

... He read the menu through  
and through

To see what fifteen cents would do.

... The waiter hollered down the  
hall,

"You get's no bread with one meat  
ball!"

One meat ball, one meat ball . . .

But if you want an object-lesson in the degradation of a Negro tune, once it falls into the hands of white musicians, listen to two subsequent recordings rushed out to cash in on the success — the Bay Ridge interpretation by Louis Prima and his band, and the sexy and goonlike voices of the Andrews Sisters, those Rhine maidens of the juke-box.

Another album by Asch which is a knockout is made by that veteran of colored jazz pianists, James P. Johnson, with four men almost as celebrated, Frank Newton, "Pops" Foster, Al Casey and Eddie Dougherty. The three twelve-inch discs give a synopsis of Johnson's jazz career from New Orleans days in the ragtime solo, *Euphonic Sounds*, to late Harlem, in the *Boogie Dream*. Newton's trumpet, the one melodic instrument in the combination, is perfect for these pieces, nostalgic,

relaxed, never sensational. The album has a sort of permanent quality about it, and is an excellent addition to Asch's new but growing catalogue of jazz by top musicians.

Victor celebrated the Petrillo peace-treaty by leading off with a recording the next day (Sunday) of *Clang, Clang, Clang, Went the Trolley* with Vaughn Munroe's band. Within twenty-four hours the discs were on the counters. Columbia began with Harry James. Nothing that promises to be a collector's item appears on the horizon at present. Recently released, though recorded before the feud, are Ellington's pleasant enough *I Don't Mind* (Victor), and the Goodman Sextet with Cootie Williams playing in a charming way *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* (Columbia). I can't think of a more agreeable way of having certain old tunes preserved, although a Goodman little ensemble can turn out at times some pretty cold numbers. What we are waiting for at the moment is to see whether Decca is going to give us any more recordings to talk about and play a second time, or whether they have gone all-out for Broadway shows and Hollywood productions.

## RECENT BOOKS

### A GOOD-WILL OFFERING

WITH great good-will, Gerald Abraham, in his *Eight Soviet Composers* (Oxford University Press, 1943), has supplied a much-needed study, clarifying developments in recent Russian music. In spite of the

number of Soviet pieces which have deluged our recital programs, one could only draw general conclusions about trends. Few of us have been sufficiently acquainted with the facts about any one composer (except Shostakovich) to see

him as anything but part of a cultural policy, to judge a new work as a stage in the composer's own development. Moreover most of the really significant, large-scale works are not known here, and the "self-centered" quality of Soviet music as a whole, its kind of "indifference" to what western musicians might think of it, has made it difficult to get at the facts. But Mr. Abraham has dug away at reference sources from the U.S.S.R. and availed himself of most obtainable scores. He synthesizes random bits of knowledge, explores some uncharted waters, and comes up with a well-organized survey, which looks at the composers both for themselves and as representatives of a larger idea.

He offers his "little book" less as criticism than as information, pure and simple. Yet with all his good will, and his feeling that it is most important for us to understand what Soviet composers are trying to do and judge their works accordingly, so much of what he has seen is so poor by all universal standards of music, that he cannot refrain from pointing it out.

He tends to let the Soviet critics do the talking. But to accept what they say as valid criticism is as difficult as to admire the music itself on abstract grounds, so tied-up is their outlook with extra-musical considerations. Their romanticism is in fuller bloom than the nineteenth century at its worst. It is obvious, without elaborate and new-sounding justifications, that if you want to please a large audience, you favor

Tchaikovsky and go heavy on the folk tunes. The U.S.A. reacts that way too.

The Tchaikovsky influence, Mr. Abraham finds, produces nothing to rival the model, but he makes out a good case for a more understanding use of folk themes by the Soviets than by earlier Russians. The eight composers discussed, incidentally, are Shostakovich, Prokofiev (since his return to the homeland), Khachaturian, Knipper, Shebalin, Kabalevsky, Dzerzhinsky, and Shaporin. The monumental choral symphonies (the most characteristic Soviet products after works inspired by folk material) and operatic works are most carefully examined.

Apparently Mr. Abraham began his inspection of material with a generous and open-minded attitude, anxious to find proof of what he believed might be true. Some of this carries over into the book and almost passes for enthusiasm and optimism. But he is clearly unconvinced that if the philosophy behind Soviet art is understood, the music takes on new meaning. With the point he would have liked to make taken away from him, he must lamely try to emphasize the factual side of his study. There is little doubt it was originally intended as a complete appraising job. This he could not honestly write without doing more harm than good to his subject. One regrets the tone of indecision that results from this conflict. The author is obviously equipped to do a good piece of work on a serious subject.

*Donald Fuller*