

SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 11: By Marsyas

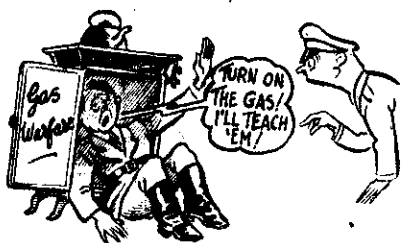
PIECES of Handel and Bach that I have heard in the programmes lately reminded me that there is a quantity of what you might call "the literature of music" among publications by New Zealand authors.

Professor F. Sinclair has just published a collection of his essays (Lend me your Ears), and there is one among them that everyone who has a singing voice should read, and nearly everyone who has a radio. He has taken a text from an old play: "Pianissimo be damned, I came to enjoy myself"; and the pages that follow, apart from being excellent and readable prose, are a notable adventure in music criticism. His distinction between "the blood-suckers" and the others who leave the singer (perhaps even the radio listener) feeling invigorated has shown me a new method of testing good music, which I shall use myself in future.

Similarly, music by Bach and others "fertilised" (my own word) some poems by Dr. J. C. Beaglehole called "Words for Music." If you think you have a special personal liking for certain music of J. S. Bach, or Beethoven's C sharp minor quartet, then look at Dr. Beaglehole's "Words for Music" and you will find that he has poached on your "private poetry." "Music for Words," conversely, is a sonnet by Allen Curnow on the feelings of a poet who has been set to music by a compatriot musician, and the same poet's symbolic elegy "Mountain Rhapsody" has a connection with Bach's Suite in B Minor for flutes and strings.

So when you hear "Handel's Largo," pick up your copy of Professor Sinclair's essays; next time the Bach suite is on the air (4YA had it this week), look at "Mountain Rhapsody." And if "late Beethoven" confounds you, don't

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appeared for the first time in this war. What we want to hear is that the U-ship has disappeared for the last time in this war.

Winston Churchill has warned Hitler that if he uses gas against the Russians Britain will turn it on the Germans. If Hitler turns on the gas, he will be putting his head in the oven.

"Post-war Problem": Preparing to meet an outbreak of peace!

get a handbook with thematic illustrations, but read Dr. Beaglehole's poem. "First Movement."

THE Christchurch Male Voice Choir gave a programme on Wednesday of this week that pleased me immensely because it was so much the opposite of the choral programmes I was complaining about three weeks back. To sing a chorus from an unfinished Schubert opera was enterprising; to continue to include at least one Elizabethan madrigal in the programme was right and proper; and to perform Vaughan Williams's arrangement of the "Turtle Dove" so sensitively was to delight this unhumiliated commentator.

H. C. LUSCOMBE is now being heard on "The Making of Music" in the Winter Course from 1YA on Thursdays. What a lot you can explain over the microphone if you have a piano beside you! A good many more people know, now, with what simple devices music achieves its effects — how it is punctuated (with "cadences"); how it is coloured (with harmonic contrast); and how it is made to proceed as if governed by the force of gravity (with "tonality"). But beware of Mr. Luscombe—he's an Elgar fan!

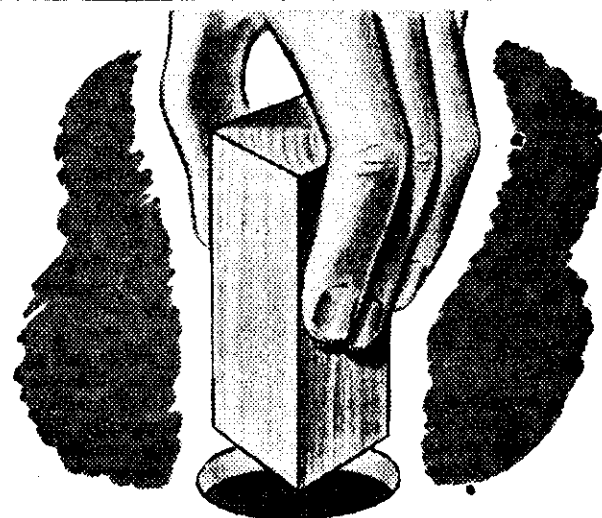
THINKING of Elgar and the *Enigma Variations* (which Mr. Luscombe drew on for illustrations), I recall what I said about the *Moldau* tune (Smetana) and the word-daubers who want us to attach their chocolate-box pictures to good music. The undiscovered tune which is the "Enigma" of Elgar's variations (Elgar said there was a well known tune which would "fit" each variation) has been subjected to similar treatment, only more extreme. Someone has found that the skyline of the Malvern Hills, as seen from the place where Elgar wrote the variations, will go on to a stave and delineate the contour of a tune that "fits!" Maybe New Zealand composers should transcribe the silhouette of the Southern Alps, preferably from the West Coast, where there are more bars.

DR. GALWAY'S offering from 4YA the other week consisted of Debussy and Ravel. I hope this had nothing to do with my remark that it would be good to hear him on some of the landmarks of experimentation of the last 50 years. I am quite sure Dr. Galway would find other things than that slender piece of musical jewellery, Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro for Harp, with Strings and Woodwind* if he wanted to answer my suggestion. Debussy's *L'Après midi* prelude is a good choice, on the other hand; it really is a landmark. But where are the *problematical* moderns? After all, it must be a good many years now since *Punch* sighed for "the good old tunes of Strauss and Debussy."

DON'T think this next matter is apropos of the last paragraph: *Bolero*, by Ravel, has at last explained

itself to me. I heard it this week in the medium of a ten-inch dance record, and I discovered the appropriate simile for it. I would liken it to the very ether that conveyed it to me, which I remember being defined in a physics class as "imponderable, elastic, and all pervading." Further *Bolero*, like the ether, was hypothetical to start with—18 times the

same tune in C Major, with a slight deviation into E Major near the end. It was a stunt; Ravel (like the scientists who invented the ether) decided to define it first and see if it existed afterwards. It exists all right. But it is "imponderable" — it has no weight; it is "elastic"—you can cut it or stretch it at will; and is it not "all-pervading"?



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