

## RECORDS and SCORES

By COLIN McPHEE

MUSICOLOGY is for the moment in the ascendant in the recording field, and we find American aborigines taking precedence over American composers. The American Indian is, musically speaking, coming into his own with two albums, one brought out by Victor, and made by Laura Boulton, the other, a shorter series, put on the market by the General Records Company, and recorded on location by John H. Green.

It would take a specialist like Dr. George Herzog to finally evaluate the Boulton records, but in any case they are a provocative introduction to a little known musical idiom. The album, confined to tribes of New Mexico and Arizona, contains sixteen examples of Indian singing, with an accompaniment of rattle, drums or bells. I have never felt that the American Indian had any intense musical urge. Compared with the exuberant musicality of the Negro this is thin stuff. Most noticeable is the lack of rhythmic interest and energy. Beside the highly syncopated, polyrhythmic music of Africa and the Far East this music is simple indeed. The lack of rhythmic energy shows in the curiously unsteady beating of the drums and the vacillating tempi. What is of great interest, however, is the functional character of the music, its social significance and its connection with magic. Such titles as *Medicine Song*, *Girl's Coming-of-Age Song*, *Harvest-Dance Song* and *Corn-Dance* give you an idea of the collection.

The album by General suffers from

the absence of any booklet to inform us of the nature or sources of the music. It is more interesting from the standpoint of musical instruments than the Boulton records, but, with the exception of the first two pieces, a beautiful example of the bastardization of racial music with a miscellaneous addition of foreign elements that blend as perfectly as oil and water. In this case the music is mostly by Yaqui Indians living in the Peninsula of California, and the influences are Latin-American. Enough said.

Turning from musicology to music we have, as a perfect transition, the album of British Indian music, recorded here in New York by Wana Singh with a group of native musicians, and put out by Musicraft. In spite of the horrible title of the series, *Echoes of India*, it has real musical interest, on a par with that made by Uday Shan-Kar and his troupe some years ago. It is all instrumental music, stringed instruments either played with a bow or plucked, drums and percussion of tiny cymbals or chimes. Here we have an art-music with a tradition that disappears in a far-distant past, equally rich in mode, metre and timbre. Perhaps the chief interest in these records lies in the drumming, which scans the metre and animates it with a rapid and ever shifting pattern of cross-accents, and which, by the way, comes out in the records with beautiful clarity.

And now to Western civilization. The Mahler *Ninth* (Victor) and *Don Quixote* of Strauss (also Victor) are the chief

items to be mentioned here. The Mahler recording was made by Bruno Walter at a concert performance in Vienna, 1938, and, punctuated at its most intimate moments with one of those apologetic but determined concert coughs, is far from perfect. But it is indeed something accomplished to have this most eloquent, most moving of all Mahler's symphonies down in wax, even if only as a temporary *faute de mieux*. To me, *Don Quixote* seems almost as good as *Eulenspiegel*. In spite of the fact that it is not so neat (by far!) in form, that it has many deadly passages (those verbose duets between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza) it has a humor, a warmth and an incredible brilliance which I think places it at the top of Strauss' works. I'm not much for humor in music, but here, based on imitative sound, it seems to ring true. If you take the work for what it is worth — as a tabloid opera in the baroque style, starring the cello in the leading role — I think there can be no pangs of conscience in enjoying it. The only irritating thing in the recording is the too belligerent, too prominent playing of Feuermann, who seems to think it was written only for cello.

De Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* has also appeared (Victor), but this is a wash-out, a fuzzy impression of impressionistic music. Bizet's *Symphony Number 1*, in C-major (Victor) comes as a surprise, and remains a disappointment. *Symphony* by X would describe it more

accurately, since it does little more than conform to type. We can see in it the ability of the Paris Conservatoire to turn out a brilliant pupil with a perfect work. The title should have been "You never can tell."

The *Triptych* of Carl Engel, a work in three movements for violin and piano (Schirmer recording) makes one wonder why so sensitive and well-equipped a composer has chosen to remain silent. Here is a work, written some twenty-five years ago, that is deeply felt, with real lyric charm. The urge to create music is a mysterious one that comes and goes; in this case the silence of the composer is something to be regretted.

#### SCORES

There is little to report about publications. Good workmanship rather than significant individuality predominates in the *Simfonieta for Strings* by Edward Burlingame Hill and the concise *Trio for Flute, Clarinet and Bassoon* of Werner Josten (both Arrow Press). Wallingford Riegger makes use of unusual rhythms and timbres in his percussive finale from the *New Dance* for two pianos (Arrow). Richard Franko Goldman has some charming and practical miniatures for beginners in piano in his *Nine Bagatelles* (Axelrod). But for over six months there has been a general lull in both recording and publishing. There are a few indications for a brighter column in the next issue of this periodical. Let us hope.

## IN THE THEATRE

By SAMUEL L. M. BARLOW

THE most curious play of the season is *Liberty Jones*, an allegory by

Philip Barry which shows off, as the larger expanses always do, the faults and