

SCORES and RECORDS

By AARON COPLAND

BERG, Roussel, Stravinsky, Avshalomoff, Loeffler, Milhaud, Kowalski, Prokofieff, Copland—not to mention Debussy and Strauss—are all to be found in the latest releases of the recording companies. This abundance of material is partly explained by the reappearance of two older firms under the combined name of Brunswick-Polydor. It is Brunswick that apparently intends to specialize in domestic re-pressings of the foreign Polydor recordings. Re-pressings are never as exciting as a shiny new label on some home product. But there is no denying that they do make numbers of valuable sets more currently salable, and as such are very welcome.

Brunswick-Polydor begins with an excellent selection of material: Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* for string quartet (Galimir Quartet of Vienna); Albert Roussel's *Symphony No. 3* (Lamoureux Orchestra under Albert Wolff); and Stravinsky's *Concerto in D-Major* for violin and orchestra (Samuel Dushkin with the composer conducting.)

Berg's *Lyric Suite* was a brave undertaking: it is the first representative work of the Viennese atonal school to achieve disc immortality. (Schönberg's mature period is still unavailable.) The phonograph can be a powerful agent for good in the case of music like this—so difficult to grasp without repeated hearings. Unfortunately it comes at a moment when, in a sense, one least wants to hear it. For if any tendency is discernible in present-day music, it is a tendency *away* from the overcomplexities and rarefactions of the atonal school. Still one willingly recognizes that the *Lyric Suite* is almost in the nature of an historical document belonging to a very particular period in the development of music. It is, moreover, to be heard in a brilliant performance by the Galimir Quartet.

Roussel's *Symphony* is a quite different story. It is objective and healthy; brisk, happy, lyrical music, always strangely personal in idiom. How well it can last is another question. No

matter! For the present it is good to have around, and makes one wish it might more often supplant the Rachmaninoffs and Dohnanyis in the concert hall.

Speaking of the concert hall, isn't it possible that the obvious enthusiasm of this season's audiences for Stravinsky's programs is partly attributable to the fact that the music is *really* becoming known through the phonograph. Add to Stravinsky's already generous list of recordings his comparatively recent *Violin Concerto*. My guess is that this will never become anyone's *oeuvre favori*. It produces a certain pinched and unspontaneous reaction in the listener. ("A tight little package" as Virgil Thomson would say.) Still, one cannot help admiring the sheer brilliance of the last movement, and what I take to be the dry humor of the first. These qualities do not alter the fact, however, that the piece as a whole is put together in a somewhat cold-blooded fashion which is anything but sympathetic. Hearing the *Concerto* makes one yearn to listen to *Oedipus*, or even *Perséphone*, again.

Milhaud continues to be a record favorite. It is only through discs that one can keep informed of what he has been lately composing. Scores and records have arrived of three recent works: the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (Columbia); the *Concertino de Printemps* for violin and orchestra (Brunswick-Polydor); and a ballet, *Les Songes*. A third concerto, this one for 'cello and orchestra, has been published by R. Deiss, Paris, who has also brought out the scores of the other works.

No orchestral conductor has had the wit to champion Milhaud's cause before the concert public. Yet even on wax it is always a pleasure to listen to a new work of Milhaud's. The potency of his personality is such that it informs all he does with interest. Of the three *Concerti* I prefer the one for piano, very well performed by Margerite Long under the composer's direction, and typical in every way of Milhaud's capacity for being perennially fresh and inventive within a well defined frame.

A great amount of honest effort has been expended upon Charles Martin Loeffler's *Partita* for violin and piano. G. Schirmer has published it in a handsome edition and Jacques Gordon and Lee Pattison play it beautifully on Columbia Records. All to no avail. The music, taken by itself, and without

benefit of Loeffler's genteel reputation, has very little to recommend it. In fact, to be completely honest, it is just such music—largely derivative and characterless despite its well-made phrases—which seems to justify the low opinion of American music held in certain quarters.

Avshalomoff and Kowalski make what is probably their American debut via the phonograph. Avshalomoff is a Russian who lives in China. He conducts the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra in a performance of his *Piano Concerto*, based on Chinese themes and rhythms, with Gregory Singer as soloist (Columbia.) It's the old style concerto, Lisztian model, in a new guise. The use of indigenous material does not dispel the impression of a kind of super-Chinatown music, artistically about as important as the music for the exotic films of a decade ago.

Max Kowalski is a German who has had either the misfortune or the temerity—depending on who came first—of putting to music some of the poems from *Pierrot Lunaire*, made famous by Schönberg's setting. Did Columbia realize its own daring in offering Kowalski's conventional songs to the public, while Schönberg's masterpiece remains unrecorded? This looks like a clear case of mediocrity rewarded.

The "classic" modern masters are represented by Debussy's *Sonata No. 3* for violin and piano (Columbia) in an excellent version by Alfred Dubois and Marcel Maas, and Strauss' famous *Zerbinetta* aria from *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Brunswick-Polydor) sung by Adele Kern.

A short ten-inch disc of Prokofieff's *Sarcasme* as played by Alexander Borovsky can be recommended also.

For the sake of the record I should mention the recent release by Columbia of my own *Trio—Vitebsk* for violin, 'cello and piano, and the *Ukelele Serenade* for violin and piano.

NEW SCORES

NAMES less well known than most of these supply the month's new scores.

Conrad Beck, a Swiss composer, who was known as a disciple of Honegger's during the late twenties, contributes three new works: *Serenade* for flute, clarinet and string orchestra, *String*

Quartet No. 4; and *Duo* for violin and viola (Schott—Associated Music Publishers). His music is best when it is simplest, as in the *Serenade*. The best pages of this work make one hope that with a more defined individuality and less of a tendency to lean upon the academic formulae of Hindemith, Beck will succeed in bringing to fruition his early promise.

Felix Petyrek has written *Six Concert Etudes* for two pianos (Universal-Associated Music Publishers). Any addition to the restricted literature of two-piano music is of some value, no doubt. But those of us who have looked upon Petyrek as one of the best of the lesser men, have reason to be disappointed in these much too usual Etudes.

New Music (Jan. 1937) continues doggedly to track down new American talent and to foster the experimental. The talent on this occasion is one William H. Bailey who has written a violin and piano piece called, mysteriously, *Idless*. Since the composer in his notes, frankly admits the Schönberg influence, we shall merely add that it is pleasantly musical in spite of that. The experimental contribution is a *Dirge* for two pianos tuned one-quarter tone apart, by Mildred Couper. This looks like pretty grim stuff on paper. On the other hand, it may be a masterpiece, but unless we can persuade our only acquaintance who owns two pianos to have them tuned a quarter-tone apart we'll never know.

IN THE THEATRE

By VIRGIL THOMSON

Garrick, by Robert Simon and Albert Stoessel, is another Juilliard opera.

The Juilliard productions have been going on at the rate of two a year (one new and local, one foreign classic) for some time now. The local ones within my memory have been

Jack and the Beanstalk by Erskine and Gruenberg

Helen Retires by Erskine and Antheil

Malibran by Simon and Bennett

Garrick by Simon and Stoessel.