

## SCORES and RECORDS

By AARON COPLAND

THE record companies provide rather thin pickings this quarter, as far as contemporary music is concerned. RCA Victor, for example, manages to deliver itself of a single ten-inch disc—the first in a long time—Walton's *Portsmouth Point* overture. It is a question whether a large company, earning considerable sums of money each year on its recording sales, does not owe some ethical debt to the future of the art of music. I do not know that this point has ever been made. But it seems only reasonable, since the publishers of books and music often issue works for the sake of so-called prestige with little hope of large sales, to expect the record companies to contribute in some tangible form to the development of music as an art.

Columbia, as usual, provides the bulk of the month's records with two large sets—Volume II of the Delius Society and Ravel's one act opera, *L'Heure Espagnole*.

Four of Delius' works make up the new set: two for orchestra, *Over the Hills and Far Away* and *In a Summer Garden*; an Intermezzo from his last opera *Fennimore and Gerda*; and a large choral work, *Sea Drift*, for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra. *Over the Hills*, which dates from 1893, is the earliest and weakest of these works. The *Intermezzo* and *In a Summer Garden* are more like the Delius that is familiar to most of us—the composer who was the embodiment of the sensitive, minor poet, par excellence. But *Sea Drift* comes as a surprise. Based on a text from Whitman, it makes use of a large canvas in a way which would imply that *le cas* Delius is still open for discussion. Combined with pastoral and nature-painting moods, customary with Delius, are unsuspected moments of real sweep and dramatic power. These make one look forward to possible further discoveries in Volume III.

Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnole* was a strange choice for record transcription. As "pure music" it is pretty nearly meaningless, and one feels certain Ravel never meant it to be considered as

such. Even the lines lose much of their comedy without the visual stage picture. The net impression is one of musical frustration, which can only be dispelled by memories of actual performances seen. This set will only interest Ravel fanatics.

The lesser items, aside from the Walton overture, are a *Sonata for Viola Alone*, Opus 25, No. 1 by Hindemith (Columbia) and another twelve-inch disc of the usual Poulenc piano numbers—this time it is *Two Novelettes* and a *Caprice* (Columbia).

The solo string sonata has enjoyed a certain vogue among contemporary composers. Hindemith manages this exacting medium especially well. But it is remarkable how little the essential character of his music has changed since this work was written in the early twenties. Chamber music devotees will appreciate these records.

The *Portsmouth Point* overture by William Walton is jolly and full of good feeling. As a matter of fact this piece, composed in 1925, is a good deal more sympathetic than Walton's more pretentious works, such as the ponderous *Belshazzar's Feast* or the recent *Symphony*.

#### NEW SCORES

The *Symphony*, which was issued not long ago as a miniature score (Oxford University Press), shows an unfortunate tendency on Walton's part to write as if he were already composer-laureate of the British Empire. These weighty works put an obvious strain on his talent. It is not a technical strain—he can write a four-movement symphony all right, with all the furbishings. But he cannot manage to imbue the notes with anything but the most conventional sentiments, despite all the strivings toward the grandiose.

Similar problems—are they typically English?—are presented by Vaughan Williams' *Concerto* for piano and orchestra (Oxford University Press). Vaughan Williams is only a trifle less "up-to-date" than Walton as far as his musical language goes, but the *Concerto* expresses nothing but conventional sentiments, and is therefore, equally disappointing.

Nino Rota, a young Italian composer who spent a few years studying in the United States, has published a *Quintet* for flute, oboe, viola, cello and harp (Ricordi). It is a well written work,

certain to sound pleasing and grateful to the ear. Rota belongs with the Jean Françaix "school"—baby composers, one might call them—for they are gifted young musicians who seem to exist in a purely musical sphere, with no sense of the turbulent times they live in. At any rate, no sign of any such awareness can be found in their music.

The Cos Cob Press, which has not been heard from in some time, resumes publication with a *Prelude and Fugue* for orchestra by Walter Piston. This is the work Piston composed on commission from the League of Composers. Piston's work is important in America today, for it is on music such as his that a school of composers is founded. A mere glance at the score of this new work will convince anyone of the meticulous workmanship, the taste and authority evident on each page.

Another score of interest is the first movement from Charles Ives' *Symphony of Holidays* (New Music Orchestra Series)—*Washington's Birthday*, composed in 1913. What unique things Ives was doing during that period! And what a shocking lack of interest to this very day on the part of our major symphonic organizations in this true pioneer musician. A score like his can best be judged from actual performance. What is most striking from a mere "reading" is the contrast between the "homely" program attached to the piece and the incredibly complex means for achieving it.

*Klavier-1937* (Hudebni Matice) is a collection of piano pieces, in the modern idiom, of eleven Czech composers. Aside from Martinu and Karel Haba they are all new names, and a surprisingly high level of achievement is maintained. I particularly liked a *Pastorale* by one Pavel Haas. As a matter of fact, I have come away from my first full season of music reviewing with a new respect for the modern movement in Czechoslovakia.

Other music received:

*Wood Wind Quintet* by Pavel Borkovec (Hudebni Matice). A well written work by one of the contributors to the above mentioned piano volume.

*The Argonauts* by Quinto Maganini (Affiliated Music Corp.). An opera cycle of four short stage works based on California lore.

*Trauermusik* for viola and string orchestra by Paul Hindemith (Schott-Associated Music Corp.). A *piece d'occasion* written the day following the death of George V.

*Suite for Violin and Orchestra* by Jean Françaix (Schott-Associated Music Corp.). Light music even for Françaix.

*Ballades Françaises* for voice and piano—Silvester Hippmann (Hudebni Matice). Four serious songs, uneven in quality, by a name new to us.

*In a Winter Garden*, Suite for Orchestra by S. A. Lieberson (C. C. Birchard). Four light movements: I Backstage, II The Musical Clown, III The Dancing Prima Ballerina, IV The Juggler. The titles indicate the genre of the piece.

## IN THE THEATRE

—By VIRGIL THOMSON—

HIGH-BROWS WOW LOCAL PUBLIC

THREE successful premieres (cheers and bravos and everything) are to be chalked up for April. Gian-Carlo Menotti's *Amelia al Ballo*, Aaron Copland and Edwin Denby's *The Second Hurricane*, and Stravinsky's *The Card Party*.

Menotti's *opera buffa* was the more applauded half of an evening that contained also *Le Pauvre Matelot* by Darius Milhaud and Jean Cocteau. A student chorus and orchestra from the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia performed both works with hired conductor (Reiner) hired stage-director (Lert) and hired soloists. All very fine indeed and a ship-shape professional job.

The Milhaud (its American first-time) is a good work, not the best Milhaud, but better than most of his operas, which have a tendency to over-amplify the action by moments, to go muggy-symphonic, and to wander. It is soundly conceived and sensibly written, at least within the limits of the convention that allows such a disproportion of musical weight as one hundred musicians in the pit to three soloists on the stage.

The Curtis performance suffered from a heavy and insensitive translation (the *fausse naïveté* of Cocteau's language is not easy