

## SCORES and RECORDS

By COLIN McPHEE

**B**OOSEY and Hawkes has published recently Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, for speaker and orchestra, a work with ultra-musical dimensions that aims at a widespread appeal. I am not convinced by it. In one sense, this work is an amplification of a type of genre music for which I have no sympathy. It is possible to accept the conventions of imitative sound in music, or, like a conditioned animal, finally react properly to a leitmotif. My blunt sense always fails when it comes to recognizing or even getting a feeling of a personality through either music or the abstract manipulation of paint or stone. The *Portrait* combines several elements. Its introductory section establishes a mood of simplicity and exaltation; the music grows pictorial, chronologically evocative, leading to the final section, a dialogue between orchestra and voice declaiming the words of Lincoln. The music passes from phase to phase and builds most eloquently. As we hear the words "Abe Lincoln was a quiet and a melancholy man . . . democracy . . . shall not perish" we have no doubt as to the intention, are supplied with the emotional clue. For me these are words to be remembered in the heart rather than declaimed in public. Perhaps if the music were different I might react differently. But I find both mood and material too familiar by this time, and the eloquent simplicity somehow does not ring quite true to my ears. For me Lincoln is more present on the face of a penny.

The *Six Chansons* of Paul Hindemith

for unaccompanied mixed chorus (Associated Music Publishers) are a joy to the spirit. The lovely texts of Rainer Maria Rilke are set in a simple and direct manner; the polyphonic style is both supple and resonant, marked by a delicately archaic quality that is especially evocative in relation to the words. Associated Music has just published Stravinsky's *Circus Polka* (composed for a young elephant) in three arrangements — piano solo, violin and piano, and two pianos. The last of the three (by Victor Babin) seems to me the only one that has any quality. The solo is skimpy, the violin arrangement a distortion. In the two-piano version there are the fluidity and interplay necessary to bring this little piece to life. Associated Music also publishes three *Ballades* for piano by Alexander Tansman. Piano music is not enriched. Monotonous, chromatically involved, finicky, these rather lengthy pieces lack imagination for piano writing, appealing neither to the ear nor the fingers. The same firm also publishes Gershwin's *Short Story*, transcribed by Al and Lee Reiner for two pianos in a way that I thought no longer survived. Mercury Music publishes two brief piano pieces by Paul Bowles, *El Indio*, from the ballet *Pastorela*, and *El Bejuco*. Both pieces have the peculiar Bowles *allegresse*, the simplicity and bright finish.

A short and completely charming song by Henry Cowell, *How Old is Song*, is published by the Ernest Williams School of Music. The piano part offers something of an obstacle, since it re-

quires the special technic of brushing the strings with one hand while the other silently presses down chords on the keys. Simple as this process seems, I have always considered it involved, but here the result compensates for the effort. The piano gives out a soft aeolian accompaniment to a graceful and expressive melodic line; the effect is delicate and imaginative.

Turning to orchestral music there is to be mentioned a little set of variations by Nicolas Slonimsky on the Brazilian tune *My Toy Balloon* (Axelrod). Variations entitled *A la boîte à musique, All over the place, With apologies to Brahms*, give some idea of the guilelessness of the music. It is an excellent piece for a school orchestra, although youngsters old enough to play tuba and trombone may consider it below their dignity to follow a certain suggested direction. Toy balloons are to be attached to the desks, and the players supplied with hatpins to explode them on a certain accent. G. Schirmer publishes the *Concerto* for piano and small orchestra by William Schuman, a vigorous and brilliant work which I find at the same time rather bleak. The music has plenty of movement; the piano reduction of the orchestra indicates a highly resonant texture. But I find the piano part less distinguished, and the actual musical material lacking the import to justify the dimensions and sonority of the work. One gets the final impression of overstatement and music keyed to far too high a pitch.

The *Boletín Latino-Americano de Música* of Montevideo has published a thick supplement devoted entirely to music of the United States. Some three dozen composers, prominent and obscure, are represented by short piano pieces, songs,

chamber works. I find the list of composers too long and much of the contents undistinguished. I should have preferred within these hundred and sixty-seven pages fewer works; a choice that had greater proportions and significance would surely have given a picture of more intense creativeness. As it stands, the collection is one of samples of styles, some individual, most of them not. The chief impression a stranger will get on turning the pages is that America is a large country and that a lot of Americans compose music.

#### RECORDS

Columbia has newly embarked on a program of reissuing certain works from their catalogue and has just brought out two albums — *Das Lied von der Erde* with Bruno Walter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Prokofiev *Concerto in D* for violin. It is interesting to see how these works change in relation to the times. The Mahler music advances, takes on new beauty and eloquence. The Prokofiev simply grows dated. The Shostakovich *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, composed some ten years back, has just been issued by Columbia. The work is fresh and crisp; the orchestra is reduced to strings and solo trumpet, a perfect background for the brilliant and transparent piano part. The work is performed by Eileen Joyce and the Hallé Orchestra. Columbia also has released Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, beautifully recorded by Rodzinski. Mitropoulos conducts the *Second Symphony* of Borodin with just the right amount of enthusiasm for this Russian period-piece. William Walton's *Scapino Overture*, bright, gay and British, is conducted by Frederick Stock (Columbia).