

SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 13: By MARSYAS

"LIBERTY" Concerts are the big noise in broadcast music just at the moment, and if you pay for a ticket instead of sitting by your radio, then you are guaranteed the biggest volume of sound, for the price, that you've heard for some time. What with "1812" and a Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody*, and a big blow-out at the end with the pompous and circumstantial *Land of Hope and Glory* you might even feel as you go out that you have earned your Liberty already. But as one who didn't pay for a ticket and who therefore cannot speak from flesh and blood experience, isn't this just the sort of concert to put Peter Dawson into? The idea, surely, is to have an evening of roistering good fun. If you don't enjoy one of those jolly ballads as much as Peter Dawson seems to enjoy singing them, you are missing something. Hearing him sing "Oh Rudder Than, the Cherry" made me wish he'd sing more Handel, and Handel of that type. But "V for Victory" suggests that his song-writing has gone off since the days of "Boots."

It has dawned on me now, as it must have dawned on anyone who read Alfred Worsley's letter of explanation, that the absence of German titles from the programmes is a matter of policy. The effect in most cases is good. I myself prefer to know a Schubert song by the first line of the Goethe poem in its original tongue, but it is far better that everyone should know what it means, not just what it looks like. But a wrong name cannot be justified. "Eight Continental Dances" is a foolish subterfuge for "Eight German Dances."

In the desperate search for the White Hope of Modern Music I listened to Edmund Rubbra's violin-piano sonata played from 1YA by Thomas Matthews and Eileen Ralph. The capriciousness of my clock deprived me of half the first movement, but I must say I wasn't overawed by the remainder as I had expected to be after reading an article by Rubbra (in "Scrutiny") about the modern teaching of counterpoint. The slow movement bored me for the same reasons that Delius's solo violin music bores me. And the tunes in the last movement didn't come up to much. But let's hear it again.

The good things seem to come from the far ends of the country where I can't hear them. 4YZ had a programme of "chamber music" introducing a recital (presumably from the studio) of music by Bach, played by R. J. Matthews. I would like to have heard this, and also a talk on "Bagpipes and their Music" by C. C. Selby. There is other bagpipe music than the Scots', and it ought to be heard. After all, Handel, Bach and Corelli imitated the Italian bagpipe (piffero) in various popular compositions; and the French bagpipe (musette) which gave its name to a particular style of composition, must have played some

pleasant music if it became the rage among the ladies at the court of Louis XIV, the Pompadour herself included. But I suppose Mr. Selby's talk was confined to the Scottish music which offends so many ears.

Then from the other end of the land, 1YX played a piece of Honegger (*Pastorale d'été*) that I have seen occasionally in the programmes and never heard. After one hearing of *Pacific 231*, and my memories of Honegger's incidental music for *Pygmalion* I have always wanted to hear more. Perhaps there are no records of his music in my stations.

THERE is a *Serenade* by Beethoven, for flute, violin, and viola, which everyone who thinks he knows his Beethoven ought to hear. 2YC had it on Thursday. It is "an early work" (Opus 25 to be exact) and it has a cheeky freshness that reminds me of the young French composers ("Les Six"). In fact the tune of the first movement could almost be by Poulenc. No doubt the interpretation (by three French musicians, including Marcel Moyse) assists this illusion, but even so, the "unbuttoned mood" of this little serenade is lighter and gayer than anything I have heard elsewhere in Beethoven's music. I can recommend it.

I OMITTED to thank Stanley Oliver for courteously informing me of the Wellington "Schola Cantorum" performance of the Bach Matthew Passion. I have since heard that the performance was magnificent, but I am surprised to know that only the second part was broadcast, and then only through 2YC. It is a relief to know, however, that the full work does not take five and a-half hours, as I read somewhere. And may I add that it was a pleasure to be corrected by someone who did not resent my ignorance of his work.

HAYDN'S *Toy Symphony* is a thing I've longed to hear ever since I read about the performance at one of Myra Hess's wartime concerts in London. Dame Hess and some other famous artists, whose names I forget, took up the quaint instruments, trumpet, drum, rattle, triangle, quail, cuckoo, and nightingale (or "bird-warbler") and started to play their little bits alongside a string orchestra. They didn't get far, because they all collapsed in laughter!

And when 3YL broadcast a performance by the Orchestre Raymonde I very soon found myself in the same position, but fortunately the music didn't have to stop because of my laughter. It's a really delightful recording. The cuckoo has a grotesque throatiness; the water-filled "bird-warbler" reminded me of a roomful of roller canaries, and it sounds very well with strings *allegro*. The trumpet and drum that were used in this version have that charming ineffectiveness of toy instruments; feeble squawks from the one and dull thumpings on the other. It could all have been so easily spoilt by using "better" instruments. And the string playing would please even Haydn himself.

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