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## SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 12: By MARSYAS

**I**NCRECIBLE is certainly the word for Walter Piston's bag of tricks which 1YA opened up the other evening. I wouldn't give it a second thought if it weren't that *The Incredible Flutist* may be a tell-tale of present day American taste, and as pre-

sent-day American taste may conceivably affect the course of music (since the music world has taken refuge in the States), such a pointer as this ballet music by Walter Piston may show us what to avoid.

In the United States the complaint of composers and their journalist-champions is very general — namely, that the audiences, whether proletariat or aristocracy, sniff at the works of contemporary American composers before hearing them. In the concert hall the people want their Tchaikovski and Ravel (or, with luck, Sibelius), in the theatre they want their Wagner (!) and their Puccini; and the conductors know that they risk their personal advancement if they take up the cause of neglected American composers. So what can you expect but shrieking cacophonies that get attention just by screaming for it? It is a strong contrast with New Zealand conditions. Here, from what little experience we've had, it seems that audiences are at least receptive, if not exactly parochial, in their attitude to music written in their midst.

The recipe for a composition that will seize the attention of the American audience seems to be roughly as follows: take as many instruments as you can find; begin with something very ordinary, so that by contrast the things that follow will shock the hearer into listening; throw in some hip-swinging Spanish six-eight time, orchestrated à la Chabrier; season with *Extract of Petrouchka*; add brass (à la Richard Strauss) to taste; on no account include anything that sounds like your own American self; introduce a momentary interlude for piano so that it sounds like a mistake; work up tension, and then blow it all out in the shoutings and whistlings of a crowd, which having subsided, a dog shall bark; then go over all your musical ground again, and close the show down as it began, with something very commonplace, to persuade the listener that he has been hearing a sane man's music all the time.

**O**N the same programme were recordings of three songs by William Walton, one of which, "Old Sir Faulk," is wittily devised in the jazz style. In the second *Facade* suite, "Old Sir Faulk" is orchestrated in thoroughly bawdy fashion, with all the rich obscenity of a swing band, and the parody is delightful. Surely the song (whether it was written before or after the orchestral version) is not meant to be daintily sung by a thin-voiced little lady in a pink-frilled dress? Kate Smith or Ella Fitzgerald, surely, should sing "Old Sir Faulk."

**B**EETHOVEN'S *Ninth Symphony* was apparently occupying the thoughts of the Dunedin programme organisers at the same time as I was writing about it in this column, for it is being heard

in two instalments from 4YA. If you offered me half a raw egg I would be more confident of the bisection proving successful.

**A** WHOLE evening of brilliant recordings by the London Philharmonic (most of them conducted by Beecham and some of them apparently with Thomas Matthews conducting) came from 3YL on a recent Sunday evening. Bizet's *Fair Maid of Perth* suite was one of them, and I can well believe now what I read in an old American music journal — that Beecham demanded and received 25 rehearsal periods for this recording! At the time this scandalised the American reviewer, who wished Sir Thomas would spend "all that loving care" on Handel's *Concerti Grossi* rather than on "such trivia" as Bizet suites and Rossini overtures.

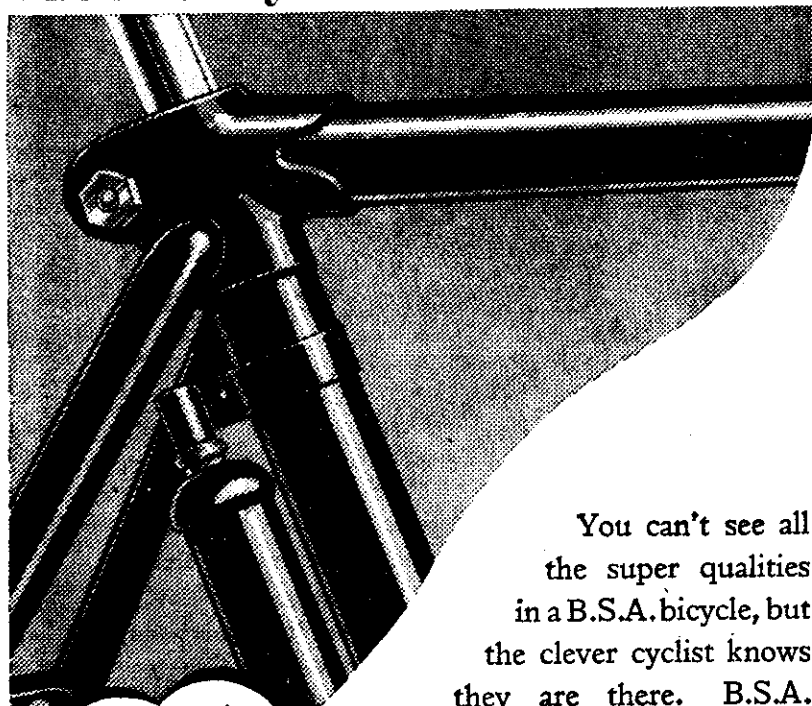
Now, when we hear the Handel more easily, we can be grateful for the Bizet. It is delicious theatre music, crystal-clear, and very lively and it has the advantage of not suffering from over-inspection. I should imagine that if 10,000 people all tried to look at a jewel at once you wouldn't see much but eyes. At any rate I suspect that's what stops me from enjoying Beethoven's *Fifth*, Dvorak's *New World*, Schubert's *Unfinished*, and some others, as much as I'd like to.

**S**ONGS from the Schumann cycle *Dichterliebe* came from 4YA, sung by Charles Panzera. The titles were all translated into English, which is a good idea, but unfortunately the impromptu translations are still not quite adequate. "Liebe" means love; "lieder" means songs; thus the cycle is "Poet's Love," not "Poet's Songs." A small point, but it is a help to have the right name rather than a wrong one.

**ALFRED WORSLEY**, conductor of the Christchurch Ladies' Choir, resented my remarks about Women's Choirs. I'm sorry he read them as an "attack" because they were obviously not intended as such (see my words "Don't want to blame . . . really grateful," etc.). Actually in my original copy another women's choir was mentioned, but as I had only seen, and not heard, its programme the reference was erased, with the result that my general remarks appeared to be directed at one choir.

Mr. Worsley has pointed out that it is not the fault of the choirs, but of composers themselves, that the repertoire of women's choirs is limited. That doesn't alter what I said. It still is "a pity." But I certainly didn't ask for major works by the great composers. I asked for more Elizabethan music, actually written (by very great composers, believe it or not) for women's voices. I could make one suggestion that would enable the women's choirs to taste the front rank composers — rounds and canons. There are dozens of very wonderful fragments, of which Mozart's and Haydn's are perhaps the best, but Beethoven and Schubert wrote plenty, too. They are mostly for equal voices, and can be spun out to last about two minutes. They are not to be despised, as their difficulty will quickly prove, and the copying problem is negligible.

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