

RECENT BOOKS

GROVE SALUTES NEW MUSIC

THE supplement to *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by H. C. Colles (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1940) is of necessity concerned chiefly with the music and the musicians of today. Its problem was to reconcile a lexicon with modern music. There are two ways in which a dictionary can undertake the treatment of that subject. One is personal and subjective, the method followed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His music dictionary however is only a lexicon of terms and so tells us little of what he thought, in 1770, about Rameau or Gluck, of Stamitz or Schobert. Still, I always enjoy reading right on the first page his statement about the Académie Royale de Musique: "Of all the academies in the world, this is certainly the one which makes the most noise."

But that method doesn't meet the needs of today. It is necessary to be concise and, above all, objective; so we follow the path trod by the earliest German lexicographer, Bach's cousin, Johann Gottfried Walther. He is a very model in these two respects, especially when taking note of his contemporaries. He does not know Pergolesi, for example, who died only four years after the appearance of Walther's work, although he faithfully reports of Francesco Maria Veracini that "this world-famous virtuoso became suddenly mad, and then so violent that he jumped out of a second-story window on August 13, 1722, breaking his leg in two places and his

pelvis in half." Of Antonio Vivaldi, he says only that he is an excellent violinist and conductor in the Hospital della pietà in Venice and has produced various works. He praises his cousin, Johann Sebastian Bach because he has written excellent piano pieces and even the letters of his name are musical. About Handel ("Hendel" is how he writes it) his verdict is "he is now a conductor of great renown, living in England," and only in the case of Telemann, who with Johann David Heinichen, rates the longest article among the contemporaries, does he let himself go. "What he has done for musical style is sufficiently well-known everywhere. First it was the Polish, then followed the French, sacred, chamber and opera styles and (finally) the style named after the Italian, with which he now has most to do."

The new Grove is indeed objective but it does not deny itself keen and penetrating characterization of contemporaries. The collaborators in different countries were given great leeway by the editor and have rightly used this freedom. I find this not only welcome — because it grants the reader a certain amount of independence — but also proper, the only possible way of discussing living musicians. I think that "objectivity" in the case of the great dead is a questionable procedure; there is always a lack of factors with which to judge them fully and rightly. And an objective approach to events which are in flux and to person-

alities not yet completely developed is quite impossible. An honest, entirely personal, quite subjective judgment about a contemporary is of much greater value to succeeding generations than the attempt to envisage and appraise him in terms of eternity. Such contemporary judgments of a master and his work, no matter if distorted or uncomprehending, are apt to possess and retain a greater value than the usual documentary approach. For they are still free of the fog that later shrouds a work because established valuations shield it from being re-experienced in any true sense. Sometimes, too, they preserve accuracy. In an earlier edition of his dictionary (1909) Riemann passed an unfavorable judgment on Max Reger which is still correct today. It was in the same edition that he said of Richard Strauss: "His fame seems increasingly to be that of a colossus with feet of clay." This was shortly after *Elektra*; at the time it was a hazardous, perhaps even unjust judgment. But today it is once again correct.

Strauss now is a *res judicata*. He is treated masterfully as such by Mr. Colles. Masterful too is the handling by Edwin Evans, of Paul Hindemith, since in a *res adhuc non judicata*, he contents himself with a mere description of his development up to 1939. Far beyond descriptive writing is Eric Blom's discussion of Stravinsky. Here no punches are pulled and a personal opinion is freely and unrestrainedly expressed. *Le Baiser de la fée* serves as an excuse to mock the unbridled admirers of Stravinsky; *Perséphone* "marked the culmination of Stravinsky's esthetic theorizing and at the same time showed, despite a wan charm, utter bankruptcy of inspiration." Judgments like this, quite apart from their

objective correctness or incorrectness, are documents and the closing characterization certainly does not fall short of justice: ". . . a keenly intelligent artist still at work upon an unceasing quest after new ways and means of expression and an ever-vigilant attention to the utmost virtuosity of craftsmanship." Equally lively is Blom's treatment of Ernest Bloch. The majority of American musicians are handled in "lexicographic" fashion with brief general judgments by Gustave Reese, as for example Roger Sessions and Walter Piston; others like Roy Harris he writes on more exhaustively. There is a penetrating description of the Italian musicians who have any bearing on modern music, by the expert, Alfredo Casella. Much too thorough consideration is given all the minor and less than minor Swiss musicians, whose importance rarely passes their local boundaries. For example the Bruckner epigone, Fritz Brun of Berne, is vouchsafed a "depth and integrity that are characteristically Swiss." Much more apt is Blom's judgment on that factotum of the Zurich Orchestra, Volkmar Andrae: "Of late years, his activity as a composer has almost ceased, perhaps because, as an eclectic artist, he began to feel he had not very much to contribute to contemporary movements. . . ."

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It was obviously difficult to handle the contemporary German musicians. There is a Viennese group whom Reich, Wellesz and Geiringer tried to describe (although an Englishman, Gerald Abraham, was called in to do Webern). The group tolerated by the Nazi regime as unobjectionable – Egk, Wagner-Regény, and Burck, – was turned over to an earlier satellite of Hindemith, which is

not without its comic aspects. It is characteristic that there are missing, on the one hand, Walter Braunfels, one of the few real German opera composers, who has written at least two grand operas since 1933, one to a text by Claudel, the second to a text by Grillparzer; and, on the other hand, Franz Schreker. Nothing better typifies the change in the concepts "new music" and "modern music." A dictionary is sometimes forgetful, sometimes too pedantic, it is necessarily unjust. Sometimes, it is entirely too objective. Mr. Colles devotes special attention to an opera, *Friedemann Bach*, by Paul Gräner and says: "The score shows it to be a work which might at some time find a welcome in such a Bach-lov-

ing country as this." That is too enthusiastic. I hope the time will never come, not because Paul Gräner is a Nazi, but because, as I can assure Mr. Colles, *Friedemann Bach* is nothing more than, to use studio language, terrible "*kitsch*."

Though it is a dictionary, this is a lively book. It is full of information, which extends, for instance, both to broadcasting and twelve-note music. But it also reflects the living spirit of the years it deals with. Because of this information, and because of this spirit, later generations will reach for this manual as we reach today for old J. J. Walther, for Rousseau, or for the two dictionaries of Gerber.

Alfred Einstein

MUSIC FOR DANCING

VERNA ARVEY has done a prodigious job of compiling facts and opinions to make up her book *Choreographic Music* (E. P. Dutton, 1941). The result is a definite contribution to literature on the dance and especially on the influence of the dance upon music. Her thesis is that the two have been interrelated through the ages; composers, whether for financial or esthetic purposes, have always written music specifically for the dance. The story begins with the primitive and goes on to today. There are chapters on folk-dance; on early-Russian, French and Italian ballet, on ballet-in-opera. The steady evolution of musical forms (symphony, sonata) is traced in relation to the dances of Lully, Rameau, Mozart and other composers. Included also are pieces on jazz influence and on modern French and American

composers who have written for the dance.

The most elaborate example of a composer working to order, is the assignment Petipa gave Tchaikowsky for the *Nutcracker* Ballet. Here it is, item by item.

1. Soft music . . . sixty-four bars.
2. The tree is lit up . . . Sparkling music; eight bars
3. Enter the children . . . Animated and joyous music; twenty-four bars.
4. A moment of surprise and admiration; a few bars of tremolo.
5. A march; sixty-four bars.
6. Entrée des Incroyables: sixteen bars, rococo (tempo minuet).
7. Galop.
8. Enter Drosselmeyer. Awe-inspiring but comic music. A broad movement; sixteen to twenty-four