

SCORES AND RECORDS

By ARTHUR BERGER

THEODORE CHANLER, in his cycle of nine songs, *The Children* (G. Schirmer), has found an excellent solution to the problem of achieving simplicity without sacrificing subtlety. Like Shakespeare, whose bloody incidents excite many who are unaware of the underlying ethics and philosophy, or like Mozart, whose melody and buoyant spirits captivate even those who only vaguely notice the dramatic flow and ultimate refinement of technique, Chanler also operates on two levels. The voice parts are clearly for children, but the accompaniments provide many elements a sophisticated public will linger over affectionately. The cycle as a whole is best sung by children in unison, though the publisher fails to mention it was written with this intention. But some of the songs have been found eminently adaptable to regular recital programs, notably *Wind* and *The Rose*. The vocal part is almost always doubled in the accompaniments which, however, compromise in no other way. Supplementing the appropriate nursery rhyme contours are some neat allusions to the less rugged types of Tin Pan Alley. These also emerge in two excellent Chanler songs for grown-ups: *I Rise When You Enter* (G. Schirmer) and *The Doves* (Hargail). John Feeney, who is the poet for these as well, is not always as concise as he might be in *The Children*, and Chanler is consequently led away at times from his

usual economy.

It is a discouraging thought that the appearance of Chanler on a commercial list at long last may have been prompted by the audience appeal of the skilfully handled colloquialisms more than by the lovely and genuine musical qualities of all of his work, whether his subject matter is colloquial or not. Without underestimating the present items, I should like to hope that publishers will soon reassure us by giving a broader representation to his musical output.

Some pleasant Lorca settings by Sylvestre Revueltas join the Chanler songs to outnumber the usual sentimental and innocuous vocal efforts on the current Schirmer list. We may be grateful, also, for the recent vocal issues of Associated Music Publishers: the thoroughly musical *Trois Fables de la Fontaine* by Marcelle de Manziarly; *David* and *In the Woods* by Paul Bowles, wrought with his familiar sensitivity and gift for prosody (though the first song is more distinguished than the second); and Hindemith's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, in which the solid construction, well-rounded dramatic plan and ingenuity make up for certain questionable syllabic accents. Of two weak songs by Goddard Lieberson, this at least can be said: since the time he wrote *Cradle Song* (1936) his dissonances, as exhibited in *Love Is a Sickness* (1944), have become less crude.

Walter Piston's *First Symphony* (G. Schirmer) is a solid work with many fascinating elements that do not easily give up their secret. It is a joy to discover how everything fits into place in this elaborate constellation of tones. Piston is not, like other native composers, discouraged by complexities. If he ventures at times almost as far into atonal realms as is possible within a tonal idiom, he does not commit the atonalist heresy of allowing the large form to reflect the obscurity of the material. The form is that of the traditional symphony and fine rhythmic continuity holds everything together. Highly chromatic episodes flow smoothly into such completely diatonic passages as the second theme of the first movement. There is terrific power in the main subject of the first allegro, with its nervous tension, range and impressive extension, but some other themes, while they seem quite motory, do not always move in the most interesting directions. I suspect, however, that the total effect of a performance may make them seem more convincing.

Three choice items of chamber music are familiar enough to modern music audiences to be dealt with briefly. Two will surely be welcomed by duo-piano teams: Bartok's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* (Boosey & Hawkes) in which melodic interest is subservient to his usual preoccupation with post-impressionist textures and effects; and a two-piano arrangement of Copland's inspired *Billy the Kid* (Boosey & Hawkes). The affecting little Stravinsky *Elégie* (Associated Music Publishers) is available either for violin or viola alone. Stravinsky harks back in this piece to the

contrapuntal style of the second movement of the *Symphonie de Psaumes*.

Music of the younger generation figures prominently among current instrumental publications. Vincent Persichetti has still done nothing to absorb the influences that exert themselves on almost any young American. In his *Piano Sonata* (Elkan-Vogel) the Coplandisms are decidedly watered down. The same derivations can be seen well on their way to a striking synthesis with other vital contemporary trends in Lukas Foss's *Fantasy Rondo* for piano and *Composer's Holiday* for piano and violin (both G. Schirmer). Foss is going through the inevitable motions of any composer who wants to control more than a limited amount of expressive matter, and he has the gift to give the inherited substances a new and significant twist. Neither of his pieces is wholly satisfactory. In the violin work the Americanisms, as in other of his pieces of this period, are too deliberate. The *Fantasy Rondo* is more convincing, though discursive in form. It has ingenuity, several inspired moments and, what is rare these days, a most pianistic style in its figurations.

Robert Palmer's *Toccata Ostinato* (Elkan-Vogel) and Norman Dello Joio's *Prelude: to a Young Dancer* (G. Schirmer) are essentially conceived along the single dimension of the one-idea morceau, but both have elements of intricacy and workmanship to lift them out of this category. The exacting Palmer piece, with its relentless 13-8 rhythm, is effective for its texture, though weak melodically. Dello Joio's *Prelude* is another

and more expert version of his post-Ravelian style, in which some of the chromatics are disturbing, and the relaxed, pentatonic procedure, however agreeable, seems rather constricting. But in each one an undeniably creative mind is earnestly functioning. I do not feel this to be true as yet in the *Cantabile* for string orchestra (New Music) by Merton Brown, whose name is new to me. The twelve-tone devices here are pursued with a rhythmic arbitrariness and harmonic archness that prevent the piece from achieving any profile.

The bulging shelf of folklore has been still further crammed with several new additions in which assorted national cultures are represented: the bluesy *Set of Three Informalities* for piano by Burrill Phillips (G. Schirmer); a pleasant Mexican *Sayula* for piano by Paul Bowles (Hargail); Germaine Tailleferre's *Pastorale* for violin or flute solo with piano (Elkan-Vogel); *Holbert's Cove* for violin and piano by Ernst Bacon (G. Schirmer), and Benjamin Britten's appropriately sparse, sometimes smooth and often crude harmonizations of *Folk Songs of the British Isles* (Boosey & Hawkes). Though none of these attempts a very deep penetration, on the whole they represent a more enlightened and authentic approach to folk material than one might encounter in the average settings of, say, twenty-five years ago. More ambitious and less folksy is Douglas Moore's *Down East Suite*, published by Fischer in the reduction for violin and piano. It flows along nicely, without pretension and with an obvious concern for harmonic movement and motive development.

All in all the work makes a serviceable contribution to the violin repertory. An unexpected bit of Americana – a ragtime – insinuates itself agreeably into Virgil Thomson's *Ten Etudes* for piano (Fischer). These fetching pieces make practicing an activity in which there is more fun than ennui. Sometimes in his preoccupation with the technical problem in the right hand Thomson slights the bass, or allows curious clashes with an ostinato figure. But *Repeating Tremolo* and *Oscillating Arm* are well-rounded pieces in any sense, and several others have some validity as music too, though their aims are fairly slight and mostly playful.

RECORDS

RCA-Victor has followed up Milhaud's *Protée* with some other representative achievements of the Diaghilev coterie that flourished in Paris around the time of World War I. Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* (Defauw conducting the Chicago Symphony) in particular has the typical near-brutality of volume and rhythm that must have vied with the cannons of Verdun. In Stravinsky's *The Song of the Nightingale* (Goossens conducting the Cincinnati Symphony) the extravagance takes the form of a profusion of iridescent colors. As I remarked about Milhaud's piece when it was issued a few months ago, the works of this period were strongly influenced by the procedures of theatrical ballet. In the theatre the preoccupation with effects, the character of a processional and the ostinato devices would require no such apology as when the works are heard by themselves.

Of the three pieces, Stravinsky's makes for the most congenial listen-

ing as a whole. Even at this early juncture of his development he had already sifted out and discarded the sonorities that formed a superfluous halo around the orchestra early in this century. There is, moreover, at least one fully rounded melody, the affecting blues theme of the trumpet that occurs about half-way through the third side of the album and again at the end.

But the greatest inspiration of all is the astonishing and revivifying opening of the *Scythian Suite* — an effect of swirling motion that is one of the most imposing finds in all musical literature. There are also other ingenuities along the way and the end builds magnificently. But the obsessive rumbling sounds recur so much that

they are quite enervating by the time the work is over.

A third Russian album on the Victor list, Prokofiev's *Seventh Piano Sonata* (performed by Horowitz), is a recent work, but one that has already become as much of a modern classic as the other two. Its attributes need scarcely be recounted at this time. I am still wary of the Schumannesque Andante and two miscalculations in the Allegro: a premature introduction of booming development material early in the exposition and the bogging-down of the subsidiary theme. The last movement is a tour de force that comes off in one astonishing piece. It is among the rare instances where ostinato technique works well.

WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

ALL the excitement of the past season came early when the Monte Carlo gave us, fresh from Balanchine's hand, a premiere, a Petersburg classic and a revival.

The revival was *Le Baiser de la fée* which Stravinsky's presence made gala. When Stravinsky conducts we feel the tension of the long, melancholy, Tchaikovskian phrases and hear the spare sound of every instrument. His beat permits no swooning retards to soften one up, no brilliant telescoping of allegro measures. The ballet then takes on a truly spacious proportion. At the opening it was wonderful to see how Tallchief, young,

grand, implacable, carried off the central role. And how Danilova danced the mill scene with delicate, contorted grace and the look of a tender Modigliani.

Le Baiser is not major Stravinsky yet it is one of the great ballets of our time. Year after year Balanchine's Alpine Fairy, the terrifying nature deity out of Andersen's fable, looms larger as a conception of genius. Among choreographers Balanchine alone projects such forms. His images evoke no time or place, they have no atmosphere. Their force is naked and direct; they seize on the mind and become basic matter to which one re-