

let me illustrate with figures from the budgets of the great orchestras in Group 1, which spend about \$650,000 a year and pay their conductors, instrumentalists, executives, landlords, and advertising agents the highest fees in the world. From each of these same budgets, less than \$2500 annually will be divided between Strauss, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Ravel's heirs, Schönberg, De Falla, Carpenter, Bloch, Milhaud, Honegger, Hindemith, Copland, Harris, all the men of Europe and America lumped together,

whose works, written within the last fifty years, happen to be performed in any season. It is also well known that nowhere in the world are royalties so low as in America, that they have been depressed to this artificial level by the ruthless insistence of Boards of Trustees and their paid managers. Certainly this contribution by composers, however involuntary, should not be overlooked in any tribute to the bed-rock economies that help streamline America's symphony orchestras.

Minna Lederman

PIERROT LUNAIRE IN LINDY'S

I WISH I could say wholeheartedly that *A Smattering of Ignorance* by Oscar Levant (published by Doubleday Doran, 1940) is a terrible book. For has it not already become a bestseller, and is not that an unmistakable mark of shoddiness? And is it not true that the writing is careless and hasty, so that, as the author himself might say with Woolcottian relish, his indifference to good writing borders on the enthusiastic? And even when the style is good, is it not merely journalese good, with hunks of lovely wit sandwiched in between slices of racontage so offhand, so slick and up-to-date that the references may not last out the month? And above all, has he not taken a couple of wicked potshots at me (at once happy and embarrassed to be included in a book devoted to People who Currently Count)? Has he not delivered me over to the lions of snobism and the vultures of venality? I burn with a desire for vengeance.

But really this turns out to be a very nice book, written by a very nice fellow.

The very nice fellow comes over through a maze of well- and ill-written anecdotes about his friends and enemies. He is there in a kind of pointilism. Piece the parts together and you will have Oscar, with his lugubrious impudence, his boorish charm, his self-deprecation, his gift for hero-worship, his sizeable knowledge, and his sizeable vanity. The last attribute is pretty nearly psychopathic in Levant. He hates himself for it, it gets the better of him, he is torn in an agony of conflict. He cannot bear to be wrong on a point of information. On the other hand, he cannot bear to be right on a point of morality or character. In the company of Gershwin he becomes a lout; with Copland and Schönberg (there is an astonishing confession about how he played them one against the other) he is a heel; and so on. Actually he is so concerned with being a heel and a lout, there is so much penitence and confession, that I think he may be well on the way to becoming a beautiful moral character. I realize in saying this I am letting myself

in for more dirty work at Oscar's hands; another mean story (bad) or none at all (worse).

I liked best the sections on Harpo Marx and the Hollywood music-factory. I am delighted to learn that Harpo is not just a character, but is really Harpo, which is almost too good to be true. In the movie-music chapter, there is a wealth of enjoyable new information about why not to go West. It is largely written at the expense of the feeble-minded producers – and who am I to resent that? I didn't care for "Music in Aspic" which is about orchestras and conductors; I knew most of the stories. I was a little chilled by "The Boys are Marching" (this is the part where I get taken over the hurdles, so my sense of chill is logical). I'm glad to know Oscar is willing to come out publicly for American music; I only wish he were less condescending about it. It occurs to me that a pupil of Schönberg (he studied with S. off and on) has no business to speak with sar-

casm of "something light and gay for viola, harp, bass flute and contralto." How does Oscar know it can't be done? That kind of lapse into Mencken-Nathan isn't much fun; I'm glad that in general the wit is more lively and more expansive. The piece on Gershwin I found too close to Levant's emotions for comfort. He is inconsolable; and it is no accident (just as it is no help) that this part is accompanied by the most abject self-castigation and the most furious wise-cracking.

With this book, and with his weekly performances on the "Information Please" radio-hour, Oscar has become a Glamor-Boy. He has now made the grade, he can give orders as well as Bronx cheers. Of course the book is a bestseller. Going everywhere, meeting everybody, being in on everything in his slightly-mocking company is a real pleasure, whether you fancy him as a musical expert, as a teller of tall tales, or simply as Oscar the Second.

Marc Blitzstein

TAYLOR-MADE TOPICS

DEEMS TAYLOR has written about a great many things in his new book *The Well-Tempered Listener* (Simon & Schuster). In this diversity of interest lies the strength as well as the weakness of his work. The average music lover in search of more culture than he can painlessly imbibe will surely get his money's worth. Whether it will increase his enjoyment of music is questionable. Here one can find everything explained – from the composer's art to the life of Wagner, an appreciation of Heifetz, the probable lives of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven,

Berlioz, and Wagner were they contemporary Americans, the functions and qualifications of the music critic, radio music, propaganda and music, the art of program building, women instrumentalists, absolute and program music, and sundry esthetic and social topics. All this is fluently presented in a pleasant folksy vernacular calculated (by an expert) to charm. Much of the material is excellent, but an attempt to cover so many things in a single volume takes its toll of superficiality, most unfortunately in the discussion of the more controversial