

## RECORDINGS OF THE LAST MONTHS

**A**LTHOUGH the first performances of Roy Harris' *Symphony*, 1933 are a matter of but recent memory, it is possible to report that the work is already available in the permanent

form of a recording (Columbia) by the Boston Symphony Orchestra directed by Dr. Serge Koussevitzky. Once again the value of phonographic recordings is impressed upon one by the recollection that, though the sphere of influence, so to speak, of the Boston Symphony is limited, their recording makes it possible for musicians throughout the country to hear this newest work of a prominent native composer. And since this is a rendition that bears the imprimatur of the composer's approval (as he ungrudgingly testified via the radio on the occasion of its premiere in Boston) the recording may well serve as a source of reference for conductors who prepare the work for performance in the future, a circumstance for which, no doubt, Harris is properly grateful. How often, indeed, do composers have excellent reason to be apprehensive about performances which they cannot personally supervise!

For those who heard the New York performance of February 2, it will be interesting to know that it is this which is now available on records. Although the mechanical problems involved in taking a recording during an actual concert are many, the Columbia engineers have handled the most prominent of them with considerable skill. As a result the records present a generally comprehensive impression of the score, if lacking somewhat the high degree of excellence which is attainable under perfect studio conditions. In one respect, however, the Harris *Symphony* is more realistically rendered to the ear than the generality of records—the range of dynamics is sharper and approximates what we are accustomed to hearing in the concert hall better than the average studio recording. The playing, of course, is remarkably fine. To fill the eighth side, we have a composition expressly written for this purpose by Harris, for flute and string quartet. Suffused with a characteristic lyric melancholia, and beautifully played by Georges Laurent and the Burgin Quartet, the work completes a valuable addition to the shelf of modern recordings.

Presenting another side of native composition, *The Pleasure Dome of Khubla Khan* by Charles Griffes has long been a logical candidate for phonographic presentation. Although its indigenous aspects are fairly indiscernible, the craftsmanship and creative content of the work are a substantial testimony to the

presence of a musical substratum in thoroughly American stock. The Victor disc by Eugene Ormandy and the Minneapolis Symphony is a finely balanced effort as regards both interpretative values and an expert performance by this first-rate orchestra. Mechanically, the record is of a quality equal to the best being produced at the present time. The same forces are responsible for a brilliant performance of Kodaly's *Hary Janos* suite, a pleasant if somewhat excessively inconsequential collection of excerpts from the opera of the same title. Much of the orchestration, however, is singularly felicitous, and the Kodaly imagination has rendered well the exploits of this Hungarian Munchausen.

What might be construed as a memorial to the two most recent native works to be produced by the Metropolitan Opera Association is contained on a Victor disc sung by Lawrence Tibbett and conducted by Wilfred Pelletier. Here is to be found the "Standin' in de Need of Prayer" from Gruenberg's *Emperor Jones* and "'Tis an Earth Defiled" from the first act of Hanson's *Merry Mount*. Undoubtedly their perpetuation is due to the fact that Tibbett is a salable recording artist, but the extremely effective performance of these two monologues presents well the distinctions between the two composers, and is thus a desirable disc for the student of native music. The Gruenberg excerpt displays his skilled hand at treating a musical idea from a literary and dramatic standpoint (it is largely an adaptation of a Negro spiritual) while the Hanson is, in microcosm, a picture of his opera, its few virtues, its numerous shortcomings. Among the former are an indubitable sincerity, a desire to be himself, come what will; among the latter are its naiveté, its distortion of English words and phrases for the sake of a musical idea, its treacherously high tessitura for the principal baritone. Both recordings are excellent; the voice is splendidly virile, and the orchestral background has a sonority not often enough found in accompanying ensembles.

Stravinsky is represented on the month's list with an excerpt from *Pulcinella* (the *Toccatta*, *Gavotte*, *Variations 1 and 2*) conducted by himself. This is chiefly valuable as an addition to the record of the *Duetto*, *Minuetto* and *Finale* already issued. The recording is thoroughly good.

Irving Kolodin