

SCORES and RECORDS

By COLIN McPHEE

THE fine craftsmanship of Paul Hindemith is once more beautifully demonstrated in the direct, forceful writing, the solidity in the construction of the *String Quartet in E \flat* (1943), newly published by Associated Music. Hindemith's style seems to increase in vigor and purpose as it grows in simplicity and concentration. The structure of the quartet is lucid and firm. The tonal center of E \flat , from which the music flies off at so many tangents, stands there like a rock, the point of reference for every note in the work. Satisfying as this quartet is, I still prefer the more carefree Hindemith of an earlier period, a time when the musical texture was undoubtedly coarser, but when the *élan* and resonance were unique. The *Concert Music for Piano, Brass and Two Harps* (1930) reappears in an American edition (Associated Music) and recalls the bright days of the *Chamber Concertos*. Given the choice of hearing either one or the other of these works, I should certainly take the latter. Recent too, are the *Eight English Songs* (1942), to texts of Moore, Shelley, Oldys, Lover, Blake. This is a charming and graceful set of miniatures, although not all seem of equal success in their setting. On Hearing "The Last Rose of Summer" and *Echo* are Hindemith playing around with favorite little technical devices in a way that is both light and poetic. On the other hand *The Moon* (And like a dying lady, lean and pale) seems little

more than a mere exercise. But then, is it possible to give these mysterious words pitch? Certainly they were never meant to be sung.

The *Danses Concertantes* of Stravinsky becomes quite something else again when arranged for two pianos (Associated Music). Perhaps (for America at least, with the eternal rehearsal problem) this music, so carefully disintegrated, so dependent on perfect timing, sharp attack and tone in perfect focus, stands a better chance of satisfactory performance in this version than in the original. I am thinking now of the disgraceful performances for the ballet at the Civic Center, which sent all-too-eager reporters back to their typewriters to drum out unfavorable comment. The arrangement is not ideal for the concert-hall; the two pianos, interlocking throughout, yet giving no feeling of interplay, are sure to prove monotonous. But far better such a performance of this minor significant work than the one we recently heard.

It is difficult to define with precision the impression received from Aaron Copland's *Violin Sonata* (Boosey and Hawkes). More robust, more taut and co-ordinated than the *Piano Sonata*, its vigor is, nevertheless, ambiguous. We are confronted with a style which by now is almost too familiar and perfected, a style that can be both *recherché* and baffling in its simplicity, understatement and Stein-like syntax. For some this style will be warm and revealing,

but to many it must remain an enigma.

Songs by American composers continue to blossom in the Schirmer catalogue. Douglas Moore, Samuel Barber, Otto Luening and Ernst Bacon appear on recent lists, but of these I should suggest to a singer only the *Five Poems* (of Emily Dickinson) by Bacon for their unaffected, if innocuous charm. Under the combined names of Bacon and Luening appears the *Coal Scuttle Blues* for two pianos (Associated Music), a sedate and professional mélange of boogie and blues that is far from the groove. The same publisher gives us *Sonatina Number 7* for piano by Stanley Bate, a sharp, impersonal little piece with a sprinting tarantella for a last movement that sounds vaguely familiar. Late for review, and reserved for next issue are Bohuslav Martinu's *Sonata Number 2* for cello (Associated Music), and the *Piano Concerto* by Schönberg which was given its first performance in New York last season (G. Schirmer).

RECORDS

The *Sonata for Flute and Piano* by Paul Bowles is recorded in a limited edition, with the label "Art of this Century." Written in 1932, and stemming from Satie and Poulenc, the music has a freshness and unaffected charm which is entirely its own. Part of this charm lies in Bowles' real gift for fluid melodic line; here the music unfolds with a grace and casualness, almost, that is both delicate and distinguished. On the final side of the third record are two brief *Mexican Dances* for two pianos, bright, nervous, resilient music that sounds to perfection on the two instru-

ments. The recording, it must be admitted, is hardly fair to the music.

Victor releases Samuel Barber's *Overture to The School for Scandal*, an over-elaborate piece of orchestration that has all the blaze and brilliance of a final set-piece in a display of fireworks and little else to remember. Morton Gould's *Latin-American Symphonette*, conducted by Iturbi, belongs in the large movie theatre. Incredibly vulgar, slick and brazen, it tears along like a procession of fire-engines rushing to a disaster. Victor also gives us Villa-Lobos' *A Prôle do Bêbê*, played by Artur Rubinstein — a Latin-American *Children's Corner* both complicated and trivial.

III

The charming Brazilian, Olga Coelho, is heard in the album *Folklore Songs of South America* (Hargail). Less exotic, less colorful than the late Elsie Houston, Coelho is nevertheless a singer of subtlety and grace. The album includes Brazilian and Inca songs, deftly arranged with guitar accompaniment by Guarneri and Coelho herself.

The reissuing of the Burl Ives albums by Columbia and Asch is a fresh reminder of the excellence of this popular folk-singer and the superiority of his style to the selfconscious and romanticised manner of John Jacob Niles. Ives sings in a simple, straightforward way that even night-club success has not succeeded in spoiling. His voice is tranquil and agreeable. Perhaps the ideal voice for ballad-singing is somewhat harsher — a little more nasal, a little more mysterious and remote. This, I think, Niles could have had, had he not chosen to make his voice ingratiating and insincere.