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The final phase of the evening was Milhaud's by J. P. Venn's group of 20th-century chamber music, which was a fine contribution. The 2nd half of the evening was devoted to chamber music, which was a fine contribution. The 2nd half of the evening was devoted to chamber music, which was a fine contribution.

February 12th: Carr's Lane Church Centre

The New Music Chamber Orchestra conducted
by Paul Venn.

I've never come across this group before and, judging from the ensemble playing, neither had too many of its constituent members. One full rehearsal is no basis for a concert comprising two such rhythmically demanding scores as Milhaud's 'Le Boeuf sur le toit' or Copland's 'Appalachian Spring'.

Milhaud's own brand of bi-tonality did not help in making the 'cinema-symphony' wholly convincing in this performance. Neither was the conductor assured enough in the many changes of tempo and mood to carry the orchestra through without 'event'; you cannot afford to have half a dozen ways of conducting one-in-a-bar with one rehearsal behind you. Some of Mr. Venn's speeds in the Milhaud, particularly the finale, would have had all but the greatest orchestras of the world struggling, while a speed, however slow, would have been preferable in the Copland which, in parts, was so unrecognisable that the composer himself would have had difficulty determining his own work. It was as if the listener was being led through some blinding haze of cacophony, able only to grasp the occasional resemblance to the actual music; at other times, the effect was strangely Cubist, with various parts of the orchestra giving different views of the same material - ensemble having departed altogether by that time.

Mr. Venn's own 'Music for Orchestra' was not without its glut of missed entries either. The composer obviously knows his Webern orchestral pieces, but without having grasped any structural devices, whether Webernian or Vennian.

The highlight of the evening was without doubt Alan Davis's performance of the Mozart clarinet concerto. The soloist's tone was on the whole good, save for some unfortunate squeaks here and there, while the orchestra played a little more assuredly since it was probably the only piece in the concert that they had played before.

As something of a promoter of concerts myself, I cannot but commend Mr. Venn's choice of programme, much of which was so demanding for the players. Often it is good to play at least one work that is slightly beyond the capabilities of the performers so as to raise the other works to a standard higher than might have been otherwise expected. But it is not fair on the players (for whom I have both admiration and sympathy) to expect any result worthy of charging a public to hear, on such a flimsy rehearsal schedule. Professionalism is a much maligned word nowadays, but if it safeguards the public (and prospective conductors) from such embarrassing evenings as this, then let it be our eternal watchword.

PHILIP LANE.