Richard Burgin, conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra during the second half of Dr. Serge Koussevitzky's midseason vacation, yesterday gave the first Boston performance of the Fifth Symphony by Dmitri Shostakovich. For the remainder of a program which, it must be confessed, was distinctly on the dullish side, Mr. Burgin assembled the orchestral transcription by Alexander Tansman of Bach's D minor Organ Toccata and its accompanying "Dorian" Fugue; Liszt's "Les Preludes" and a work new to this country, the "Improvisations for Orchestra" by Jakobus Langendeen, cellist of the Boston Symphony.

A few years ago Dmitri Shostakovich was much in the public eye, because the young composer of Soviet Russia had written a First Symphony that augured a brilliant future. Later he created that controversial opera "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk." And then, reportedly because his music had ceased to express the esthetic ideology of the Soviet state, Shostakovich fell from public approval.

The Fifth Symphony, first performed in Russian during the festivities of 1937, commemorating the establishment of the Bolshevik Government, proved the means of returning him to favor. Whether a composer ought to write music as he feels it inwardly, or whether the tonal art may be used to express political and other ideas, is a long and not very profitable argument. John N. Burk, in his truly admirable note on the Fifth Symphony in the program book, has written shrewd words on the subject.

Purely as music, the Fifth Symphony turned out a sad disappointment, agreeable in some pages—notably the slow movement—but prevalingly unoriginal, long-winded and banal. Though written for orchestra with obvious technical skill, the work served only to exemplify the axiom that no amount of technic can make up for lack of genuine inspiration.

Mr. Langendeen was called from his seat in the cello section to respond to the hearty applause bestowed upon his "Improvisations." His music, falling in four sections, may not be highly individual, but it is imaginative and full of substance. Mr. Gillet was likewise singled out for fine playing of his exacting part for oboe.

Tansman's version of the Bach Toccata and Fugue is a musicianly job that has provided a brilliant orchestral dress without unduly inflating the original. Nor did Tansman seek out spurious "organ effects." This transcription ought to be heard again. Liszt's grand old tone poem, however pompous it may seem in this casual age, is exciting music. Once again, because of sheer gusto, it brought evident pleasure to an audience.

That the conducting of Mr. Burgin was of high order hardly needs to be said. Upon each occasion that he occupies the conductor's stand, the versatility of his musicianship is emphasized anew. C. W. D.
RUSSIAN PIECE
BY SYMPHONY

New Shostakovitch Work
Played Here

Jan. 21, '39

BY WARREN STOREY SMITH

With Richard Burgin now replacing the still vacationing Dr. Koussevitzky, the Symphony Concerts entered yesterday upon the second half of the current season. The principal item on Mr. Burgin's list was the new Fifth Symphony of Shostakovitch. Other Bostonian "first performances" were of Jakobus Langendoen's Improvisations for Orchestra and Bach's D minor Organ Toccata and Fugue (the Dorian) as transcribed by Alexander Tansman. Liszt's "Les Preludes" brought the end.

The best thing about Shostakovitch's Symphony yesterday was the programme note which Mr. Burk was inspired to write contrasting the status of the Totalitarian with that of the Capitalist composer. To repeat what for some may be a familiar tale, this Fifth Symphony, which had its Leningrad premiere a little more than a year ago, served to restore Shostakovitch to the good graces of Russian officialdom, which had decried the "bourgeois" tendencies in such works as the opera "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk" and the much later ballet, "Limpid Stream.

Whether the almost arrogant simplicity of this Symphony was dictated by contrition or conformity will probably never be known. In any event, the piece was widely hailed in Russia, and it seemed to please the audience of yesterday. When so much modern music is harsh, arbitrarily complex and anything but melodious, it is almost ungrateful to suggest that the new Shostakovitch work—a few spirited pages and affecting episodes aside—is vapid and wishy-washy... Some critics are never satisfied.

Mr. Langendoen, who has been a member of the orchestra's cello section since 1920, made yesterday his second appearance as composer at the regular Symphony concerts. His four Improvisations, which had been played in the composer's native Holland, but never before in the United States, were composed in 1922. The first is entirely in unison, a procedure attempted some years ago by our recent visitor, Georges Enesco in his First Suite for Orchestra. The second, a Capriccio, is waywardness itself, a sort of play of extremes. The third, Pastorale and Procession in Oriental, probably Javanese; also dramatic and pictorial. The fourth, "Burleska," is a short and violent orchestral hurly-burly. Orchestral stunts these Improvisations, but the work of a resourceful musician, none the less. And after Shostakovitch's tepidities, the third and fourth had a welcome robustness.

As for the rest, Mr. Tansman has done a scholarly job on one of Bach's more sombre works; and "Les Preludes" is "Les Preludes." Did Liszt, one wonders, write no other symphonic poems?
About Music and Politics; Novelties From Mr. Burgin

By L. A. Sieper

It is unfortunate that the music of Dmitri Shostakovich must be assessed in terms of political economy. The man has so much talent that it ought to be possible to consider his scores as music. And how can we, as a group of his alternate elevation and dignity at the hands of the Soviet Government?

Much of the debate over Soviet music is misdirected. It is impossible for a man to write music without reflecting his background and environment. There is nothing inherently wrong, or immoral, to international morality, in the writing by Shostakovich of music representative of Soviet Russia any more than there was in the writing of Elgar or of music representative of the British Conservative Party. A Russian may write that he does not approve of the British Conservative Party. You are both within your rights, but your disagreement is on extra-musical grounds.

Nevertheless, there is a difference. Music spoke for the English soul, which was spoken to by England. The Government of his day did not concern itself with what Elgar said. He represented the people, he returned him publicize if he did not do so. The Soviet Government does not that with Shostakovich. Shostakovich music Elgar could have written music making comment of the ideas. He has wanted to, but under the Soviet Government, or any other totalitarian government, it is necessary to have something to say. What a pity that a composer of Shostakovich's talent could not have arisen up in a country where freedom is granted to artists.

Both his talent and the effect of governmental restriction on it are evident in his Fifth Symphony which thematically bears, substituting for Dr. Koussevitzky introduced at the season's thirteenth pair of concerto by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, given last week in Symphony Hall. In this score pages of great beauty stand side by side with pages of rubbish. It is as if Shostakovich had written for a time under the guidance of its own imagination, then suddenly remembered that he was going to write at all, or at least to his tried to be heard at all, he must celebrate the virtues of communism, with whom he put in a cheap military march, or a bombastic march in the manner of the Russian Cossacks. The bombastic march is an attempt to please in the form of official approbation. It is possible, of course, that he would have done no better if he had been in America, but it does not seem likely. The good parts are too good, and the bad parts too bad; there is too obvious a gulf between them. The first movement on a first hearing seemed sterile Its melodic material had more length than shape, and the tempo was uneven. But the second movement, the Scherzo, has humor and even some wit, relative to the Paganini coda, and the Largo which follows sets a real atmosphere worthy of Rimsky-Korsakoff, which is uniquely dissolved by an introduction of Puccini-esque stuff expressly designed for consummation by the composer. The finale pretty well sells out to them. It's too bad Shostakovich has his individual talent good enough to be given its head. The Symphony was applauded9edly by the Friday afternoon audience.

Mr. Burgin included two other novelties in his program, the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, C. P. E. Bach, and Jakobus Langendoen's Improvisations for Orchestra. The Bach and even on the eastern side, far less showy than the early ones in the same key. Nevertheless, from the musical standpoint, it is marvelling in structure, particularly the fugato. Toccata's ornamentation made it almost impossible for the orchestra to render the composition effective in a popular sense. It was as awkward as the original, and more brilliant. The work was well received by the Friday audience.

Mr. Langendoen has been a member of the orchestra for 19 years. He also at the second level of the solo section. His 'Furlough' on a Dutch Theme of Adrian Van dercrear, played at the concert in 1937, was well received, and others of his have been heard at the Pop Concert. The new composition is a suite of four movements, well described by the composer's title. He seems to have set down thematic, and

Symphony Program

Symphony No. 5 Op. 47

Shostakovich

Toccata and Fugue in D minor

Bach

Improvisations for Orchestra

Langendoen

"Les Poémes," Symphonies

Prokofiev No. 3, after Lermontov

Liszt

The work was well received by the Friday audience.

January 23, 1939
Symphony Concert

Engrossing Novelties from Soviet Union and Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

By MOSES SMITH

The program of the Boston Symphony Orchestra yesterday afternoon and this evening, assembled by Richard Burgin for two of his occasional trips to the conductor's stand, looks on the face like an unpromising venture. It resembles some of his past programs, as if it had been made up of odds and ends crowded out of the usual run but necessary, for one reason or another, to present before another season has gone. If, in spite of these specifications, the present program, again like others, Mr. Burgin has conducted, turns out to be an agreeable affair, perhaps we ought to reexamine periodically our accepted notion of constructing a program.

The current list begins with the fifth and latest symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich, who is important a composer to be ignored even though, from our point of view, he resides in the Soviet Union, or, though, from the point of view of his contemporaries, he has not always courageously adhered to the party (Communist) line. The first half of the program includes Alexander Tansman's transcription of the "German" Overture and "Fugue in D minor" by Bach. "Improvisations" by Jacques Ibert, for almost twenty years a member of the solo section of the Boston Orchestra; and finally, Lint's "Les Présidets," which has been awaiting a decent burial for more than 20 years.

Largely because of this 80th-anniversary project, which was composed to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Soviet Republic, Shostakovich seems to have retained to the grace from which he had fallen a few years ago in connection with "The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk." It was easy, listening to yesterday's performance, to see why. The music has a new simplicity. It has tunes you can hum and metres to which you can march. Perhaps the Communists can even spell out a relation between the music and the Stalin ideology. But in any event the Symphony is made of the stuff to which millions will listen without wrinkling their brows.

But the Symphony is no more abstract of time for those who have gone through the mists of classical, Romantic, modern and musical-kleptical, secrecy of the conventional concert-dealers. They are simple, but they are not superficial. They are, at least, original creations. Even if you say something you think you have heard before, they have a twist that lends distinction. The hierarchy is basically our good and trusted friend, tonic and dominant. But here again the distortion, which never seem merely arbitrary, stimulate the listening appetite. Furthermore—and this, I suppose, is basic—the prevalent malleable patterns are not our major and minor modes; they are much more varied and much richer.

Hearing the work for the first time and assuming that the performance was as good as it seemed to be, I had the feeling that the last movement did not belong to the other three. It seemed banal. The excitement seemed false. Further acquaintance tonight, however, may tell a different story.

The other novelty was a distinct surprise. By calling his work "Improvisations" Mr. Burgin could disarm the critic who insists on certain standards of form. Actually the composer had no need of such a precaution. Each of the four "Improvisations" is a complete formal entity, and in none of them seems to be any wasted motion.

The first, "Capriccio," is capricious in formal outline as well as in the character of the musical material. The third, "Pastiche and Preciosity," is a remarkable piece worked out of nothing more than a dozen or a few percussion instruments. By dint of constant repetition plus cumulative power, the instruments and patterns are added to the music adding great excitement, which seems to be nothingless. Even as a treat de hors, the movement is a treat.
Boston Symphony Gives
Concert at Metropolitan Theatre

By G. Y. Loveridge

Winds and tides of music swept through the Metropolitan Theatre last night, powered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and directed in their going and coming by Dr. Serge Koussevitzky. It was the kind of musical weather that everybody talks about and nobody even wants to do anything about, except have more of it.

The evening began with playful and well-mannered breezes fashioned by Haydn. proceeded to the mystic seas and skies of Debussy, and ended with thunderbolts from the hands of Sibelius. A magnificent climate it was that Dr. Koussevitzky contrived.

The Londoners were rightly fond of Haydn when he wrote such symphonies as that in E-flat, No. 102, for them. The formal grace and effervescent humor of it survive the fashions and the wear of decades, as the applause of the audience last night made evident. Dr. Koussevitzky gave it muscles, especially in the minuet, which seemed a dance of giants at times; and in the first and last movements old Papa Haydn made some vigorous bounds. Whether he intended his symphony to go like that, nobody knows. If he did, it is 10 to one he couldn’t have found an orchestra to play it that way in his time. The largo introduction and the slow second movement were in strong and effective contrast to the display of physical Vitality that characterized the performance.

The orchestra discoursed these mysteries oracularly, which is to say that everybody could understand them in his own way and everybody could be both right and different. Dr. Koussevitzky called forth all the colors and powers of the ensemble; he guided the “dialogue du vent et de la mer” into a brilliant turmoil. The Sibelius symphony in E-flat, No. 5, came after intermission. Through the smoke that gets in your eyes, ears and lungs, one could perceive Dr. Koussevitzky and his men, like the fiery Frank and furious Hun of the poem, charging the music. Slowly the symphony got into motion, with horns and tympani, with flutes, oboes, clarinets voicing a motive. It is a curious but irresistible symphony, at times seeming likely to become a Strauss waltz, at other times depicting a giant tossing motive-pebbles into the air, but gradually builds up to a compelling conclusion. The force of the orchestra was magnificent, and the persuasiveness of the reading such that one was transported beyound notes and sounds to those rugged and yet romantic heights that Sibelius inhabits. The reiterated fff chords that end the story came all too soon.

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