

## A "PREMIERE" BY DISC; MORE MODERN RECORDS

THE first orchestral work of substance to be commissioned directly by a recording company is off the disc presses. *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* must be eminently gratifying not only to the RCA Victor Company, its enterprising sponsors, and to Roy Harris, its fortunate composer, but to all those vitally interested in the cause of modern American music and the familiar problems associated with its circulation. This event is at once portentous and emboldening. At one stroke it completely demolishes the conviction formerly held in modern music circles that only an elaborate and carefully planned campaign, fostered by an artistic and resourceful non-commercial organization, would succeed in publishing recordings of representative American works of the more advanced and ambitious order.

Harris supplied Victor with a work in his most vigorous vein. First of all, the overture must not be confused with an earlier composition, now discarded, in which Harris also made Patrick Gilmore's ribald and lilting tune the main subject. Specific problems were presented by Victor for the recording, not the least of which was the time duration of the piece and its division into two well-balanced parts, each to occupy one side of a twelve-inch disc. The free fantasy constructed by Harris is extremely terse and sententious, its rigid and bony character fitting well the peculiar exigencies of the microphone. The contrapuntal developments (including a beautiful passage in chorale variation style, in which the theme in slower tempo becomes the bass), and a canon of the theme itself, unfold a form which is exceptionally rapid in its generation of melodic and rhythmic designs. This method, so characteristic of Harris, insures a highly satisfying sequence of emotional contrasts, ranging from exciting and pungent driving power to suppliant sadness; and yet, at the same time, it reveals a solid unity that grows more evident and consistent upon each successive hearing. The orchestration is rough-hewn and strapping, the most successful yet devised by this composer. Further comment upon the work seems superfluous since it is a fantastic fact that the "first performance" may

be heard at the nearest record shop. High fidelity methods obtained a powerful and clear-cut recording of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra performance under the direction of Eugene Ormandy. (Victor disc Number 8629).

In adding Carlos Salzedo's *Concerto for Harp and Seven Wind Instruments* to an admirably growing series of modern American music recordings, Columbia performs a valuable service to harpists and composers interested in the sonorous properties discovered by this specialist. As music *per se*, I have definite reservations regarding the work. The recording, as crystalline a piece of phonography as one will come upon, exposes the sonorous possibilities of the *flux éoliens*, *flux hautboïstiques*, *flux en grêle*, *accord en jet*, and the xyloharmonic, guitar, plectric and tympanic sounds and others of the thirty-seven tone colors and effects developed from the resources of the modern harp by Salzedo. Hence it is valuable as a technical document. The interpretation by Lucille Lawrence and the Barrère Ensemble of Wind Instruments is authoritatively under the baton of the composer who also plays his solo piece, *Chanson dans la Nuit*, on the last side of the third disc (Modern Music Album Number 8).

Aaron Copland's phonographic debut has been long overdue. Though he had won a Victor prize with his *Dance Symphony*, a work reasonably aimed to strike popular fancy, it remained for Columbia actually to publish the first recordings of his music—paradoxically, the dissonant piano *Variations* and the trio, *Vitebsk*, framed in quarter-tones. Both sets will be valuable and persuasive additions to the Columbia series.

Copland performs his solo pieces and the piano part of his trio in the percussive style inherited from Stravinsky and Bartók, and aids generally in the establishment of interpretations other performers will find necessary to follow. The string playing of Messrs. Karman and Freed, in the trio, seems to lack integration of the sort all meaty chamber works require, and, occasionally, their individual concerns tend to get in the way of the music. Copland's treatment of the middle section of the *Variations*, with its subtly contrasted dynamics, must certainly be a valuable adjunct to the musical notation of passages many performers find

difficult. The record breaks spoil the continuity of a broad outline; however, this limitation cannot be avoided. While of a more abstract and less emotional character, the piano piece, I believe, is the more important of the two recordings. Two pieces for violin and piano from Copland's jazz period, the *Nocturne* and *Ukelele Serenade* will occupy the odd sides of both sets (these recordings I have not heard). Both *Vitebsk* and the *Variations* reproduce faithfully.

Richard Gilbert

### SHOSTAKOVITCH "ACCOMPANIES" A FILM

THE new Soviet film *The Youth of Maxim*—one of the most stirring motion pictures shown in America—has misleading advertisements in behalf of music by Shostakovitch, music which can be found only with the aid of a microscope.

A chorus performs several unison songs, the greater number of which I am certain are folk tunes. The opening scene of sleigh-riding carries a bright and slight song of a popular nature, which is effective. Folk song or no, the arrangement of the dirge, following the death of a factory worker, is in every sense thrilling. The sole accompaniment to the voices develops out of a thin, piercing factory whistle which whines an obbligate, with greater and less intensity, throughout the song, and the effect is hair-raising. Here (the picture with the music) is art become real propaganda.

L. E.