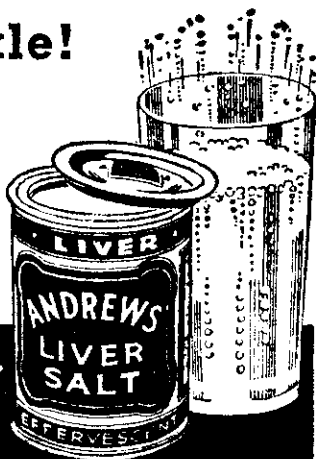


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SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 5: By MARSYAS

"IT'S all right to arrange Bach, because he used to arrange other composers" someone once said to me, intending to justify certain modern "dished-up" versions of Bach's music, and at first the statement seemed to me to prove quite the opposite—that Bach knew the best methods of presentation, and applied them to his own works as well as to other men's, so that we could accept his own presentation as being in the best mediums. But when I heard Eugene Goossens's orchestral arrangement of Bach's Fifth French Suite (originally for "clavier" or keyboard) from 4YA the other evening I decided to find out a bit more on the question. And I found Bach's most loving biographer and critic, Schweitzer, saying that Bach ventured to transfer the two cantabile violin parts of a Vivaldi concerto slow movement "to the harpsichord with its abrupt tone," and adding "this is not the only case in which he makes it difficult for his prophets to go forth in his name against the evil transcribers" (of today).

The main point seems to me to be this: where, in his own works, Bach appears to have been reaching for effects which were denied him by his instrumental resources, then we are justified in giving him the use of our modern improved orchestra. Thus in some of the organ works which can be heard in really superb arrangement by Stokowski there is a case for arranging.

For Charles Burney said of Bach (in his "General History of Music," printed in 1789): "This truly great man seems by his works for the organ... to have been constantly in search of what was new and difficult, without the least attention to nature and facility. He was so fond of full harmony that besides a constant and active use of the pedals he is said to have put down such keys by a stick in his mouth as neither hands nor feet could reach."

Burney was at a disadvantage in having to evaluate Bach at that date, and his remarks class him as a philistine, but there is something in his suggestion that Bach was "in search of what was new."

Nevertheless we have no indication in the keyboard works that Bach was attempting to over-reach his limitations. Rather he turned them to good account, and the fact that he spurned the newly-invented pianoforte indicates that he was satisfied with his "well-tempered clavier." And the truth of the matter is that his keyboard works, "The 48," and the Suites, sound better in their original medium.

Mind you, Goossens's arrangement of the Fifth French Suite is excellent. His use of string tone is in the Bach manner, and his woodwind dialogues are authentic-sounding. But there is not the

substance in the Suite to support the mass of an orchestra, however well applied. If Bach had written it for an orchestra he would have treated his musical material differently, and probably not the way Goossens has done.

NOTICE that Richard Strauss's *Hero's Life* and his *Domestic Symphony* have both been on twice within the last fortnight, but I didn't listen to either.

Mention of the latter only reminds me of the horrible story connected with it: how Strauss got the village idiot-girl tied to a post in his garden, rigged up recording apparatus, and then invited the village ragamuffins to torment her with sticks and stones. The screams produced were transcribed on wax and Strauss examined them at leisure. Result: "Music"—*Sinfonia Domestica!*

And his *Hero's Life* leaves a nasty taste in your mouth, too, if you happen to be fond of Beethoven in his *Eroica* mood. When that great man wanted to exalt heroism in others he stepped boldly forward and himself fulfilled a heroic act—he launched a revolution in symphonic music. But when Strauss wanted to write *A Hero's Life* he collected themes from his own works and concocted a kind of musical autobiography!

If it must be Strauss, make it Johann:
If it must be Richard, make it Wagner.

DR. GALWAY did Beethoven's Egmont overture and the *Appassionata* sonata in his "Masterpieces of Music" session last Monday. He has a most pleasant radio manner, and a gentle approach to the hesitant listener who might have switched off if the programme had said "Opus 84," and "Opus 57 in F Minor." No doubt his session holds the attention of some hundreds of listeners who want good music explained to them. It would be good to hear him analyse some modern works, especially some of the landmarks of experimentation of the last 50 years which do not speak for themselves as *Egmont* and the *Appassionata* do. His "pulling power" would be turned to good account if he could break down some of the misunderstanding about 20th Century music.

WE had more Beethoven conducted by Thomas Matthews in Auckland this week. I can't say I was as happy about the Fourth Symphony as I was about the First. Better reception enabled me to hear the flaws more clearly. Nearly all the first movement went off well, except that different woodwind players had their own ideas on certain phrases which are treated "in canon." Thus instead of one little figure being tossed from one instrument to the next, we had a sequence of different versions of the same notation. But the more they play such music the better they will under-

(Continued on next page)