

SCORES and RECORDS

By COLIN McPHEE

BOOSEY and Hawkes do a real service by publishing in the United States at this time certain works of Bela Bartok which they have taken over from the Universal catalogues. The selection goes as far back as the *Piano Suite*, Opus 14 (1918), includes the *Piano Sonata* (1927), the later *Three Rondos on Folk Tunes* (for piano) and two volumes of *Violin Duets* (1933). Folk tunes supply the background and mold the idiom of most of this music, and your pleasure in it will be determined by your interest and belief in folk music as legitimate material for the composer. Bartok's straight arrangements are always highly personal, the settings are ingeniously and logically worked out; their refinement and sincerity delight musicologists, and at the same time they project well from the concert-platform. Nevertheless, I cannot help feeling that at times there is a tendency towards elaborate and arbitrary harmonization, as though to avoid a simpler and more obvious scheme. At times, too, the working out can be cold and intellectual, on the verge of the pedantic. I see a simple illustration of all this in the *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs* (for piano); the first six I do not care for at all; the *Old Dance Tunes* (Number 7, to the end) are gems.

The *Piano Sonata* still seems one of the outstanding piano works of this century. It is to piano literature what the *Sacre* is in orchestral music. It is a tour de force in "percussive" writing for piano and fresh and remarkable sonor-

ities. The amazing drive derives as much from the concise form as the rhythmic tension, which never breaks from the first to final note. The *Violin Duets* are miniatures, intended for teaching, very simple at the beginning and increasing in difficulty, recalling in several ways the *Mikrokosmos* set.

Aaron's Copland's *Danzon Cubano* (composed for the twentieth anniversary of The League of Composers; published by Boosey and Hawkes) is a real two-piano piece, and Heaven knows there are few enough of them to make up the programs that increase every year. The charm of this music lies partly in its Latin-American flavor, but more so in the thin and beautifully spaced writing for the two pianos. It is some ten minutes in length, and is sure to be taken into the hearts of two-piano teams. Copland's *Salon Mexico* has been arranged for two pianos by Leonard Bernstein (Boosey and Hawkes). The transcription is excellent, and has all the bite and zing of the original.

Boosey and Hawkes publish two fairly recent works of Benjamin Britten, which show two very characteristic facets of this composer. The *Hymn to St. Cecilia* for a capella chorus to words by W. H. Auden, is delicate, sensitive music, simple and fluid in style, and beautifully written for chorus. It is sincere and intimate, and cannot fail to make an impression on performance. The *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, for tenor and piano, say nothing at all to me. They are baroque and pompous

show-pieces, pastiches that hold little interest. The Pucciniesque vocal line is brilliantly written, the Italian text admirably set. But there is little if anything personal in this music, and I am always amazed at the apparently great urge in Britten, a man of real musical gifts, to turn out one more genre-piece. Where the satisfaction lies I cannot understand.

Douglas Moore's folk-opera, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, has been published in vocal score by Boosey and Hawkes, who are also preparing (among others) new editions of Delius' songs, Mahler's *Eight Songs* (to *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* texts) and the vocal score to *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Associated Music publishes a revised edition of Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* arranged for string orchestra, also Stravinsky's *Dances Concertantes* for chamber orchestra, comment on which will appear in the next issue. Mercury publishes two volumes of short piano pieces with the casual title *Meet Modern Music*, which contain easy miniatures by contemporary Europeans and Latin Americans. Other works received include: *Song of Freedom* for band, by John Alden Carpenter (G. Schirmer); *Six Concert Etudes* for orchestra or small band by Anis Fuleihan (Schirmer also); *Evocations*, three brief piano pieces, and *Angels* for brass or strings, both by Carl Ruggles (New Music); *Two Inventions*, piano solo by Otto Luening and *Dance Soliloquy*, piano solo by Gail Kubik, (Mercury).

RECORDS

One is glad to have the album, *Bartok Plays Bartok*, which Continental put out several months ago. The four discs contain a selection of short piano

pieces from the *Second Bagatelle* (1908) to the recent *Mikrokosmos*. Bartok's clear and sonorous piano writing records well (although the mechanical achievement here is only fair) and it is always a revelation to hear a composer giving a performance of his own music. What we really want is a fine recording of the *Piano Sonata* (played however by someone else rather than the composer, for I remember his performance of this work as unsatisfying).

Henry Cowell's *Tales of Our Countryside* (Columbia) is given a bright performance by Stokowski with the composer at the piano. This suite consists of four of Cowell's better known piano pieces, including the *Harp of Life* and the *Irish Reel*. The piano supplies acoustic background, chiefly through use of the various "tone-cluster" devices which were almost, at one time, Cowell's trademark. The music is effective, but I find it too simple and direct for my own taste, and would rather have one of Cowell's more imaginative and experimental works.

The D'Indy *Symphony Number 2 in B \flat* is conducted by Monteux (Victor). I find in it more historical than musical interest, marking as it does a transitional phase in the course of French music. Related to this period is the *Incidental Music to Pelléas et Mélisande* by Fauré, (Koussevitzky, Victor), which to my ears sounds dull and unevocative. Outstanding among recent Columbia re-issues are the two volumes of the *Brandenburg Concertos* played by the Busch Chamber Players.

The Bost album of *Kurt Weill Songs* is a reminder of a time when Weill wrote popular songs that had atmosphere and charm. It includes *Soerabaja*,

Johnny and *J'attends un navire*. Half the charm of the album lies in the frail and pathetic voice of Lotte Lenya. It is the voice of the poor little match-girl, the desperate prostitute. The pathos of

this style, both in music and in singing, is purely European, and its appeal today is for those who remember narrow streets of Paris or Berlin on a rainy night.

THEATRE and FILMS

BY ELLIOTT CARTER

KURT Weill's new score for *One Touch of Venus* coming after last year's *Lady in the Dark* reveals his mastery of Broadway technic. Apparently he can turn out one success after another with a sure hand. Weill, who orchestrates and arranges his own work, whose flair for discovering and using the stylistic earmarks of popular music is remarkable, has finally made himself at home in America. Where in pre-Hitler days his music underlined the bold and disillusioned bitterness of economic injustice, now, reflecting his new environment and the New York audiences to which he appeals, his social scene has shrunk to the bedroom and he has become the composer of "sophisticated" scores.

The present one represents quite a piece of research into the phases of American love-life expressed in popular music — the barber-shop ballad, the barroom song dripping with bloody murder, the serious and comic parodies of Cole Porter, an uproarious mock-patriotic *Way Out West in Jersey* in the best college spirit style. Even the orchestration with its numerous piano solos in boogie-woogie and other jazz styles constantly recalls night-club atmosphere. Traces of the mordant composer of *Dreigroschenoper* and *Maha-*

gonny occur rarely and only in places where Weill is not trying to make an impression. Compared to his other American shows, the music is neither as ingenious and as striking as *Johnny Johnson* nor as forced as his made-to-order jobs for *The Eternal Road* and the railroad show at the World's Fair. But in the atmosphere of Broadway, where so much music is unconvincing and dead, Weill's workmanlike care and his refined sense of style make up for whatever spontaneity and freshness his music lacks.

Hearing *The Merry Widow*, which is one of a string of revivals that started with *Rosalinda* and goes on to bring back *La Belle Hélène* and a retouched *Carmen Jones*, I had the impression that on Broadway, operatic singing with its implied background of musical training and discipline is the exclusive property of stage kings and queens with their retinues, or else of foreigners, or of misguided Americans. In the true America, plain citizens croon on the legitimate stage, where they are judged in terms of their personality, without the complicated barrier of traditional musical routine which transforms them into curiosities. This operetta, filled with so many elegant tunes, is a charming reminder of the days when royalty was