

AMERICAN COMPOSERS AND THE PHONOGRAPH

IRVING KOLODIN

TWO events within recent months have somewhat bolstered the hopes of those seeking a measure of attention for contemporary American composers on records. The first was the issuing by the Columbia Phonograph Company of the Roy Harris *Concerto* (sextet) at the close of last year; the other was the first release of the newly organized New Music Quarterly Recordings (an affiliate of the Cowell publication) which, it is announced, will be augmented by an additional disc every three months. As the first American work of a serious character to be made available in recorded form, the Columbia undertaking is an impressive forward step, although one whose importance should not be estimated purely at its face value. And if the first New Music release is disappointing, from a musical standpoint, the further plans of this organization promise material of considerably more interest.

On other fronts, the impressing of substantial works from the repertory of contemporary music moves ahead steadily if in a fashion that only too well indicates the extension into this field of the characteristic insouciance traditionally associated with recording companies and their choice of material. Thus, we have recordings of *L'Histoire du Soldat* and the *Octet* within recent months, but nothing yet from *Renard*, *Les Noces*, *Oedipus Rex* or the piano concerto. The Bloch *Piano Quintet* has quietly made its appearance on this side of the Atlantic with the interesting combination of Alfredo Casella and the Pro-Arte Quartet as performers, but none of the orchestral music (the *Concerto Grosso* is, after all, chamber music) of that composer has yet been offered the immortality of wax. There is talk of a recording, to be privately sponsored, of Bloch's most recent work, a setting of the Jewish Sabbath Service (*Avodath Hako-*

desh) which New York is shortly to hear, but the plans for the records have not yet emerged from the realm of vagueness, both as to date and to price.

But one need not look so far as Europe to find cause for bewilderment in recent record lists. The appearance on Victor records of the Shostakovitch *First Symphony* may impress one as an event to be applauded (as any departure from their usually conservative policies would be) until one reflects that the persons responsible for that recording went very far afield in favoring Comrade Shostakovitch at the expense of the many worthy works of native origin that were passed by. Possibly considerations more ponderable than those merely artistic were involved; the fact that the first set of records to be pressed was presented, neatly bound by a flaming red ribbon, to the Russian Ambassador (accompanied by ceremonials during which the leading critic of New York's most august newspaper delivered a speech of felicitation in which he mispronounced the composer's name no less than six times), no doubt reflects the motivation for the recording. At any rate, it indicates that the recording company has recognized Russia and its composers; perhaps at some convenient moment in the future they may extend that courtesy to those who are merely native. When that moment arrives, they might take pains to avoid the contretemps that sent out several hundred sets of the Shostakovitch symphony with one section pressed twice, and one section completely missing (sides eight and nine respectively). It is thus apparent that the recording is up to the usual standard.

As the appended listing* indicates, a valuable library of modern music on records has accumulated despite the general willy-nilly ordering of the commercial aspects of the phonograph business. In those cases where a perceptible discrimination has been exercised in the choice of both a composer and his representative works, it is usually to be found that some circumstance outside the ordinary functioning of the recording company has entered into the matter. In many cases (as the tabulation indicates) a purely chauvinistic pressure on the companies involved has resulted in attention to specifically native composers. Where that has not been effective (or, at least, insufficiently so) the

*A tabulation of available contemporary music records has been compiled by Mr. Kolodin and appears on pp. 134-137.

initiative of a small group of enthusiasts in gathering the support of enough prospective purchasers to make a recording commercially feasible has accomplished extraordinary results. The most notable example of this is to be observed in the realization that though no Sibelius symphony was to be obtained on records as recently as three years ago, there is now to be had all save the sixth and eighth. Partly this was due to the cooperation of the Finnish Government (which contributed to the cost of the early recordings) but as much can be attributed to the activities of the Sibelius Society, an international association of persons who indicated their desire to possess these works in a permanent form by subscribing for the sets in advance of the recording.

Even composers of reputations so firmly established as Stravinsky and Ravel can thank the accident of their residence in France (more particularly, in Paris) for the greater part of their very substantial representation on records. For, as the list indicates, nearly all of the more than a dozen large works of Stravinsky on records originated in France; of Ravel, the proportion is almost as great. It is idle to contend that there is not a sizable demand for these works, but it is also apparent that, domiciled in some center other than Paris, both of these men would have had to accept an attitude considerably less aggressive than has been their portion. A similar situation (although expressed in a different fashion) is to be observed in the case of Arnold Bax; five of the seven works credited to him on the list were sponsored by the National Gramophonic Society of London (an off-shoot of *The Gramophone*, the oldest periodical devoted exclusively to the phonograph) an organization which has also served the cause of other contemporary English and Continental composers notably well. The further efforts extended on behalf of native talent in England are demonstrated by the recordings listed for Gibbs, Cundel and Maconchy, who were the successful competitors in a contest for chamber music sponsored by the *Daily Telegraph*, of London. One of the specifications of the contest provided for a recording of the chosen works.

What the fate of an outstanding musical figure lacking such support or sponsorship is may be apprehended from the meagre

attention devoted on records to Schönberg. The *Gurre-lieder* was solely a result of the chance that Leopold Stokowski prepared the work for public presentation; the *Verklärte Nacht* (which has been performed in New York alone almost a dozen times in the last decade) is now about to return to records for the first time since the aforesaid NGS made it available in an inadequate version eight or nine years ago. Of the bulk of Schönberg's works, including, of course, all the material which is representative of his position today, one observes only silence. It is impossible to believe this would have been the case had he adopted either France or England as his home.

If the attention devoted to so salient a figure as Schönberg is a mere two works out of a lifetime's production, it is apparent that native American composers can expect little consideration in the ordinary channels of commercial recording. The chauvinistic pressure that is a ponderable factor in England, France, Italy and Spain is dormant, if not non-existent here; for the judicious critical attitude which permits an honest enthusiasm for worthy native works is scarcely to be discerned here. Those influential writers who turn their attention to indigenous composition are still suffering from the last wave of indiscreet chauvinism that engulfed them; the very self-conscious determination not to enthuse casts a chill over their work, with the result that both castigation and praise are meted out with a reticence that in neither instance serves a critical function. Further, the fact that celebrity, in a country as large as ours, is perforce localized, renders the task infinitely more difficult. English music centers in London; Italian in Milan; French in Paris; but despite the concentration of musical activity in New York, there is sufficient distraction to half-a-dozen other cities to disturb the focus, to render each a little center in which certain local figures are venerated at the expense of those who have escaped from this provincialism.

How little the pressure of public opinion can be counted upon in assisting the American composer to a fair representation on records is reflected in the remembrance that a competition conducted by several musical organizations (during the Schubert centennial year) included the promise of a recording of the

successful works. Musicians as well known as Ernest Bloch, Louis Gruenberg and R. Russell Bennett were awarded the accolade; the first for his *America* symphony, the second for his *Enchanted Isle*, the third for both *Abraham Lincoln* and *Sights and Sounds*. None of these works has been recorded; no reason for the failure to do so was ever given by the Victor Company, and, having used the advertising for what it was worth, the entire matter was dropped. Many reasons could have explained that failure; but there is no reason why a loud and unremitting protest should not have been initiated against such disgraceful treatment. It is as much a criticism of native musical life as it is of the company itself to observe how so shabby an action has been perpetrated unremarked.

Thus, lacking cooperation from the companies themselves, the existence of an aggressive musical press, or a nation-wide interest (in musical circles) regarding the works of definite persons, it is obvious that only one course will achieve the end of putting representative American works on records; that is the Subscription Society plan which has enjoyed an amazing success in the two years since it was first attempted. Tentative beginnings there have been, with the Chicago Phonographic Society and the New Music Quarterly Recordings; the first devoted its efforts on behalf of native composers to J. A. Carpenter, and is now defunct; the second is well-intentioned, but will confine itself to songs, piano pieces, chamber music in small forms, etc.

But what is imperatively indicated from the foregoing discussion is an organization of national extent, organized to support the recordings of American works which, by repeated performance, have proved to be of demonstrable quality. It is estimated that an advance subscription of five hundred purchasers will balance the cost of a chamber music recording (quartet, quintet, etc.); that double that number is required for a work scored for large orchestra. In neither case does the number seem prohibitive for works which have been played and replayed by orchestras and chamber-music organizations in all sections of the country. Such a list might well begin with the Copland *Music for the Theatre* or piano concerto, followed by the Piston *Flute*

Sonata or *Second Quartet*; the *New England Symphony* or the *Concord* sonata of Ives, or a group of the representative later songs; the Session's *Symphony* or *Piano Sonata*; the *Odes of Horace* or the *Americana* choruses of Randall Thompson (different as they are); and proceed with works by some of the composers of European origin now resident here—Bloch, Loeffler, Josten, Ornstein, Gruenberg, Berezowski, Wagenaar—who are forced to depend on the country of their adoption for phonographic support.

For the launching of such a society the chief necessity at the moment would seem to be an aggressive, enterprising spirit, to seek out those persons who are interested in both modern music and the phonograph. Such an activity should enlist the sponsorship of the various agencies for the performance of contemporary music through the country; the League of Composers in New York, the Contemporary Music Society of Philadelphia, the Pro Musica, the Chicago Section of the I.S.C.M., etc., and from a tentative list (such as the foregoing) could be chosen, by general consent, the order in which the works would be impressed. Much of the impetus to the recording of contemporary works in England was provided by the success of a single set of records, Gustave Holst's *Planets* suite, which sold thirty-five thousand sets within a period of several years, in England and America. Without pretending that the greater size, alone, of this country should easily make possible sales that are only a fraction as large, it is unbelievable that the subscription sale of recorded representative American works could not become an integral part of our musical life, under a vigorous and intelligent sponsorship, one shorn of factional implications, whose sole purpose would be the dissemination of the best music produced here to date.

A TABULATION OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ON RECORDS

(AS OF MARCH 1st, 1934)

[This list includes all available recorded works of living composers, save those of pronouncedly conservative tendencies. Records of foreign origin may usually be obtained from the shops specializing in such service. Where the same work is recorded by more than one company, it is so designated. Where the composer has participated as performer or conductor, there is an asterisk—I.K.]

KEY TO COMPANY DESIGNATIONS

B—Brunswick
C—Columbia
D—Decca
O—Odeon
P—Polydor

V—Victor
HMV—"His Master's Voice"
FV—French Victor
FC—French Columbia

IV—Italian Victor
IC—Italian Columbia
SV—Spanish Victor
SC—Spanish Columbia

NGS—National Gramophonic Society
CPS—Chicago Phonographic Society
NMR—New Music Recordings.

In preparation—records so marked
not yet available for purchase al-
though perhaps already recorded.

COMPOSER	WORKS	COMPANY
Alfano, F.	Excerpts from "Resurrection"	IV
Bantock, G.	"Pilgrim's Progress"	C
	Also songs and piano pieces	
Bartok, B.	String quartet (opus 17)	P
	Hungarian folk-tunes	C*
	Piano suite (opus 14)	HMV*
	Five piano pieces (opus 6 and 8)	HMV*
	Five Roumanian dances for orchestra	P
Bax, A.	"Tintagel"	HMV
	"Mediterranean" (orchestra)	HMV
	Sonata for violin and harp	NGS
	Quartet in G	NGS
	Oboe quintet	NGS
	Sonata for two pianos	NGS
	Other works for two pianos	NGS
Berners, L.	Orchestral fugue	D
Bloch, E.	Concerto Grosso	V
	Piano quintet	V
	"Nigun"—Improvisation	V, C
Boughton, R.	Excerpts from "The Immortal Hour"	HMV
Bridge, F.	Three Idylls for string quartet	C
Carpenter, J. A.	"Skyscrapers"	V
	"Song of Faith."	V*
	"Adventures in a Perambulator" (in preparation)	V
	Excerpts from the song cycle "Water Color"	CPS*
	Other songs	V
Carillo, J.	Preludio a Christobal Colon	C
Crawford, R.	Andante for string quartet	NMR
Cundel, Eric	String quartet in C (opus 27)	HMV
Casella, A.	Dances from "La Gira"	C
Chasins, A.	Various piano pieces	HMV, V*
Debussy, C. A.	Almost all large works, with numerous duplications.	
Delius, F.	"On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring"	C
	"Brigg Fair"	C, HMV
	"Summer Night on the River"	HMV

COMPOSER	WORKS	COMPANY
Delius, F.	"Dance Rhapsody, No. 1"	HMV
	"Sea Drift"	HMV
	"Walk to the Paradise Garden"	C
	Violin sonata (No. 1)	HMV
	Cello sonata	HMV
	Various songs.	
Dubensky, A.	Fugue for eighteen violins (in preparation)	V
	"The Raven"	V
Dukas, P.	"La Peri"	C
	A large part of "Ariane et Barbe-bleue"	FC, FV
	"L'Apprenti Sorcier"	C, P, V
Eicheim, H.	Japanese Nocturne	V
Enesco, G.	Roumanian Rhapsody No. 2 (in preparation)	V*
Espla, O.	Spanish folk-songs	SV
Fabini, Ed.	"El Campo" (orchestra)	V
	"Isla de los Ceibos"	V
de Falla, M.	"El Amor Brujo"	C, SV
	"Nights in a Spanish Garden"	FV
	"Three Cornered Hat"	HMV, C
	Dances from "La Vida Breve"	O, P
	Sept chansons espagnoles	C*
	Many songs and smaller works.	
Feinberg, S.	Piano suite (opus 11)	P*
Gibbs, A.	Quartet	HMV
Gershwin, G.	Concerto, Rhapsody in Blue, "American in Paris"	C, V*
Golstan, Stan.	Roumanian Rhapsody (orchestra)	FV
	Quartet in A flat	C
Goosens, E.	Ballet music from "Judith"	V
	"By the Tarn"	NGS
	Smaller works	C
Griffes, C.	"Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan" (in preparation)	V
Halfter, E.	"La Chanson du Lanternier" (orchestra)	SV
Harris, R.	Concerto (sextet)	C
	Symphony 1933 (in preparation)	C
	Pastorale (in preparation)	C
Harsanyi, T.	Piano and cello sonata	C*
	Five preludes for piano	C*
	Quartet	C
	Songs.	
Harty, Sir H.	"With the Wild Geese" (orchestra)	C*
Hindemith, P.	String quartet (opus 22)	P*
	Slow movement from string trio	P
Holst, G.	"Planets" suite	C*
	Various choral and instrumental excerpts	C
Honegger, A.	"Pacific 231"	FV, O*
	"Rugby"	FV, O*
	"Pastorale d'Eté"	O*
	String quartet	C
	Excerpts from "Le Roi David"	O
	Excerpts from "Judith"	O
	Other concerted works and songs.	
Hoeree, A.	Septet for harp and woodwind	HMV
Ibert, J.	"Escales"	C
	Histoires	HMV
	Four songs from "Don Quichotte"	HMV
Ireland, J.	Cello sonata	C*
	Several piano pieces	HMV, C

COMPOSER	WORKS	COMPANY
Infanta, Manuel	Piano pieces	SV
Korngold, E.	Excerpts from: "Die Todte Stadt"	V
	"Das Wunder der Heliane"	O
	"Der Schneeman"	P
Kodaly, Z.	Excerpts from "Hary Janos"	P
Krenek, E.	Kleine Suite (opus 13-a)	P
	Excerpts from "Jonny spielt auf"	O
Lambert, C.	"Rio Grande"	C*
Malipiero, G. F.	"Stornelli et Ballate"	NGS
Martinu, B.	Duo for violin and cello	P
Micholovici	Oboe sonata	P
Milhaud, D.	"Création du monde"	FC
	"Le boeuf sur le toit"	FC
	"Saudades do Brazil"	C
	String quartet (No. 2)	FC
	Three minute operas	FC
	"Adieu" from "L' Automne"	FC
	Various choral and vocal works.	
Montemezzi, I.	Prelude from "L'Amore"	V
Maconchy	Oboe quintet	HMV
Pfitzner, H.	Excerpts from "Palestrina" and other operas	P*
Pick-Mangiagalli	Rondo Fantastico	IV
	Notturmo (opus 28)	IV
	Overture to "I Piccolo Soldati"	IV
	"Il Carillon Magico"	IV
	Piano pieces.	
Pizzetti, I.	Excerpts from "Pisanella"	IC*
	Tre canti ad una Giovane Fidanzata	IC*
	Songs.	
Poulenc, F.	Aubade (piano and chamber orchestra)	FC*
	Trio for oboe, piano and bassoon	FC*
	Mouvements Perpetuels	FC*
	"Les Biches" Rondeau and Adagietto (piano)	FC*
	Two Novelettes—Caprice (piano)	FC*
	"Le Bestiaire" (songs)	FC*
	Other songs.	
Prokofieff, S.	Classical Symphony	V
	Concerto No. 3	HMV*
	"Pas d'acier"	V
	"Love of Three Oranges" (suite)	HMV
	Finale of "Chout"	HMV
	Overture on Hebrew Themes	V
	Songs and piano pieces.	
Ravel, M.	Trio, quartet and septet	V
	Piano concerto	C
	"La Valse"	V, C
	"Daphnis et Chloe" (suite No. 2)	V
	"Ma Mère l'Oye"	C
	"L'Heure Espagnole" (complete)	FC
	Rhapsodie espagnole	FC
	Tombeau de Couperin	FC
	Bolero	V, C, B*, FV
	Many other large works, piano pieces and songs.	
Respighi, O.	"Fountains of Rome"	V, IC
	"Pines of Rome"	IC
	Suite Antique	IC
	Triptych after Botticelli	(English) B

COMPOSER	WORKS	COMPANY
Roussel, A.	Symphony written for Boston Symphony Anniversary.....	FC
	"Spider's Feast"	FC
	Suite in F	V
	Songs.	
Satie, E.	Gymnopédie No. 1 (orchestrated by Debussy).....	V
	Trois petites pièces montées (orchestra).....	FC
	Gnossienne	V
Schreker	"Die Ferne Klang" (orchestra).....	P
	"Kleine suite für Kammerorchester".....	P*
	"Birthday of the Infanta" (suite)	P*
Schelling, E.	"Victory Ball"	V
	Piano pieces.	
Schillings, von	Excerpts from "Mona Lisa"	P*
Schönberg, A.	"Gurre-lieder" (complete)	V
	"Verklaerte Nacht" (in preparation)	V
Schmitt, F.	"Tragédie de Salomé"	FC*, FV
	"Dionysiac"	FV
	Other smaller works.	
Scott, C.	Various instrumental pieces	C, HMV
Stantschinsky	Prelude in the form of a canon	P
Stravinsky, I.	"Sacre du Printemps"	FV, V, C*
	"Petrouchka" (complete ballet)	HMV
	"Petrouchka" suite	C*, V
	Fire-Bird	V, C*
	Symphonie des psaumes	C*
	Capriccio	C*
	"Fireworks"	O, FC
	"Histoire du soldat"	FC*
	Octet	FC
	Petite suite for orchestra	C
	Toccata and Fugue	FC*
	Excerpts from "Pulcinella"*, "Rossignol," "Apollon Musagète"	V
	Three pieces for string quartet	FC
Szymanowski, K.	Fountains of Arthuse	FC
Shostakovich D.	First Symphony	V
Sibelius } Strauss }	Represented by recordings of almost all their major works.	
Terni, E.	String quartet	IV
Toldra, Ed.	String quartet	SV
Tansman, A.	Suite divertissement (piano and string quartet).....	FC
	Mazurkas for piano	FC*
Turina, J.	Trio No. 1	SC
	"La Oracion del Torero"	SV
	Danzas fantásticas	HMV
	"Procession del Rocio"	SC
Vaughan-Williams ...	"The Lark Ascending"	HMV
	(Also several songs)	
Villa-Lobos	Various piano pieces and songs	HMV, V
Warlock, P.	"Curlew" (after Yeats' poem)	NGS
Walton, Wm.	"Facades"	D
	"Portsmouth Point" (orchestra).....	D
Weinberger J.	Excerpts from "Schwanda"	O, V, B
Weil, K.	Excerpts from the "Dreigroschenoper"	O
Wladigeroff, P.	Bulgarian suite, opus 21 (orchestra).....	P
	String quartet	P
Weiss, A.	Three songs	NMR