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Boscovitch Makes Comeback

URIAH Boscovitch is making a comeback: the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra chose his "Shir Hama'alot" as one of the first three works it commissioned for its 25th anniversary season, and he is at present working on a Cantata "Bat Yisrael" (words by Bialik), commissioned for the Henrietta Szold Centenary. But for the past 20 years few of his compositions have appeared before the public: a few songs like his "Adonai Roi," the "Semitic Suite," which has been recorded by Lola Granetman and Amiram Rigal as well as by the Eden-Tamir team; his Oboe Concerto, which won two Engel Prizes; a Violin Concerto which got the Huberman Prize in 1942/43; a "Little Suite" written specially for the Ramat Gan Chamber Orchestra; incidental music to a dozen Habimah plays and the music to "The Boy Samuel" for Inbal — this is actually all of Boscovitch's known production.

Experimenter

All his works so far have found ready acceptance by juries and audiences — his songs, "Dudu" and "Shir Hama'alot" have even become generally accepted folksongs — but Boscovitch does not fill up music paper at record speed. He experiments, weighs, changes and weighs again. Typical of this attitude is the fact that he has revised most of his scores, over the years, employing the experience gained to improve his writing. He has been writing continuously — his contention being that one must keep fit with one's brains and pen like a sportsman with his limbs and muscles — but has considered very little worth publishing during the later years. His newly regained self-confidence may stem from one of his declared hobbies: Yoga, which he thinks has returned to him the gift of inspiration and the excitement of creation after a period of stagnation. He discourses passionately and brilliantly on many subjects, but specially on Yoga — and music, of course. His quick brain and well-trained intellect, together with his thoroughly sound professional training, make him an interesting partner in conversation and a stimulating opponent in friendly argument.

Boscovitch comes from the cultural centre of Transylvania which at various times was called Klausenburg, Klucz or Cluj. His professional knowledge was acquired at the Academy in Budapest, the Hochschule in Vienna, the Schola Cantorum in Paris and the Ecole Normale (with Cortot, Nadia Boulanger and Dukas), where he studied together with conductor Igor Markevitch. After returning home, he joined the local Opera as coach and conductor. One night, he heard over the radio a particularly impressive performance conducted by Issai Dobrowen, which moved him

to send him the next day the score of his "Chansons populaires juives," without much hope that anything would come out of it. But today it looks as though this intuitive action saved his life, for suddenly, in 1933, he received an invitation to be present at the public performance of his composition to be played by the Palestine Orchestra in Tel Aviv. He accepted, of course, came to



URIAH BOSCOVITCH

the premiere — and decided to remain in Palestine. Here, he gave up piano playing and quickly became one of the country's most sought-after teachers of composition. He studied Hebrew earnestly and became so efficient that together with Dr. Shmueli, his former pupil who is now a noted musicologist, he translated for publication Paul Hindemith's "Craft of Musical Composition" and his "Traditional Harmony." Even today, he describes the study of Hebrew as one of his hobbies. In addition, he made a thorough study of the folklore of the different oriental communities, and he holds that this oriental music, being definitely homophonic by nature, should not be harmonized, "arranged" or "transcribed." He insists that artistic composition, on the other hand, should not be based on folk tunes but rather on "folklore imaginaire."

Promising Pupils

Boscovitch, who teaches at the Israel Academy of Music in Tel Aviv, has had many promising musicians amongst his pupils: kibbutzniks Yaron, Zahavi, Shlomo Yaffe and the late Nissimov, Yehoshua Lakner and Yehzekiel Braun, and, among the younger generation Snunit, Mahat, Ben-Moshe and many others. Elyakum Shapira, today assistant to Leonard Bernstein at the New York Philharmonic, started his musical studies with him.

Besides being a member of the Music Advisory Council of the Ministry for Education and Culture as well as of the Academic Council at the Tel Aviv University, Boscovitch is

on the Editorial Board of the revived musical magazine "Bat Kol." Being the Tel Aviv music critic of "Ha-Aretz" for the last three years adds to the weight of his public activities.

Enthusiasm Unspoiled

But all this, and the fact that conductors like Munch, Dobrowen, Von Beinum, Barbirolli and others have presented his compositions practically all over the world, has not spoiled him. He is always ready to talk about music and its manifold problems, getting enthusiastic very quickly about arguing his point of view or developing theories, and he continually searches for improvement of his mind and knowledge.

Though every second of his time and every nerve is attuned to music, he is an outspoken family man, and his two young children cannot complain of neglect by their musician-parents (his wife is a piano teacher at the Academy, too).

He now awaits the first performance of his "Concerto di Camera," recently completed and scored for an interesting combination of instruments: a solo violin assisted by xylophone and marimbaphone, cello, viola, harp, piano, and a flute and alto flute. The Henrietta Szold Cantata should have its premiere by the beginning of next year, whilst the prize-winning "Shir Hama'alot" should be performed by the I.P.O. during the coming season, thus bringing the writing of composer Boscovitch before Israel audiences again after a comparatively long absence. YOHANAN BOEHM