

## RECORDS and SCORES

By COLIN McPHEE

WITH the exception of the *Program of Mexican Music* by Chavez (Columbia) and the *Two Pieces for String Quartet* of Copland (Columbia) no new music of any interest seems to have been recorded since last May. True, there are fresh recordings of the Stravinsky *Capriccio* and the *Sacre*, but to me the best of recent releases, aside from the Chavez and Copland, belong to the French romantic school, the *Symphonie Fantastique* of Berlioz (Victor), the little known and strange *Orpheus* of Liszt (Columbia) and overtures by Auber and Delibes. I had forgotten the fascination and beauty of the *Symphonie Fantastique* – the daring and clarity of the orchestration, the peculiar melodic line which at first seems so frigid, so perverse and neurotic, and which insinuates itself the more one listens. I frankly prefer the pictorial program music of Berlioz, done in the grand manner, a fusion of David and Delacroix, to the equally programmatic music of Beethoven, where the scene is laid in the no-man's-land of the soul. In some strange way the improbabilities of Berlioz are not absurd, but are symbols which can easily become rich in implications. It all depends upon how you feel about it. Nevertheless, he is the ideal symphonist of the nineteenth century, with a more refined, more filtered and scientific orchestration than Wagner, and a vital sense of construction which Liszt seldom had. *Orpheus* is worth listening to, however, for its remote mysticism and peculiar scoring. Here, as always with

Liszt, sonorous problems are confused. When he writes for orchestra he is thinking of the piano, and vice versa. But in spite of, and perhaps owing to this confusion, there is a certain buoyancy to the orchestra, a certain transparency which is quite special.

Constant Lambert conducts the overtures to *Les Diamants de la couronne* (Auber) and *Le Roi l'a dit* (Delibes) with enthusiasm. Both are Victor records. The animated sections of both these pieces are more or less automatic, but the slow parts are not only really charming but perfect examples of the style of these specialists in nostalgia.

Turning to the contemporaries the first item to be noted is the *Mexican Album*. This collection of intriguing music has to be heard to be really appreciated; the restrictions of this column do not allow justice to be done to it. The material is too rich, the beauties too unusual to demand less than a separate article. Chavez contributes three numbers which present a sharp contrast – a dance to the goddess of maize, from his early work *Los Cuatro Soles, Xochipili-Macuilxochitl*, an original work using primitive instruments, and *La Paloma Azul*, a rather acid version of a popular love-song for orchestra and chorus. Chavez' highly individual sense of timbres is brilliantly demonstrated in these three records. I find *Xochipili-Macuilxochitl* the most interesting of the three. The instruments used are either copies of actual Aztec instruments or their closest

modern equivalents. Chavez uses a pentatonic scale but the musical material is his own. The piece has a sonority like nothing you have ever heard, barbarous, lean, yet highly resonant. *La Paloma Azul* gives a very curious effect; a sort of abstract sentimentality pervades the music, the voices languorous against a cold and acid orchestra. Much as I like the idea, I find the work too long; the peculiar mood seems to lose its intensity before the piece, logical in itself, comes to an end. Louis Sandi's Yaqui music (the Yaquis are a tribe still living in Lower California) is another brilliant adaptation of primitive material, but here the material is authentic. There is an atmosphere of magic in this work that cannot be described, but that comes partly from the thematic material and partly from the beautiful orchestration. The *Sones Mariachi* and the *Huapango* are as effective as the rest. This album is a brilliant document of the musical activity in Mexico today.

Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra, released by Victor, is given a marvellous performance by Feuermann and Stokowski. It seems to me that Bloch's rhapsodic style has never been more successful, more eloquent than in this work. In certain other music by Bloch I have felt the lament automatic and self-indulgent, but in this work it is really convincing. Copland's *Two Pieces for String Quartet* (1928), played by the Dorian group have been put out by Columbia. They are in Copland's restrained and intimate manner, and perfect examples of his feeling for *la note juste*; the first movement has the simplicity and atmosphere that fills the music to *Our Town*.

The two new recordings of the *Cap-*

*riccio* and the *Sacre* (the former Victor and the latter Columbia) are certainly more spectacular than earlier recordings, but seem to be less unified. Monteux conducted in my old recording of the *Sacre*, and Stravinsky in the newest. One must accept the tempos of the composer as right, and the advance in the technic of recording now makes it possible to obtain the volume of sound which formerly was so inadequate for this work. But I find the sharpness with which secondary parts come forth at times very disturbing; this same thing occurs in Koussevitzky's performance of the *Capriccio* with San Roma (in my old records played with Stravinsky at the piano and conducted by Ansermet). One "discovers things one didn't know were in the score," but these loom up suddenly, like abrupt close-ups in a film, in a way unknown to concert performances. Perhaps I am simply used to my old records; in spite of their far greater brilliance, the new ones do not seem ideal. The *Capriccio* is no longer a capriccio, but a virtuoso piano concerto.

Before passing on to the publications I would like to call attention to the recording of Bach's *Little Organ Book*, by E. Power Biggs (Victor). The first volume came out last spring, and now the second has been released. I wrote in this column last year about the charm and values of the baroque organ at the Germanic Museum in Cambridge. Its clarity of tone records beautifully, and at last one has the feeling of hearing Bach as one imagines he should be. I know one church organist who found the registrations too thin and austere — but then he had an organ with chimes, cymbals and drums.

#### SCORES

The New York branch of Boosey and Hawkes has been very enterprising in its

output of significant modern music. Bartok, Britten, Copland and Schuman are included in their latest catalogue. Bartok is represented by a *Divertimento* for strings (still unperformed), which is, as usual, of a rather cold perfection in style and construction. Benjamin Britten's *Violin Concerto*, on the other hand, is an extremely warm and personal work. It was first performed here last season at the Philharmonic with great success, and is not only a brilliant virtuoso piece, both for violin and orchestra, but has at times a subtlety of mood and timbre that one remembers long afterwards. The more recent *Les Illuminations* (to text of Rimbaud), is for voice and string orchestra. To me its chief interest is in the writing for the strings, which are handled with extreme mobility and brilliance. Britten is a viola player as well as a pianist, and he knows how to exploit his strings to the utmost. Copland's *Music for Radio* (1937), has for subtitle *Saga of the Prairie*, which seems to me to describe perfectly this work, built on broad, simple lines, and filled with an atmosphere of *plein air* and freedom. In spite of the admirable vocal writing in *This is Our Time* of William Schuman, I don't feel convinced about the work. It seems to me somewhat too earnest, rather sombre, and definitely grandiose. I may be wrong, for I have not heard it; these are the impressions I get from the printed page. The musical approach is sincere enough, the writing direct and logical, but somehow it seems more like propaganda than a moving piece of music.

Arrow Press has published *Charlie Rutedge* by Ives. This cowboy song is one of Ives's more successful ventures, although his complete disregard for the technical limitations of the piano, or, for

that matter, any other instrument, always seems to me less Olympic than just plain amateurish. Copland's *Two Pieces for String Orchestra* (Arrow) are simply the quartet pieces transcribed. Schott publishes Hindemith's *Third Sonata for Organ*, which is very gentle Hindemith, "quietly agitated" at the end. Nothing very new, but done with the usual Hindemith finesse.

New Music has put out, among other things, Norman Cazden's *Sonatina*, Opus 7 (1935). This is decidedly well-written for the piano, with a charming slow movement. Henry Cowell's *Maestoso* is another piece for piano published by New Music. Here Cowell is less experimental, and more concerned with purely musical values. Harrison Kerr's *Trio for Clarinet, Violoncello and Piano* is a concise work in four movements, allegro, largo, scherzo and finale. The contrapuntal writing is smooth, the whole piece worked out with distinction. And that about covers the field for the moment.

I might add that Schirmer's has brought out three of my own arrangements of Balinese music for two pianos. These are almost literal transcriptions of gamelan music in Bali, divided in such a way as to make them playable on two pianos. Balinese music is so polyphonic that you need at least four hands for the different parts. Of course the intonation of the scales suffers when forced into our system, but the difference is not so great as you might imagine. On the other hand the percussive quality of Balinese orchestras of metallophones and xylophones is quite satisfactory on the piano. My enthusiasm for Balinese music is no secret by now, but it is only part of my admiration for the amazing polyphonic orchestral music of Indonesia. As a mat-

ter of fact, heterophonic is the more accurate description for this kind of many-voiced music, but we won't go into that now.

## ON THE FILM FRONT

—By PAUL BOWLES—

CHAPTER One in the Story of How The Third Reich Conquered The World, known as *Feldzug in Polen*, has a score by one Herbert Windt. Herr Windt has obviously listened to lots of Sibelius with admiration, for the score is full of profound epic snorts and groans. Interest lies solely in the fact that it's fun to see what kind of soundtrack the Nazis make for an official propaganda vehicle. A kind of heroic relentlessness is obviously aimed at, and now and then almost achieved, but at these rare points it is the driving force of the film (made by army cameramen during the Polish campaign) which creates the illusion that the music has interest, never the music itself. The general effect is a succession of indigestible brassy sounds, often happily covered by noise of gunfire, explosions and roaring motors. Amusingly enough, for sequences showing the Nazi Army on the march, the music becomes typical villain-music — the kind used for the wicked characters in Disney. Perhaps for the same reason: to terrify the children. There is an *Erkönig* fate-motif, used only for map sequences showing Nazi victories and territorial expansion. You hear a good deal of *Erkönig*. Technically the soundtrack is lousy.

*The Long Voyage Home*, with score by Richard Hageman, is the pure and good movie cruelly betrayed by the worthless score. You need a sensitive job

for a film like this which depends vitally for its effects upon the establishment and clinching of definite moods. There were numerous practically foolproof spots where any composer could have made himself at least innocuous. But Mr. Hageman apparently thought he could do better, and so he made himself offensive. The music starts out legitimately with *Blow The Man Down*. Then for a "native" scene laid in the West Indies it does an incredible number which sounds very much like the Russian State Choir singing *Storm on the Volga*. With no shame for lack of transition even from one bad thing to another it plunges from that into super Herbert and thence into some whole-tone perversions of the shanty. Clouds of musical error keep rolling down across the beauty of the film. An example: after a touching death scene, one of the shipmates says: "Yank's gone." But what did Mr. Hageman use to punctuate that simple declaration? A Wagnerian brass comment, as jarring to the mood as the slamming of all the theatre's exit doors. The only pleasant spot musically was the scene near the end when the men go back aboard the *Glencairn* and an accordion plays some of that over-sweet music that has been forced on the orchestra in the rest of the film. At last one hears the idiom in its proper place, and it sounds all right. The only trouble here is that since the accordion