

no new impression about the two pieces, which have been discussed here before, except to observe that Toscanini didn't take them too seriously, and that Levant did a swell job with the concerto, which opus I think is ripe for a Tinpan Alley museum.

C.B.S. offered William Schuman's *William Billings Overture*, unfortunately on the same program with the highly publicized Shostakovitch *Eighth*. In a way, it was just as well, as this overture of Schuman's hardly represents him at his best and was obviously not intended for serious musical consideration. In spite of a declamatory and forceful de-

livery of materials, it fails to work up much excitement or even entertainment. The sound body is heavy and fairly full of notes but the effect throughout is thin and somewhat empty. The work has clarity and openness and is brightened up by some mild dissonances, but it lacks power and guts. C.B.S. also offered two new works which I was unable to hear, one a world premiere of Lionel Barrymore's *In Memoriam* written as a tribute to his brother John, the other the radio premiere of Robert Ward's *First Symphony*, which has been reviewed elsewhere in these pages.

THE TORRID ZONE

By MERCURE

BLUE Note and Commodore take the lead this time with fine recordings of improvised jazz. Each label is a familiar emblem of high quality, uncommercial music by top men, excellently recorded. Both firms show fine discrimination in planning their recording sessions. Blue Note uses chiefly colored musicians, while Commodore has a preference for white ensembles made up of such men as Bushkin, Condon, Kaminsky, Russell, Wettling — to name a few.

Among Blue Note's best older records are two made by the Edmond Hall Celesta Quartet. Hall is one of the great clarinet men, and his warm tone and intonation, his restraint and sensitive phrasing are set in delicate relief against the fluid sound of Mead Lewis' celesta and the more rhythmic punctuation of guitar and bass. Now four more robust

numbers are played by Edmond Hall's Blue Note Jazz Men; *Night Shift Blues*, *Royal Garden Blues*, *Blues at Blue Note* and *High Society*. The seven-piece band includes Sidney de Paris, Crosby, Dickens, Shirley, J. P. Johnson and Catlett, men who make each of these records an event. Commodore brings out several Dixieland platters of as high quality. Under the name "Wild Bill" Davison and his Commodores, Davison, Brunis, Russell, Schroeder, Condon, Casey and Wettling get together and produce *Panama* and *That's A Plenty*, with terrific drive and impact. You feel as you listen that this was one of those happy days when the men were really inspired. *Jam Session at the Commodore*, Number 5 (*Basin Street Blues* on one side, *Oh Katharina* on the other) has more or less the same men, only Kaminsky takes over on the trumpet,

Morton on the trombone and Catlett at the drums. My preference is for the first piece, despite the florid piano introduction and interlude of Bushkin (whose solo-playing I can't stand). Another slight shift in the personnel gives us George Brunis and his Jazz Band playing *That Da Da Strain* and *Ugly Child*. The Brunis trombone is as fine as ever, and this seems to me one of Commodore's Grade A discs. The Edmond Hall Sextet records for Commodore two twelve-inch sides. The tense and dynamic piano of Eddie Heywood animates *Downtown Café Boogie*, and forms the real backbone of this record. *Uptown Café Blues* is a relaxed and expressive dialogue between clarinet, trumpet and trombone. Heard after this intimate music, Jimmie Lunceford's band in *Backdoor Stuff* (Decca) sounds empty and impersonal, and the violent reaction of over-sensitive fans to large bands can be understood. But Lunceford's is one of the best, and this prolonged riff-number in slow tempo has some fine solos.

Victor puts out an album, *Up Swing*, with four discs from the past by the big white bands – Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw and Glen Miller – with old favorites such as Dorsey's *Song of India*, Shaw's *Begin the Beguine* and *Lady Be Good*, and Miller's *Tuxedo Junction*. The solo work still sounds good, although the arrangements have worn pretty thin by now. Decca retrieves records from the early '30's made by Johnny Noble and his Hawaiians, recreating a sonorous paradise of glissandos and quavering triads.

Blues are back again. It is good to be able to report that the styles of three such popular singers as Big Bill (Okeh),

Washboard Sam and Jazz Gillum (Bluebird) remain traditional and authentic. From the standpoint of sound, I prefer earlier records of Jazz Gillum, when he was accompanied by a harmonica which I never tired of listening to. It was not virtuoso; neither was it homely. It had a wild, aerial quality, delicate and fascinating. But Gillum's voice in *Deep Water Blues* is still compelling, still has that curious blend of pathos and radiance. Washboard Sam's voice has vigor but is less exciting; half the effect of his songs is in the solid but relaxed beat, the casual crossing of piano and guitar in the interludes. *I Get the Blues at Bedtime* is up to standard, if not one of his best records. Big Bill's voice is more subtle, more flexible, makes engaging use of falsetto in the top notes. He has a new recording of a current favorite uptown, *I'm Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town* (I tell you baby, don't want anyone else hangin' roun'; gonna buy myself a Frigidaire; don't want any mo' iceman hangin' roun').

Sister Rosetta Tharpe uses her powerful and fervid voice to record two more swing spirituals, *Sleep On, Darling Mother*, and *I Want to Live So God Can Use Me* (Decca). Her style is as personal as ever, and if her religious ardor sounds less convincing it is perhaps because her songs are not quite up to par. It is unfortunate too that the two songs just recorded by Bea Booze – *These Young Men Blues* and *So Good* (Decca) – are so frightfully banal. This is only her third record, and in her first two, especially in *See See Rider*, she sang with promising warmth and simplicity. Good songs are hard to find, but there must be a few around, and one hopes for something better in her next recording.