

A Toronto Symphony

It is said to be a great achievement to write a book—even a poor book—and the pains of an author have been called pangs of an infinite stomach-ache. What then could be said about writing a symphony? After all the author's pains are at an end when his book is written. It is the reader who suffers then. For the musician who has composed a symphony they have only just begun—and this after all the agonies of imaginative creation have been bravely endured. In the making of a song or a piano or organ number the composer may be his own interpreter. With a symphony he must have players—and a lot of them. Gifted players, too, every one a master of his particular instrument. This means inevitably that the composer's work undergoes analysis—first-hand, informed, discerning—that the author's very rarely gets.

The Symphonist

Amongst musicians, and composers particularly, the symphonist has a place all his own, for symphonists are born not made. Most of us are symphonists somewhere in our daily lives though we may never know it. The symphonising impulse or afflatus may only touch us at moments of extreme enthusiasm—over a golf story, or a political wisecrack, or a fine cigar, or some sporting achievement—and pass again like a whiff of perfume. But the symphonist in music lives in that atmosphere of tension all the time. It is easy to call him sensitive but it is more than sensitiveness that moves him to write symphonies. Sympathy and sympathy mean much the same thing when all is said and done and the symphonic composer is one of the world's most sympathetic beings and his music the life of him reduced to sound. Beethoven was—and is—the greatest of all symphonists because the heart of him quivered with compassion for everything that ennobled life and its living.

Manson in G Minor

If ever music's "softening gleam" of sympathy blended gloriously with the sunshine of early spring it did on a morning last week when Robert Manson's Symphony in G Minor was heard in the County Orange Hall, Queen street. Conductor was Donald Heins, assistant director of Toronto Symphony Orchestra—and the players (fifty or so of them) were members of the orchestra. It was a labor of love on the part of all. For many of them it meant sacrifice of a very definite kind, but music has her wonderful compensations, even though there's little to earn and many to keep. Robert Manson has played viola in Toronto Symphony Orchestra for many years. Has written a good deal of scholarly music—instrumental and vocal—and the orchestra under the late Luigi von Kunitz played a suite of his in Massey Hall. On the present occasion he acted as librarian and general happy-man, welcoming his fellow musicians and seeing that they had the needful in accommodation and seating comfort. Before the music began the spirit of

comradeship. Robbie Burns could have said a word to some purpose on an occasion like that.

The Music

This symphony is the best thing Robert Manson has yet done. It has many tuneful comforts and rhythmic solacements. There is an appeal in it that arrests and holds attention. Proof of this was the pleasure the players had in playing it. I have heard many rehearsals. Seen composers (and some of the greatest, too) go "hay-wire" under extreme provocation, and orchestras "cut loose" under worse. And if the test of a pudding is in the eating of it, then the test of a symphony (or of any music for the matter of that) is in its effect upon its performers. If lookers-on see most of the game, then orchestral players not only see most of a composer's symphony, but they see his processes, too—and it is with a symphony, as with other things, not what is said, but the way it is said that matters supremely.

The Moods of it

The moods of it are many, but the prevailing one is serenity. It abounds in tunefulness and its harmonies are grateful, leaving a sense of unity and compliance with things as they are—contrasts of beauty and ugliness, of sorrow and laughter, of right and wrong, of justice and injustice taken for granted and left at that. Rhythms are never stodgy. Broad opening andante that quickly sprang into vigorous vitality had nothing torpid about it. There was always "something doing" in details of phrase or even harmonic device to give a feeling of joy in life. A lovely interlude of reflection for reeds with cor anglais melody over modal harmony was singularly effective. The scherzo was happy-hearted as anything of Mozart, with a lilt rhythm as care-free as Edward German's own.

Workmanship

Everyone listening to new music for the first time gets a set of impressions (unless he is a mere fault-finding witch-smeller who couldn't tell a ninth from a third!) particularly his own and by his own method—mostly unconscious. But it is safe to say that in the workmanship of Manson's G Minor Symphony is the secret of its beauty and appeal. The composer knows the orchestra. His mixtures of brass and reeds—of reeds and strings—of strings and brass are never muddy. He daintily lifts one choir above another, and either in pitch or in volume keeps the proportion right. It is the same with his harmonic progressions. The various lines have their song in unbroken form, there are no ugly drops of a rising ton for the sake of the cadential close—how easy it is to spoil an effect with bad writing. Robert Manson is never musically ungrammatical, he scores for the orchestra as if every instrument was his own. Cellier's and Sullivan's gifts are his in this, and the result is sheer beauty. Perhaps we will hear Manson in G Minor next season under Sir Ernest Mac-