

SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 19: By MARSYAS

DURING the last three or four weeks, five local composers have had first performances, and choirs have used pieces by two others. The latest is a young Auckland called Thomas Rive, who has tried his hand at settings of Shakespeare, Herrick, and Swinburne. On hearing Gwenda Weir sing these songs (accompanied by five members of the Auckland String Players) I felt almost immediately that the initial thrust in Thomas Rive's musical thinking is vigorous and genuine. He starts off with musically good intentions. Stravinsky, of course, wouldn't allow such consideration to enter into musical criticism—he would permit only discussion of *how* the thing is done. Well, it was a little hard to tell, because the string players hadn't put enough work into their parts. The first song had an easy swing. In the Herrick *Julia* the composer felt the need to do something with "silks" which didn't come off; and "the liquefaction of her clothes" always suggests to me some grisly vision in a painting by Salvador Dali. It's an unmusical word. The metaphysical poets offer the same problems to the composer as certain present-day poets who are left alone by wise musicians. I hope we may hear more music by Thomas Rive; each of these songs had an individual atmosphere, and the melodies seem to lie comfortably for the voice.

THE Auckland String Players, I imagine an amateur group, contributed other music to the same programme. As I listened to the Holberg music (Grieg) I regretted for the moment that my ears had been spoiled for amateur performances by the NBS orchestra and the "augmented" IYA orchestra. In the Haydn concerto they had an easier task, though equally responsible; Dora Judson made the solo piano part sound well, but there are one or two bad notes in the instrument that call for attention.

IT seems a pity to put Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* on the air at 10.6 p.m. when all little children should be in bed; as IYX did recently. Not that grown-ups shouldn't be allowed to enjoy it, too (they all do, in any case) but it gives great pleasure to children—though I know of one young man who thought it would have been better with "more story and not so much music." For a child's first introduction to grown-up music it would be hard to better *Peter and the Wolf*.

A MOZART programme by the NBS orchestra displayed the talents of an outstanding young soprano, Rosaleen Hickmott. She carried everything with her *Vol che sapete*, the orchestra included. Her voice has a pure clear quality, flawless in the upper register, and with a mature diction in the lower

notes. At times it reminded me of Rauta Waara, the Finnish soprano, who sang Mozart at Glyndebourne. But the G Minor symphony which followed was less successful than the operatic pieces. Tempos are always arguable things, but a speed limit is set by the need for attention to detail. Only a Toscanini can take a metronome mark ten higher than everyone else's and still get everything in.

JULY 4 was a glorious opportunity for programme organisers looking for a change, and American composers were turned loose. Everyone, from Nevin to Copland, was there, but we were spared Charles Ives and George Antheil (who wrote an "Airplane Sonata" with a movement marked: "Andante Moderato—to be played as quickly as possible"). However the compositions we did hear told enough of the sad story of American music. Is sensation all they take with their ears over there? I have yet to hear a contemplative piece by an American that reaches beyond the cheaper forms of nostalgia; with one notable exception, Duke Ellington. Copland is just a Gershwin with a college education.

A RECENT festival of music performed by secondary-school children showed what they can do without the competitive element. The concert which 3YL broadcast was the outcome of a discovery made during our Centennial year, namely, that such things should occur, not every 100 years, but every year. There are those who believe it's no use complaining of the present sad state of amateur music—that one must create players. The results produced by the children's choirs in this festival suggest that this may be right.

One might even hope that the school-boy's conception of singing as "sissy" is losing ground. But to ensure this the music must be chosen carefully. Boys who were at the festival might be excused for thinking that certain of what they heard there was "sissy". Not that they should be given music which satisfies the same urge that football satisfies; but the very difference between the vowel intonation of boys and girls (all too obvious in this festival) is enough to prove that boys' and girls' choirs must differ widely in the music they use. The songs "I Triumph" and "Heaving the Lead", which the boys obviously enjoyed, illustrated this point and showed that it was not being overlooked.

In certain two-part pieces on the programme the "second" part failed to reach my ears. To sing the tune of a Chopin piano piece with words, fitted to it (à la Korjus) is silly when there are hundreds of real songs that would be easier, just as well liked by the children, and better to hear. The piano-accompaniment reduced Chopin to the sound of a tinkling musical box. Nor should a children's instrumental quartet be asked to play in a large theatre, or over the air with the players badly disposed about the microphone. The song by Howells which one group tackled may be a pretty tune, but its awkward leaps were too much for a children's choir. But the ambition behind this enterprise is fine, and I hope nothing will stop the movement from growing.

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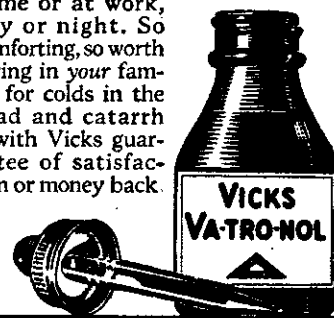
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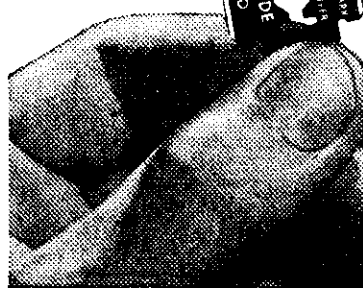
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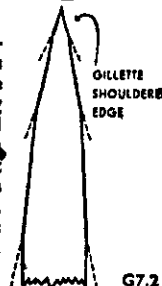


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