

RECENT BOOKS

MUSIC CYCLOPEDIAS—NEW STYLE

TWO impressive collations of musical fact have recently appeared—the *Oxford Companion to Music*, by Percy A. Scholes (Oxford University Press 1938), and *The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians*, edited by Oscar Thompson (Dodd, Mead and Company, New York 1939.)

Dr. Scholes succeeds surprisingly in combining a painless method of imparting information with stimulating personal commentary. Freshness is conveyed by a desire to treat the facts of music as having meaning for the average intelligent person, rather than as paraphernalia of an esoteric fraternity.

Stress has been laid on terminology, biography, theoretical and historical information, "performing directions;" but also on seeing "from a fresh point of view what's known." There are many features which make for readability and convenience. The volume is "self-indexing;" that is, the index is incorporated throughout the body, in the form of unusually copious cross-references which lead the reader to related information and germane questions. Many such connected items, if read in succession, form unified essays and were written with this effect in view. The Reader's Synopsis is a further unifying device. There is a short article on American Musical Terminology as distinguished from British. The Pronouncing Glossary "of foreign or difficult terms and names" is less formidable than the usual dictionary hieroglyphics; it is also less exact. A hundred and seventy-nine plates furnish very welcome pictorial overtones. There are the usual temptations to speculate on mystic connections between successive subjects, such as *Saltarello*, *Saltbox*, and *Salvation Army*. The associations on the plates are just as persevering, as for example the German Concertina (Reed-Organ Family) hovering above Respighi, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert dancing a Polka to the left of Poulenc, or Enesco placed due north of such effects as *Siren Whistles* and the *Bear Growl* or *Lion Roar*. A gratifying number of pictures are caricatures and old cuts. There is a profusion of text figures and a large

number of useful and simple tables. Thanks to its organization, although it has the orthodox alphabetical arrangement of a Dictionary or Encyclopedia, it serves in many respects also as a coherent handbook on music.

Occasionally the definitions of playing directions or signs may be clear enough for the experienced performer, but would mislead the less initiated. The scope of any compilation must be limited somewhere; yet the reviewer personally regrets the skimpy treatment of comparative musicology. There is no item for Primitive, African, etc. music; Chinese, Japanese, East Indian, and Malaysian are summarily grouped as *Oriental*. Under *Ballad* there is curiously little discussion of the music of balladry.

Modern music is given about as much space as the extent of such a volume generally permits. If one wishes there might have been more, the author would probably agree. On the other hand, a number of topics are unusual and welcome—*Annotated Programs*, *Applause*, and the like. The discussion is often refreshingly anecdotal, and in many cases the sociological setting of music is brought out in rich detail. All in all this is a very companionable offering full of good reading. Limitations of scope, or rather size, and of factual control, to be expected in a one-man enterprise of this kind, are surprisingly little in evidence.



The Thompson Cyclopedia is an altogether different work designed as a standard dictionary of music, although here too the musical brow has been considerably lowered. Organized in straight alphabetical order, with a dreadnought bibliography of about three thousand five hundred titles, as well as supplementary bibliographies, it profits by the efforts of a distinguished roster of contributors.

Undoubtedly this is to become our standard American all-around reference work on music, written to serve the intelligent layman as well as the musician. The number of subjects itemized is overwhelming, the organization excellent and in many respects novel. The treatment of topics in which interest and information is well-established, is of a smoothness that does credit to the editors. In such sweeping territory, however, it may be easier to see the imperfections than the virtues. Thus, if bona-fide musicologists had written more of the articles, the popular appeal might have been a whit reduced, but somewhat less of our popular

patter and chatter on music would have been embalmed along with the rest in an authoritative exterior. Those musical domains in which settled judgment and accepted fact rule less rigidly, tend to be somewhat spotty. Musical theory, in spite of Miss Bauer's succinct summaries, is uneven. The article on *Melody* is little more than a bare definition. The direction of the *Leading Tone* need not be inevitably upward; an *Isotonic* (Tone-) *System* does not necessarily consist of twelve half-tones. Comparative musicology is again skimpy. To see the late von Hornbostel, one of the founders of this discipline, identified as one who concentrated on musical psychology is a jar. It is to be regretted that the sources of Mr. Skilton's appreciative article on American Indian Music are outmoded and the melodies notated by ear—a procedure taboo in the study of primitive music—while the assertion that material so far gathered covers "very fully the music of Indians in every part of the country" is, to say the least, optimistic. Psychology of Music appears to be another field somewhat under-represented.

Latin-America is conspicuously absent. For the U. S. A. there are curious omissions. No entry is made for James Weldon Johnson, or Handy and his Blues. Nor for Helen H. Roberts, one of our few outstanding students of Indian music, or the late Phillips Barry whose work in folksong is easily among the best in Western Europe and the U. S. A. The technical polish of the volume is somewhat blurred by misspellings, especially of German, and by vagaries of accent and other vowel marks.

The Bibliography, in itself a gigantic undertaking, is also in many respects disappointing. Properly reduced and better integrated with the articles, it would serve its purpose better. Features worth further developing are the subject-groupings and the explanatory and summarizing remarks.

These defects appear minor, however, when considering how near the Cyclopedica comes to its attempted goal. It combines information, sober appraisal, and some masterly essays, with a spirit that is alive to modern trends in music and to related trends of our modern civilization that bear upon music. It serves as a detailed cross-section of music in America, especially today; and offers an unusually exhaustive treatment of modern music in general. As an undertaking it betrays a genius for planning and organization.

George Herzog