

## RECORDS and SCORES

By COLIN McPHEE

THE recording of Mahler's *Symphony Number 1* by Victor will appeal, I think, primarily to those (including myself) who have a special interest in Mahler's music. Even in this early symphony there is no mistaking the idiom – the transparent and contrapuntal texture, the sensitive, precise orchestral timbres, the long melodic line and the sometimes embarrassing banalities, but above all the warmth and peculiar, Mahlerian melancholy. The thematic material is rather uninteresting throughout, and the music at times too episodic – it has a tendency to stop and go. It is certainly a work to be sympathetically heard only after the *Seventh* or the *Ninth*, interesting rather in its technical details and intimate moments than in its musical content and organization.

The *Variations and Fugue on a Mozart Theme* of Max Reger (Victor) sounds pretty lush and sentimental after Mahler. It has none of the bite and clarity of the former work; it is turgid and hazily romantic, eternally legato, with an aggressive bass that stalks through the whole piece, as determined as the bass in the *Meistersinger* Overture. It is not by any accident that Reger chose this theme, which was the basis for the variations in the *A-Major Sonata*. The neatly balanced phrases, the tender cadences and half-cadences strike a sympathetic note in Reger's musical make-up, and lie at the core of so much of his music, which always seems to me metrically cramped and

finicky. One or two of the quiet variations have a certain poetic charm, but on the whole the work is a strangely inflated treatment of an innocent tune, elaborately chromatic, and oily with false counterpoint.

Victor also gives us the *Symphony Number 1* of Shostakovich. This gay, tart music still sounds very attractive and spontaneous today, and the clean, brilliant orchestration records perfectly.

I have not the temperament to be impressed by Fauré, and I find his *Requiem* a tedious sequence of sanctimonious and sentimental moods. For me the days of religious music are long past; this work has the spiritual conviction, the vitality of the Church of Sainte Clothilde. I don't like the moments of romantic emotionalism, the faint echoes of sensuous impressionism that creep in from time to time. Chords of the ninth in a mass or requiem offend me as the bare heads of women in church offend a priest. This *Requiem* produced the same effect on me the first time I heard it, and I don't hear it differently after listening to the new recording by Victor.

Columbia has recorded Bela Bartók's short *First Rhapsody* for violin and piano. This has the characteristic folk-quality of so much of Bartók's earlier work. The most interesting thing about it is the piano part, which at times throws the themes into charming relief and is always crisp and *recherché* in sound.

Victor releases more choral music, the

*Songs of Conquest* by Harl MacDonald, which are for mixed chorus *a capella*, extremely dull, in an unimaginative church-anthem style, and a short chorus by Sibelius, *The Bell Melody of Bergball Church* (Opus 65b) equally dull and uninteresting. Columbia also gives us Deems Taylor's Suite from *Peter Ibbetson*. Tchaikowsky goes round and round.

#### SCORES

Stravinsky has made what ought to become the permanent arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner* for orchestra and chorus (Mercury Music Corporation). The harmonization is beautiful and simple, following the conventional one, but strengthening the cadences and the progression of the bass. The real Stravinsky touch comes with the words "And the rocket's red glare," recalling strangely the last chorus of the *Symphonie des psaumes*. The arrangement was made "to express my gratitude at the prospect of becoming an American citizen."

There is little else to mention at the moment in the way of printed music. The new *Piano Concerto* of Carlos Chavez, performed for the first time this month, is being prepared by Schirmer in an arrangement for two pianos.

A promising new publishing organization in Montevideo makes its appearance, the *Editorial Cooperativa Inter-americana da Compositores*. It especially encourages contemporary composers who represent the younger generation. At present, works for piano, voice and chamber music are preferred, although individual arrangements may be made concerning the publication of works in other classifications. For the first edition of a thousand copies, the composer contributes one half the cost, which is

modestly estimated for the present at fifteen dollars (U.S.) for four pages. The edition is attractive, the paper fair, the engraved plates excellent. As yet no large works have been published, but I should like to mention the charming and simple song by Carlos Estrada, *Caminos Tristes*, and the piano pieces, *Cuatro Danzas Mexicanas* by Manuel Ponce, and *Cuentos de Niños* by Carlos Suffern. Incidentally the house is also eager to publish North American music.

In the United States, New Music has brought out a short and sonorous *Hymn for Brass Choir* by Richard Franko Goldman, and the *Second Sonata* for violin alone by Alexander Jemnitz. Mills Music gives us some anthems and spirituals by R. Nathaniel Dett, and a dull and ostentatious two-page bit of patriotic fervor by Roy Harris, *Freedom's Land*, for voice and piano. For harmonic and melodic banality it marks a new low for any serious composer.

#### A "MUST" FOR RECORD COLLECTORS

It is not inappropriate to include in this column Irving Kolodin's *Guide to Recorded Music*, just published by Doubleday Doran. I write of this book with complete enthusiasm. It covers an enormous field ("from Palestrina to Prokofiev"), and passes judgment on the reproduction, interpretation and price of more than 5,000 recordings. It is extremely readable, hard to lay down, the writing deft and witty, the critical approach serious and just, with a point of view that I find very sympathetic. I can't always agree; he writes that Hanson's performance of Copland's *Music for the Theatre* is "incisive, well-controlled . . . a tribute to the animation of his conducting talent" but I still insist that it was wretched from the standpoint of tempos,

balance and interpretation. This book is a must for the musical amateur, but also a valuable reference book for the pro-

fessional musician. It deals only with art-music, and no mention is made of folk- or exotic material.

## IN THE THEATRE

By SAMUEL L. M. BARLOW

THERE'S not much music in the new musicals on Broadway, so we can step lightly over a couple of corpses and get on to Louise Crane's Coffee Concerts where there was nothing else but.

The costumes of the Chorus in *Let's Face It* are probably held up by capillary attraction. Cole Porter's score is even more attenuated.

Lehman Engel did a competent job putting appropriate noises into *Macbeth*. "I'll give thee a wind," says the Second Witch. Personally, I'm tired of the emanations of the Hammond Organ as a substitute for a score.

And now for the Coffee Concerts. They were urbane, intelligent, interesting, often remarkable. Amid so much new provender, there was quite reasonably some dull chewing. But, as we said at the fourth Concert, that's just the Riff in the lute. Every evening I attended there was something memorable, and some evenings, notably the "Cuadro Flamenco," there was high excitement.

Essentially, Miss Crane presents the Source Book of Modern Music. Brahms swigged at just such a font when he was lucky enough to find a good Hungarian Gypsy. Before the series was over, Miss Crane had turned on the original tap of all the conglomerate music we hear, from Gilbert and Sullivan or Ravel's *Bolero* to Danny Kaye's latest *capo*

*lavoro*.

And not only was this an invaluable venture for the musically inquisitive, but the process of letting the very folks do their folk-stuff uncovered some notable performers. Anita Sevilla, Triana, Sarah Gorby, Carol Brice, and Belle Rosette leave their usual Broadway counterparts far behind. With the current depression in lieder singers, I should think there was a place at the top for Mme. Gorby's fine art and good soprano; and Mr. Hurok should hear Carol Brice's voice. It is one of the most beautiful I have heard. And Anita Sevilla is one of those rare personalities gifted with high comedy of means and pleasant intensity of feeling.

We give serious consideration to any of Bach's variants of a church chorale or to the sea change suffered by a tune which once traveled from Provence to New Orleans or from Ireland to the Kentucky mountains. It is only natural that the metamorphosis should go on. Lou Singer has swung, gently and low, such old favorites as *Barbara Allen* and Schubert's *Who is Sylvia*. These new dressings (and several old hats) were displayed by Maxine Sullivan, Sylvia Marlowe at the harpsichord, and Benny Carter's small ensemble at the first concert, under the title of "Salon Swing."

I entertain one major objection to this