answer:

I don't see that I can say anything particular about modern music. There is good and bad music. There

is modern music that is good and ancient music that is bad. I don't think it is particularly a matter of idiom. I might sum it up by saying it is a great privilege for any artist to sing to people of the things they understand. I think that answers the question.

6. Question:
B

Would Miss Beyer, with her qualifications, be able to compose something in the style of Haydn?

Answer:

I guess so! In fact, I have!

Ashley Pettis:

If I seem to eliminate any questions, it is because they aren't worth reading! I asked that you eliminate questions that have no validity whatsoever. I wish it were generally understood. It would save people pencils and trouble.

7. Question:

Practical suggestion. That each modern composer be required to produce first a Menuet or Gavotte or Fugue strictly according to accepted rules for these forms. One personal opinion is that many could not meet the requirement.

Ashley Pettis:

Since this "practical suggestion" is not directed to any person, I'll make it a personal matter for the Director of the Composers' Forum-Laboratory to answer. I take it that this is not made by a musician, and may I make an assertion that there never has been a composer in the Forum-Laboratory who has not met these qualifications during their formative years.

8. Question:
B

Why does Miss Beyer's music seem to lack melody? Perhaps it is more subtly hidden and requires many hearings in order to familiarize one with it.

Answer:

I think there is a lot of melody in it but apparently your idea of melody is a little different than mine. As for the other part of the question: yes! I think that is true!

9. Question:
B

Do you believe in key signature?

Answer:

Yes! I have written music within the key but just now I am out of it!

10. Question:
H

Am I correct in feeling that your music is more closely related to that of such a contemporary as Harold Morris (whom we heard here last week), than to Miss Beyer's? Does this mean that there are two such different schools of contemporary music?

Answer:

I believe, if the notes on the program were clearer, this question would have been answered. The work was written in 1922-1923. That is, before the days of radio and it was written before I had come into contact with symphony orchestras to any extent or with the musical literature of the world.

11. Question: H
 Answer: *short* Mr. Helfer really knows how to compose. May I ask what inspired the composition?
 As a matter of fact, it was a classroom exercise in the New England Conservatory, in the class of Stewart Mason. It was entered in the Indicott competition in 1922, and by the way, it did not win a prize. (laughter)
12. Question: B
 Answer: Among contemporary living composers in this country and in Europe, please name a few whose work you consider significant?
 That is a very difficult question and I would rather not answer it!
13. Question: B
 Answer: Please identify the numbers from the Piano Suites which you played. The third movement was strange and remarkably moving.
 I have no names to my music. I have just numbers.
14. Question: B
 Answer: Why was not your "Quintet" played tonight?
 There is a certain limit to these programs. They could not go on and on while Mr. Helfer had just one work.
15. Question: B
 Answer: Is your music based on the chromatic scale, or how can you explain your music and your playing with your fists? (laughter)
 That sounds contrary to me! First you say "chromatic scale" and then "why do you play with your fists". The chromatic scale goes up and down in 1/2 steps, and I took in many tones at once. I think that this modern life is so noisy, so intricate, and so complicated that one just can't explain it any more with one simple tone and melody. One must simply go on and bang like the rest of the world.
16. Question: B
 Answer: Do you think a definite program would enhance each work?
 I thought I had. I didn't read the notes in the program. Aren't they in there?
17. Question: B
 Answer: Since when do you call music a technical production of sounds without aiming at pleasing the ears of your audience?
 I feel awfully sorry for you. It is just a matter of hearing it over and over. If you come to these Forums every Wednesday you will become accustomed to these dissonant sounds.
18. Question: H
 Answer: Do you model your style on Vaughan Williams?
 In 1923, "Vaughan Williams" wasn't even a name to me. (laughter)

19. Question:
H

Are you being consistent in using your contrast of styles in the last movement?

Answer:

I didn't know there was a contrast of styles. They would have to be pointed out to me.

20. Question:
B

I am not trying to be facetious. I am seriously interested in your definition of the concept "Beauty".

Answer:

I believe that in my music there are some overtones if you are able to listen for them. But my way of writing is so difficult I can readily see that you cannot hear these overtones as I feel they are in. It is really a matter of getting more acquainted with it.

21. Question:
B

Why clarinet and bassoon? Why not violin and 'cello?

Answer:

I have written for violin and 'cello, too! That just happens to be clarinet and bassoon!

22. Question:
B

In your duet for clarinet and bassoon and all through your music, there seems to be an enormous lack of unity, coherence or relationship. What are you trying to do? Pray, tell me! (laughter)

Answer:

If you do not see or hear any coherence and unity in it, I am sorry! I don't think that in a few words I could give you that feeling of unity which I feel is there.

23. Question:
B

What feeling did you intend to convey in the clarinet sonata?

Answer:

I don't think I wanted to convey any feeling at all. I write music because I love to write music. I have to! It is an inner urge. It is a necessity.

24. Question:
B

Do you make a conscious attempt to use the augmented fourth?

Answer:

I like the augmented fourth and I'll probably use it a great deal -- so will you please excuse me?

25. Question:
B

Did you strike your elbows and fists at random?

Answer:

No! I strike exactly a certain limit of tones.

Ashley Pettis:

The last of this question I'll take the privilege of expurgating. (Did you intend your pantomime to be part of the effect? How are your elbows?)

26. Question:
B

Are your "Piano Excerpts" symbolical? What effect do they mean to convey?

Answer:

I am not after effects at all. I just write because I have to write. I don't know if this means anything to you, but it means a great deal to me.

27. Question:
B

The arm and hand playing on piano is very unusual, but not appreciated here, I believe. The last pieces on woodwinds are beautiful. Real melody and harmony.

Answer:

I don't think that is quite true because any human being alive can't help but be influenced by what is going on in life and it is just a matter of what means you are using. I just happened to use this means.

Comments:

H.

Mr. Helfer's "Quartet" is worth hearing.

H.

Your music brought me into a harmonious interesting world. I would love to hear some more of it.

H.

You are evidently an admirer of the Debussy String Quartet. Incidentally, this is intended to be a compliment.

H.

Your "Quartet" was welcomed heartily, after listening to Miss Beyer's compositions.

H.

Thank you for some genuine music, Mr. Helfer. What a relief after the weird stuff that preceded it!

Pettis:

This is a personal question.

28. Question:
B

Was Miss Beyer ever in love?

Answer:

I have never been out of it.

29. Question:
B

Why a piano solo? Why not a washboard or some such ingenious contrivance? Or why anything at all?

Answer:

That is being done, too!

Comments: continued

H.

The Quartet is all surface. Miss Beyer's energetic force should be injected into it.

H.

The men who make up the Quartet are genuine musicians, and the composition is very fine!

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