

## SCORES and RECORDS

By AARON COPLAND

THE season's end makes it necessary to clear the table of this year's vintage of scores and records. The poor reviewer finds himself with many more works than can be adequately treated within the limits of a single article.

Take, for example, Roger Sessions' *Violin Concerto* (Affiliated Music Corporation). Anyone who intends to review a work of this calibre should certainly be able to spread himself. As everyone knows by now, Sessions is not the type of composer who dashes off a concerto for an occasion. You can be sure that the composition was written with loving care—that each phrase was painstakingly molded, and each section dovetailed into its inevitable groove, before the composer wrote *finis*. (Sessions has even been accused of being over-meticulous.) It is almost an impertinence to review such a work hastily.

Moreover, it would be foolish to attempt an evaluation with any degree of finality without having heard an actual performance. Still, even the briefest study of the miniature score reveals this as music of real quality. By that I mean that this is music of a real personality, and if you do not recognize that personality you do not know Sessions' music. For me it is most evident in the slow movements, such as the opening one of this *Concerto*. At such times Sessions creates a music profoundly his own, without the aid of any surface mannerisms; music of an ineffable pessimism — resigned, unprotesting, inexpressibly sad, of a deeply human and non-romantic quality. His faster movements balance this with a lighter, almost athletic music, brilliant and sometimes dramatic in character, but always flowing onward with a strong sense of direction. All his music, slow or fast, is written with consummate technical finish.

Despite these qualities, the *Violin Concerto* will not make friends easily, for it puts extraordinary demands on the listener and the interpreter, even the best-disposed listener and interpreter. Sometimes it seems to me that Sessions writes his music

for Titans, forgetting that we are, after all, only mortals with a capacity for lending our attention within definite limits. In his passionate search for perfection, he either loses sight of or completely disregards audience psychology. It is not a question of giving an audience what it wants, but of *not* giving it more than you can reasonably expect it to be able to digest. It is difficult to set those limits. But I wonder whether the general texture of this work is not too continuously complex, the melodic line too frequently involved, and the proportions of the whole on too gargantuan a scale. It is only performance and familiarity which can resolve a question of this sort.

William Walton is with us again. This time the future composer-laureate of England contributes a patriotic paean to the glory of London, entitled *In Honour of the City of London*, for mixed chorus and orchestra (Oxford University Press—Carl Fischer.) It's a fulsome and workmanlike job, neither better nor worse than other recent scores of Walton's. The conclusion is inevitable that if he continues much longer to turn out this sort of thing, it won't be long before what was once an unusually gifted man becomes a species of superior hack writer for the choral festivals of all England.

Francis Poulenc is with us again also. But who could have foreseen that Poulenc, of all people, would turn up with a *Mass* for unaccompanied voices (Elkan Vogel Co.). He has changed his medium, but not his style. Eclectic as ever, charming as ever, musical as ever, this *Mass* is not at all severe and forbidding. *Au contraire*. It was meant to be sung in all simplicity in a sunny church in southern France. Even in an ordinary concert hall it may be counted on to win its auditors.

Two of this year's young prize winners—William Schuman and David Diamond have had works published recently. Schuman is, so far as I am concerned, the musical find of the year. There is nothing puny or miniature about this young man's talent. If he fails he will fail on a grand scale. His eight part chorus *Pioneers* (J. W. Chester—Edward B. Marks) tries characteristically for big things. It is carefully planned music—music of design rather than melodic inspiration. When the planning is too evident, as it sometimes is, the effect is unspontaneous. But

for the most part, this is music of tension and power—a worthy match for Walt Whitman's stirring text. From the testimony of this piece alone, it seems to me that Schuman is a composer who is going places.

Diamond's *Psalm* for orchestra (Juilliard Publications—E. F. Kalmus) is his first published orchestral score. Unlike Schuman, Diamond's music is all spontaneity, and could profit by more careful planning. The *Psalm*, written two years ago when the composer was twenty, is violent and expressive by turns, the work of an indubitably gifted young man. The orchestral balances are none too expertly managed at times, no doubt due to inexperience. But in general this is a more than promising score by a composer who already holds a high place among the younger talents.

Nicholas Nabokoff has written a theme and variations for piano which he has called *Contrasts and Developments* (Edition Russe de Musique). Nabokoff is a full-fledged composer. Recently of Paris, we are fortunate to have him in our midst as a permanent resident. These variations are characteristic of his style: large and generous in feeling, of a neo-romantic inspiration, not too distinguished in content, with a complete command of contemporary musical language. If pianists played present-day music this is one of the pieces that would be heard.

Edmund Rubbra's *Sonata* for violin and piano completes the list (Oxford University Press—Carl Fischer). Rubbra is an English composer, on the John Ireland side. This *Sonata* is glibly written, of an easy effectiveness, and second-hand in emotional content. Need more be said?

#### RECORDS

RCA Victor has had an unusual spurt of interest this spring in works off the beaten path. They recently issued an intriguing set of Hindu music by Uday Shan-Kar's Company of Musicians and Dancers. One of the best of the recordings is a piece for twelve drums, played by Shirali. Rhythmically and melodically this is fascinating for the Western musician. Nevertheless, as sheer music the pieces are more effective when heard in the theatre as accompaniment for the dances for which they were written.

Vaughan Williams' *Symphony* in F-minor, (RCA Victor), which I reviewed two issues back, when the miniature score was printed, is now available in a first-rate recording, conducted by the composer himself. It is an interesting experience for a reviewer to be confronted, as it were, by the actual sound of the notes themselves. In the final analysis there is a difference between looking at the notes and hearing them sounded. My conviction as to the essential conventionality of the musical thought remains, but there is an urgency and drive about the music when heard, which tends to sweep away all critical objections. You can listen to this with pleasure if you can keep your critical faculties in abeyance.

Another English work, on a less exalted plane, is Lord Berners' ballet suite from *The Triumph of Neptune* (Columbia). Lord Berners has long enjoyed the reputation of being a witty and clever composer. Music such as this is all right if you are in the mood, though the formula is beginning to wear a bit thin. A pleasant suite in 1926, but not so exciting in 1938.

The Westminster Choir has recorded Roy Harris' *Symphony for Voices* (RCA Victor). The composer's idea, apparently, was to use the voices like instruments and thereby create a vocal symphony. The experiment comes off quite well, on the whole, though the recording tends to make mechanical, effects which were highly dramatic in actual performance. As is usual with Harris' work, the *Symphony for Voices* improves on its predecessor, the *Song for Occupations*. It is clearer in conception and in vocal writing, and despite moments of strain and unnaturalness, it produces an impression of strength and depth of emotion, so patent in all Harris' work.

A single disc with an unusual offering is Edgar Varese's *Octandre* for four woodwinds, three brass and double bass (New Music Quarterly Recordings), conducted by Nicholas Slonimsky. It is difficult to hear music like this with detachment. It brings back certain aspects of the era of the twenties with a bang. The *Octandre* and other works of Varese were so absorbing then, and new music has made such a *volte-face* since, that it would be surprising indeed if they did not suffer by the passage of time. It is interesting to have the *Octandre* available now, but it is the

Varese of the *Arcanes* that one should like to see recorded.

Robert McBride, at twenty-five, has had an orchestral work recorded. That sets a precedent, I believe for American music and the RCA Victor Company, who made the recording. McBride's *Fugato on a Well-Known Theme* (other side: Mossolow's *Iron Foundry*, an exploded firecracker) probably has sales value because it is an amusing trifle, well orchestrated, and well performed by Fiedler's Boston Pops Orchestra. One wishes that the composer's sense of musical logic were better, for even a light piece should have some idea as to where it's going. Still, it's a start towards a day when orchestral works by Americans will be less of a rarity on discs.

Other scores received:

From *Czechoslovakia* (Hudebni Matice): Pavel Borkovec, *Concerto* for piano and orchestra; Pavel Haas, *Suite* for piano, Opus 13; Jaroslav Jezek, *Little Suite* for piano; Isa Krejci, *Trio* for clarinet, contra-bass, and piano; Josef Suk, *Piece* for string orchestra.

From *Italy* (Ricordi), Orchestral works in miniature score: Ennio Porrino, *La Visione d'Ezechiele*; Ludovico Rocca, *In Terra di Leggenda* and *Salmodia*; Ezio Carabella, *Giro-Tondo dei Fanciulli*; Penzo Rossellini, *Canto di Palude*; Ricardo Zandonai, *Concerto Andaluso* (Solo cello and small orchestra).

From *Hungary* (Rozsavolgyi and Company): Leo Wiener, *Passacaglia* for piano, Opus 17; Andres Ysasi, *Films* for piano, Opus 54.

From Jibneh Edition (U.S.A.), Lazar Wiener, *Three Songs* to Jewish texts.

## THEATRE AND DANCE

EDWIN DENBY

### WORLD'S FAIR AND OTHER SHOWS

I LIKE what the World's Fair looks like now, and I think it will be still better when it's finished. It isn't art, but it's something pleasant. It's like "folk" art when it's neither foreign nor historical, that is when it's something you don't think about,