

SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 4: By MARSYAS

HEARING Thomas Matthews conducting the 1YA studio orchestra (augmented) a few nights ago set me wondering how better performances might be got from all the studio orchestras.

As I said before, a guest conductor is particularly useful when he has come straight from leading the London Philharmonic under Beecham, but in this case I wondered just how much of his rehearsal time Mr. Matthews had been able to devote to the finer points, the things he must have learnt under Beecham; and how much he'd had to spend on teaching the silly little things that could have been learnt at home—correcting wrong notes, smoothing out rhythmic difficulties, and so on.

The question is this: Do the members of the studio orchestras look at their parts at home, between concerts? Or do they act on the principle that the NBS pays them for the hours they put in at the station (rehearsing and broadcasting) and that they are under no further obligation to the Service?

Do they know their parts, when the red light goes on, as well as a solo pianist knows his? Or are they virtually sight reading? Though some of the orchestral rearguard may not think so, their one-stave parts in, say, a Beethoven score, are just as important as the two staves from which a solo pianist plays. And there are less than half the number of notes to be learnt.

How many solo pianists, engaged for studio recital, would dare to go to the studio prepared virtually to sight read their way through a broadcast, as it would sometimes seem the orchestral players do?

On the other hand, someone may assure me that orchestral players do know their parts well beforehand. If that were the case, then there would be no one left to blame but the conductor if a performance lacked polish, and I don't think the conductors are to blame always. Because if they could start right in at each rehearsal dealing with the finer points of the score instead of having to listen for wrong notes and correct mistakes, we would soon have a first-class orchestra in each studio. The remedy lies, not with the Service, but with the players. If they are not keen enough to look over their parts at home, then they are not *musicians* at all, but only *hirelings*.

I HAVE to mention Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* for the second time in a fortnight, the reason being that I have since heard it broadcast, a new recording conducted by Stravinsky himself. There are plenty of gramophone owners who would like to be able to get the latest records from America the way the NBS does. I have a feeling that these new recordings of Stravinsky's (intended by him to replace American versions of which he disapproves) are quite recent,

not much more than a year old anyway, and I certainly did not expect to hear, in March, 1942, recordings I read about in American papers towards the end of last year.

WHEN you think of the riot *The Rite* caused at its first performance in 1913 it seems strange to be hearing it in the "Classical Hour" in 1942. Not that it shouldn't be there—no one has succeeded in finding a better general term than "classical music." But the point is that we accept *The Rite of Spring* now almost as coolly as Punch's "good old tunes of Strauss and Debussy."

Why? Because we have heard so many queer things that got written after 1913—quarternotes, atonality, polytonality, and the rest—things that put *The Rite* in the shade as far as dissonance is concerned, so that *The Rite* now sounds harmless by comparison. In a sense, I suppose it is classical music, already.

The Devil knows what it sounded like in 1913, though—for by all accounts there was the Devil to pay. But this week it sounded as clear as Mozart. With this difference: that you see into a Mozart symphony, but you see through a Stravinsky "musicorama"; right through, and out the other side. There is no doubting the craftsmanship of Stravinsky, but he is, as H. L. Mencken calls him, a "hollow man." I think he must be one of T. S. Eliot's "Hollow Men":

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion.

PURCELL had the air that night from 3YA. It is good to have a whole 35 minutes of Purcell *Four Part Fantasias*. In fact, string quartets are not so exclusively Viennese as some people would like you to believe. You could hardly call these Fantasias "string quartets," but still they are near to it, and certainly they're something we can proudly point to and say: "There's English music for you."

Incidentally, when the Kentucky Minstrels sang (on the same night from 1YA) an item scheduled "Passing By—Purcell," they were not singing a song by Henry Purcell of the 17th Century, but a song by a Mr. E. Purcell Cockram, who died in 1932, and who "for reasons best known to himself," saw fit to attach his second name to this song.

I WAS grateful to 4YA for more of those French folksongs from the Auvergne. But the translations embarrassed me. In the first place they were announced as "Folksongs by Auvergne" (the French label says "Chants d'Auvergne"). Auvergne is, of course, a

district, not a man! And the translator named one of them "Over There in the Limousine." In Languedoc it's something like "O bal din lou Limouzi" and in French it's "La bas dans le Limousin." Since there's a place quite near the Auvergne called Limousin, I would reckon that the song was "Down in Limousin." Or did the peasants of Provence really have folksongs about automobiles? Once before when we had these songs, "La Fiolaire" ("La Fileuse" is the French version) was announced as "The Young Girl." "The Spinner" might have been better.

It might be an idea to get translations done for *all* the foreign names

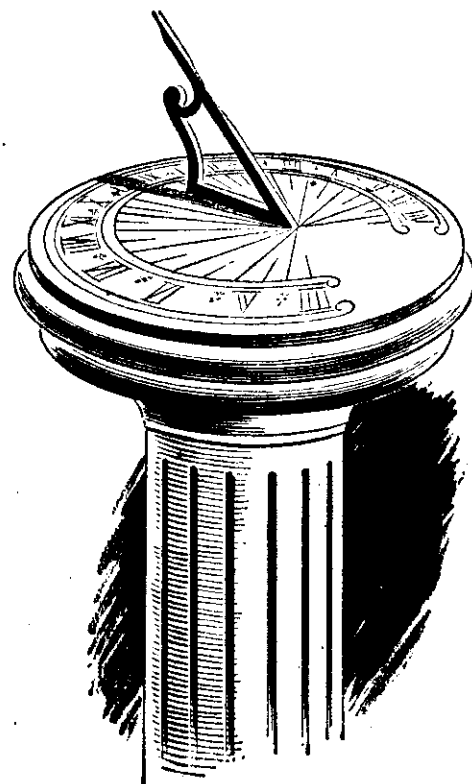
that keep cropping up, especially when sensitive people squirm to hear a *whole sentence* in German (as for instance a song title).

Once I saw in *The Listener* that a concerto by Darius Milhaud would be played, "conducted by l'Auteur." Fortunately someone warned them at the station concerned and it was announced (correctly) as "conducted by the composer"! Of course French record labels as as embarrassing as hotel menus, but with a waitress you can simply say "Thick soup, please," whereas there's no dodging the issue in the printed programmes. And a wild guess doesn't always come out right, in either case.



I. Sun-Dial

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