

SCORES and RECORDS

By COLIN McPHEE

BOOSEY & Hawkes have just published the score to Benjamin Britten's elegiacal *Sinfonia da Requiem*. This is without doubt the composer's most sincerely felt, most personal work up to the present, and although it is somewhat uneven, somewhat confused esthetically, it has passages of real beauty and eloquence. The three movements, romantically entitled *Lacrymosa*, *Dies Irae*, and *Requiem Aeternum*, have the immediate, pictorial approach that one finds in the Verdi *Requiem*. I prefer a less literal translation into sound of such an emotional program; a movement like *Dies Irae* can only remain cold and automatic, dictated by ultra-musical considerations. But there is no mistaking the purely musical impetus of the first movement, the conviction with which it rises, step by step, to a beautifully controlled, most poignant climax. Here the title can be relegated to the unconscious; the progress of the music demands first consideration. As always with Britten, the scoring is superb, daring, but never experimental.

There is little that is experimental for that matter in any of the music received the past two months. Finish and a direct appeal to the average listener characterize nearly all of it. Music Press publishes a lively *Concert Overture for Orchestra* by Leo Sowerby, which is straightforward music, brightly and simply scored. The same firm also publishes Quincy Porter's *Music for Strings*, a suite of three

short pieces that should be just the thing for schools and colleges. Otto Luening's *Suite for String Orchestra* (Boosey & Hawkes) falls under the same category. Frederick Jacobi's *Night Piece* for flute and small orchestra, a quiet soliloquy constructed along the lines of *Quiet City*, is delicately scored, and should also find favor among small orchestras.

William Schuman and Henry Cowell turn to band music. Schuman's *News Reel* (G. Schirmer) is fun, a gay and spirited piece that I should very much like to hear. The five numbers, *Horse-Race*, *Fashion-Show*, *Tribal Dance*, *Monkeys at the Zoo* and *Parade* have an immediate popular appeal. But the music is more than mere fun, it is never relaxed and whimsical. It has an urge and drive, the orchestration an exuberance that is highly exhilarating and should project brilliantly in the open air. The *Shipshape Overture* of Henry Cowell is of much slighter dimensions; it is light and tuneful, rather Celtic, and easy to perform. More band music is Morton Gould's slick *Cowboy Rhapsody* (Mills) which David Bennett has given an even slicker band instrumentation. Mills also publishes a rather heavy-handed arrangement for orchestra of a Frescobaldi *Toccata*, done by Hans Kindler.

Nothing very exciting in the way of piano music has appeared, other than the Chavez *Concerto*, of which I have just seen the proofs, and which I shall discuss in the next issue. Robert Casa-

deus has a set of *Etudes* (G. Schirmer), deft though traditional piano writing by a pianist, while Boosey & Hawkes has a memorial album, *Homage to Paderewski*. This rather faded bouquet includes an assortment of composers from Bartók to Whithorne; significant names are rare. Neither Bartók nor Milhaud have much to say. There are two short fragments by Martinu and Nin-Culmel that stand out for their delicacy and charm. New Music gives us a set of six songs by Ernst Bacon that are quiet, introspective and have real musical appeal.

Among recent *patriotica* there is Norman Lockwood's anthem, *America! O Democratic Nation*. Freedom is acclaimed in earnest four-part harmony with piano accompaniment. From all recent indications we must still wait for another Rouget de Lisle.

RECORDS

Before taking up the new recordings I should like to mention a slim but valuable little brochure issued by the Music Division of the Pan American Union. It bears the title *Recordings of Latin-American Songs and Dances*, and is compiled by Gustavo Durano. It is an excellent, concentrated survey of the field, packed with information. The rhythmic elements of different dances are analyzed, and there is a bibliography at the back. Turning the pages one can see at a glance the relation of one national music to another, note the variations of a rhythmic formula that extends from Argentina to Cuba. The records are mostly Victor, and while many of them are unobtainable here, they can be ordered, we are told, through the RCA company at Camden.

Columbia presents two albums of Brazilian music, done under the super-

vision of Stokowski, whose name sprawls across both covers in type much larger than the title. The maestro apparently did not venture far from the beaten path, for all the pieces are fairly familiar by now, after the many preceding albums. In one or two records the orchestral accompaniment has a certain quasi-primitive color, and there are several arrangements by Villa-Lobos, sung by Brazilian Indian singers with rather unprimitive voices. There is far more interesting music than this to be recorded in Brazil.

Victor gives us the Shostakovich *Sixth Symphony*, marvelously performed by the Philadelphia orchestra. There is a new warmth and seriousness in this music that has been absent in the earlier works. The scoring is beautiful and highly imaginative, brilliant and daring as ever, but somehow less strident. Heard after fresh and vigorous music, the Glière *Third Symphony* (Victor) sounds pretty dull and awful. Glière is the President of the Union of Soviet Composers, but no amount of literature can make his music come to life. This symphony is an endless and romantic bedtime story. In tempestuous and chromatic clichés it relates a series of picturesque and pure-Russian legends in the style of Korsakov and Medtner. I have a great fondness for program music, but I like to see it done with more imagination and far less pomposity.

Three instrumental movements from Hindemith's opera, *Mathis der Maler*, which the composer has grouped together as a three-movement symphony are recorded by Victor, played under Ormandy. The titles, *Angelic Concert*, *Entombment*, *Temptation of St. Anthony*, derive from the paintings of (Mathis) Grünewald, the romantic artist of the late fif-

teenth century, who was obsessed by demons, death and corrosion. This is definitely program music, but it is deliberate, sophisticated, naïve and poetic as Bach. The last movement with its chorale that finally triumphs over the demoniacal figurations is a parallel to the *Wachet Auf* chorus of Bach, where the strings, poor foolish virgins, vacillate innocently beneath a grave and warning chorale for the singers. The foundations for this neo-mediaeval work are to be seen in Hindemith's *Marienleben*, which has always seemed to me to be the com-

poser's confession of faith.

Walton's *Concerto for Violin* (Victor) is the perfect anonymous concert-piece. A brilliant, ecstatic violin part gives Heifetz a chance to soar beautifully above an elegant orchestra. The work is emotional and rhapsodic, sensitive and highly polished, but completely uninteresting.

Stokowski performs Morton Gould's *Guaracha* (Victor), a hard-boiled item if ever there was one, and the *Scherzo* from Paul Creston's *Symphony, Opus 20* (Columbia).

ON THE FILM FRONT

By LÉON KOCHNITZKY

IN the present circumstances, the Film Front is no longer a metaphorical expression. It has a real existence, even a strategy and a characteristic technic. Its aims are co-ordinated. The building up and the working of the gigantic American war machine are to be explained to the civilian population. The "factual shorts" already produced by the Office of Emergency Management Film Unit are the first achievements of this new Front.

It is important that a nation at war should be told how its war machines are built and of what they are made. *Aluminum, Bomber* and *Tanks* are very efficient documentary pictures. Is their efficiency increased by the musical treatment? The O.E.M.'s scores seem too often to be playing first role in the action and more than once they overrun the whole show, even when the musical continuity is scarce and the form and expression are only so-so. There is an endless "mickeymousing"

of the action. Tank and bomber are depicted in sound and rhythms; close your eyes to the screen and you can easily detect them. This is the proper way of treating the Fox and the Crow, or the Big Bad Wolf and Donald Duck. But not the tank and the bomber in which men risk their lives for the sake of civilization. Such machines should be handled with care by musicians. The best that can be done, perhaps, is to let them "speak for themselves," in their own fearful, atonal language, which could be sonorized as a low, rumbling accompaniment without the help of brasses and percussions. Of course, the O. E. M. is not the first "Mickeymouser" of machines and engines. Arthur Honegger in *Pacific 231* and Mossolov and Prokofiev have also overworked that device, and it can be traced back to Richard Wagner himself. The descent of Wotan and Loki from the home of the gods down to Niebelheim in *Rheingold* is nothing but