

Sound and Shadow

By MAX BROD

In other respects the Palestine Orchestra this season is offering few novelties and in fact not many modern works at all. We must be thankful it is true for the new presentation of Alexander Boscovitch's Violin Concerto (which will already have been heard by the time this appears).

Postscript: The Violin Concerto of Alexander Boscovitch achieved a resounding success. The work has already been analysed in detail in this column (Forum, the 3rd March 1944). Its new concentrated form has increased its tender spirituality. The violinist L. Fenyves (as soloist of the Palestine Orchestra) played so enchantingly well that the rare description "a perfect interpretation" is here in place.

FORUM

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Introducing a new feature . . .

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Of all Palestine composers *Alexander Boscovitch* has the most distinctive genius. This was demonstrated by his violin concerto, given its first performance by the Palestine Orchestra. His oboe concerto last year was delightful, but this time the impression of a powerful individuality was even stronger. Marcel Proust once, in his essay on Ruskin, clearly outlined the critic's task. He must look for the "traits singuliers" of the artist about whom he writes, that is, what distinguishes him from all others. It was more useful to pin down a seemingly unimportant nuance than to construct some such figure as "Ruskin the Man" or "Ruskin as Prophet". So much for Proust, and so to work. Three elements form a surprising unity in Boscovitch's work. First, the heritage of *Bela Bartok*, with whom he has a common country of origin in Hungary, a common abundance of rhythms and a common precision in part-writing. Secondly, the French impressionist school (he has studied in Paris). Thirdly, the Palestine experience, the devotion to the music of the east, with the Jewish and Arab notes of which Boscovitch's music is impregnated.

It has not yet been internationally noticed that an important group of original composers is growing up in Palestine. I am convinced that this new style will soon assert itself.

Boscovitch has one tremendous vision — Asia. For him Bartok too with his Hungarian and Balkan folklore belongs in the "Asia" category. The notes of the Mediterranean are also brought in. In the last movement of the violin concerto Spanish rhythms suddenly appear, reminding us of *de Falla*, *Ravel*, above all of *Debussy's* magnificent "Iberia". This might all seem rather capricious, were it not held together by the powerful originality of the young composer. It is in fact the synthesis of these various elements which excites our admiration. In the violin concerto which we heard their effect was as children of a single family.

The work starts off in dance time. Two oboes introduce the gentle but well-defined rhythm which dominates the first movement, a rhythm which links the different parts like a kind of refrain, returning again and again like the melody between the separate sections of *Moussorgski's* "Pictures at an Exhibition". The solo instrument, brilliantly played by *Lorand Fenyves*, with the most profound feeling for the cantilene, begins low down, but soon sings its way out and takes the lead. It dominates the broadly woven andante. Here it becomes clear that we have entered a double world. In the rhythms of the first and third movements there are lightness, clear unsentimental southern skies, vigorous life and energy. But in the songs of the central movement the Jewish soul dreams its old dream of God and peace on earth. Out of quiet and deep absorption (*Mahler's* "I am mislaid of the world") the ecstasy suddenly foams up — this is something new never before expressed in sound, when the violin frees itself from all keys and in bold double stops soars discordantly over the dark foundation held firm by the wood-wind. Almost against our will we are torn from this mysticism into the scherzando of the last movement. Broad manly themes move in and all sorts of ornamental small fry scrabble around with the strangest orchestral effects provided by Boscovitch. Everywhere, even in the accompanying figures for harp and clarinet, probably the favourite instruments of the composer, there keep recurring memories of the old Jewish chants, to which the bible is sung in traditional manner to this very day. Boscovitch has carefully studied this tradition, as we can tell in every bar. Then comes a cadenza of breakneck brilliance — for my taste almost too brilliant — and finally not the usual fireworks, quick passages, but the concerto returns pianissimo, meditatively, to the cantilene of the central movement, which is so beautiful and simple that it could even become popular. A great success, in which the soloist, the orchestra, this time again in form, and the conductor *G. Singer* all had their share.

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