

SCORES AND RECORDS

By ARTHUR BERGER

THE recording companies are slowly returning to consciousness. At a February session, following Stravinsky's appearances with the Philharmonic Symphony, Columbia recorded the four recent works which had been included on his programs: *Four Norwegian Moods*, *Ode*, *Scènes de Ballet* and *Circus Polka*. The master discs will doubtless be allowed to gather considerable dust before their contents are divulged to the public, but this is the best news to come from the recording companies in years. The Billy Rose tie-up naturally favors *Scènes de Ballet*, which is expected to be out by summer.

For the present, there are no record releases, only printed music to report. Though Associated has not caught up with Stravinsky's *Symphony* and *Ode*, it keeps remarkably abreast of his recent progress. The *Sonata for Two Pianos* of last year is already in print. It is a little masterpiece of extraordinary gentleness, but its composer never carries the mood to the point of lethargy. His sense of just proportion is greater than any contemporary's, and in this *Sonata* he knows precisely where to jolt us with those typical false starts, or to interrupt the mellow with the incisive. Observe the short passage in thirty-second notes before the entrance of the remarkably tender second theme, or the somewhat ribald motif of the allegretto (in the second piano) scolding the more relaxed main theme which

has just barely been stated. The last mentioned interruption is one of several recent instances (and there are others in this work) of Stravinsky's return, from time to time, to his Russian folklore period.

Music of foreign publishers is scarce here now. Through the American firm of Boosey and Hawkes, Benjamin Britten's *Serenade* for tenor, horn and strings (Hawkes of London) has come to this department. And to a member of the armed forces I am indebted for Francis Poulenc's *Violin Sonata* (Max Eschig, Paris). The Britten affords striking evidence that at least one composer abroad is as profoundly conscious of the Copland style as so many young men here are. This is unprecedented for an American composer, perhaps because no one of us has ever had so individual a manner — something specific, that is to say, to emulate. Britten's prologue for French horn practically duplicates, with the addition of some further Coplandisms, the initial English horn solo of the *Interlude of Music for the Theatre*. As in the *Interlude*, Britten's prologue also serves as epilogue. The rest of the work is less specifically derivative, but is rather the worse for this.

As a song composer, Poulenc is perhaps unsurpassed in our time. In a less concise form, however, the seductive lyricism animating his songs is also encountered in his instrumental works.

The *Violin Sonata* is a delightful example. By frankly accepting what others are, quite understandably, laboriously engaged in rejecting, Poulenc is able to achieve a warm, impetuous flow which is very much needed these days. Shostakovich, in his way, also achieves this flow, but with much less musicianship and sensitivity, and without Poulenc's sense of agreeable sound. Lapses into sentimentalism are however noticeable in the second movement.

Sonata da Chiesa (New Music) is one of Virgil Thomson's works that continue to perplex me. After a study of the score it becomes more than ever evident that the austerity, distortion and acidity are deliberately contrived with a polished and sure craftsmanship, mature at the age of thirty when the work was written. But it seems to shy away from exerting the appeal of *The River*, *The Plow*, the third movement of the *Hymn-Tune Symphony*. Doubtless Thomson had some reason for this that escapes me. *Evocation, Number 4* by Carl Ruggles (New Music) is, on the other hand, music I get only too well by now, but what I get is not very satisfying, nor is it different from the unmotivated and undirected tension of most atonal efforts.

The Prairie, the full length cantata of Lukas Foss, is already a familiar affair. The repetitiveness of its motives, the recurrence of its melodic devices (e.g., the syncopated third at phrase-endings), made it familiar, in fact, after the first performance. Yet the piano-vocal score (G. Schirmer) offers just the kind of pleasure I expected it would. Much of the writing is clean, and when examined in detail does not crumble away like the *al fresco* attempts

of so many others. The less appealing parts of the work are those which are forced. The young composer has inherited some of the rhetorical tricks which sprang, in their originators, from a concern with audience persuasion. Foss himself, I believe, is guiltless of such insincere designs on his listeners, but a youthful naïveté, an exuberance impelled him to do the "right" thing, to do what others are successfully doing. When he is not so impelled, as in the tenor aria after the first recitative, or the alto's solo in Part III, he shows a soft lyric inspiration and a personal style of which we may expect him to become more keenly aware in the future, and to develop fruitfully.

A new non-commercial publishing venture has been added to the few that already exist: Valley Music Press, sponsored by Smith College and Mount Holyoke. Though in existence since 1943, its editions, with their neat grey covers, have only now reached this department. To do justice to a very welcome new enterprise, I shall have to put off the examination of back numbers for the present. There is however, a 1945 item, the third of Elliott Carter's settings of Crane's *Voyages*. Many fine modern poems, unlyrical and idealistic like Crane's, pose the same, perhaps insoluble, problem for musicians. This may be why Carter has been more successful in setting other texts. On the musical side, the song has sympathetic aspects, but some of its dissonances and false relations are not handled smoothly enough.

Turning from the Foss and the Carter, with their innocuous earmarks of *Our Town*, I was glad to find Copland's original among current publica-

tions in three very pleasant excerpts for piano (Boosey and Hawkes). In transcribing the music from his film, the composer inevitably sacrificed some of the lovely flowing quality of the strings in the second piece, but the last has unexpected eloquence.

Songs by William T. Ames, David Diamond, Otto Luening, and Paul Nordoff have been sent by Associated. Of these the Diamond settings of Shelley's *Music, When Soft Voices Die* and Clair's *On Death* seem the most sensitive and

interesting. Along with their vague, lax, archaic quality, they have a fairly personal style which Diamond has prolifically applied to dozens of songs recently. Thus, when we come to the five from *The Tempest* (Chappell), the authorship is easily recognizable. The Shakespeare settings are simpler, doubtless because of the limitations of available performers in Margaret Webster's production. But with this simplicity comes a much-needed clarification of form and direction.

WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

THE beautiful and subtle works of the Balanchine Festival made history for the Monte Carlo, indeed for all of us. It was wonderful to see the company rise to its fine moment. Night after night the young dancers bloomed in New York's City Center where the audience, which only yesterday seemed so callow, grew visibly more rapt and more knowing with each performance.

Ballet Imperial, 1941 (to Tchaikovsky's *Second Piano Concerto*) and *Mozartiana*, Paris, 1933 (the Tchaikovsky suite) are revivals. *Danses Concertantes* (Stravinsky), and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (Strauss) were introduced last fall. The brand-new *Pas de deux* (to an entr'acte from *The Sleeping Beauty*) is at this writing still to be presented. But *Sérénade*, 1935 (again Tchaikovsky), though not officially included was performed and certainly belongs with the rest in any Balanchine season.

Except for *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*,

a *ballet d'époque* with characters and comic episodes, these works are, by program terminology, abstract, which seems to mean without plot. They give us however fugitive suggestions of games, processions and encounters of love. *Imperial* is announced as an Homage to Petersburg, but in a way that is what they all are, evocations without nostalgia of the atmosphere of Balanchine's youth. Their idiom is classic in its "purest" form, a statement that also inadequately prepares one for an evening with Balanchine, since he has so enriched the language of the ballet, that when used by him, it seems the most communicative dance medium of the Western world.

Danses Concertantes still carries a high electric voltage, it is the company's most brilliant ornament. The Stravinsky score is of course no casual incident in this celebration. Balanchine has been under the composer's sign for over