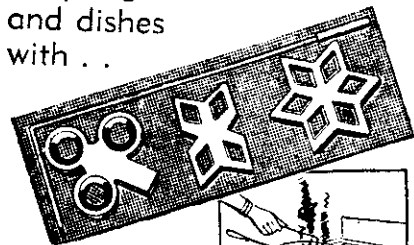


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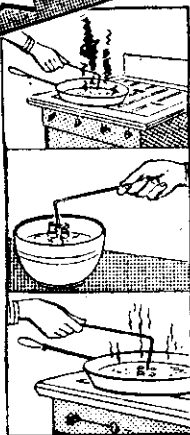


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## NEW RECORDINGS

# Midsummer Music

THE trouble with a New Zealand summer is that it comes in the hot part of the year.

Passions which, according to the best books on warm places, should run high, become sunburnt on the beaches and are torpid with an unseasonal hibernation. In music, the annual performance of *Messiah* is the signal for the putting away of violins and other cold-weather instruments, and hardly anything troubles the bituminous haze of the main highways and the acrid flames of transport scuttling off to the country or the beach, but the shrill hollow voice of the portable gramophone or—maybe—the dulcet pipings of an occasional recorder. This is the time when music-lovers whose main field of listening is fenced in by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and the barb wire of a little Bartok, are likely to succumb to the seductions of Mantovani and his orchestra.

With Mantovani and his singing strings on an LP (Decca LK4060) you can relax without having to reach out and turn over the disc more than three times an hour, which is as it should be. The titles, which all together make up a suite of Victor Herbert's music, are suitably seasonal, being such conjunctions as "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life," "When You're Away" and "Sweethearts," "The Irish Have a Great Day Tonight." But if your age-group is such as to be within ten years or so of social security you can tickle the memory by reminiscing with Gordon MacRae and June Hutton as they sing numbers from the film *By the Silvery Moon* (Capitol LC 6599). This concerns such fancies of 1919 as "Ain't We Got Fun" and "If You Were the Only Girl in the World." When Gordon MacRae says that by the light of the silvery moon he wants to spoon, to his honey he'll croon love's tune, you may, of course, feel the same way yourself and inspect your own moon with the dewlight in your eyes; or, rushing out to the back porch, you may yearn for a rocket and a space suit. It's all a matter of taste.

If your taste is for more subdued colours perhaps you had better stick to *Les Sylphides*, as played by Joseph Levine and the Ballet Theatre Orchestra (Capitol CCL 7518). As Chopin's original music has been dressed up orchestrally by almost every composer who had one foot in the ballet, there seems nothing indefensible in Benjamin Britten having done the same for this version. To my un-Sylphidic ears Britten's

## A Monthly Review by OWEN JENSEN

arrangement sounds just like any other; and that means blue moonlight, Pavlova, Karsavina, Margot Fonteyn and a pleasant time had by all.

For something warmer to tone up the moonlit shadows there is *Love Duets* from *Romeo and Juliet*, being Tchaikovsky's and Gounod's respective musical ideas about aspects of Shakespeare's love story. The Tchaikovsky episode is an unfinished posthumous work completed and orchestrated by Tanieff. Gounod's music is from the fourth act of his opera *Romeo and Juliet*. The singers are Jean Fenn (soprano), Raymond Manton (tenor) and Kathleen Hilgenberg (contralto), with the Los Angeles Orchestral Society conducted by Franz Waxman (Capitol CTL 7034). Tchaikovsky's music has a touch of Tristan without Wagner's chromatic chromium plating. A long orchestral introduction makes one wonder if things will ever get going, but once the voices make their entry—and the singing has moments of exceptional beauty—the scene is full-blooded enough. Gounod, true to himself, is unashamedly, naively and sweetly romantic, which is, after all, a very popular opinion about *Romeo and Juliet*.

A rise in the emotional thermometer brings us to *Poeme d'Extase*, Op. 54, by Scriabine. It is played—and beautifully at that—by the Paris Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Manuel Rosenthal (Capitol CTL 7033). I can remember in earlier student days being introduced to Scriabine through some pseudo-Chopin wishy-washy piano preludes and being placated with the information that there was another and better Scriabine. This is it. Completely original and unlike anything else of its time (1908) except perhaps in its glowing tone colours faintly resembling Debussy, or in its amorphous character, less still like Delius, *Poeme d'Extase* is a good ripe musical incantation. On the reverse side of the disc, fit for a summer evening, is a *Pagan Poem* by the Alsatian-American composer Charles Martin Loeffler (died 1935). Said to be inspired by Virgil's poetry, there is less ecstasy about this music than Scriabine's rhapsodies and mighty little paganism.

If paganism's your fancy, turn then to Frank (Hans Andersen) Loesser's *Guys and Dolls* (Brunswick LAT 8022). Based on a story by Damon Runyan and recorded here by the original American

cast, *Guys and Dolls* is rather more than somewhat.

## A Long, Cool Evening

Passions of the older variety that do better braising than broiling may well find their solace in Symphony No. 4 ("Romantic"), by Bruckner, played on this disc by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under Otto Klemperer (Vox PL 6930). As far as I can make out, you are either an incorrigible, incorruptible Bruckner devotee (Bruckner never encourages "fans"), or completely allergic to him. Some listeners find books in the running Bruckner and good in everything, while the rest hear nothing but dull, stony sermons. Hanslick the critic, who was Bruckner's Viennese contemporary, could say: "Everything flows, without clarity and without order, willy-nilly into dismal longwindedness," but another critic hears Bruckner's music this way: "The vast span of his themes and thematic groups, make the majority of composers seems asthmatic . . . the long, powerfully sustained ecstasies with their wildly and solemnly chanting trumpets, have something almost terrible in their vehemence and amount." You pays your money and takes your choice. Certainly, you will find little to quibble at in the playing of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

The Vienna Symphony Orchestra is featured again, this time with Rudolf Moralt conducting, the work being Dvorak's Piano Concerto in G Minor, with Friedrich Wuehrer as soloist (Vox PL 7630). This is something of a disappointment, being neither a brilliant virtuoso piece nor a lyrical rhapsody, but for the most part an unevenly inspired dialogue between piano and orchestra. Certainly it lacks the fire of the 'Cello Concerto. Friedrich Wuehrer and the orchestra do their best to ginger up the conversation when it flags. Another work that has both its attractive and its dull moments is Brahms's *Serenade No. 1 in D Major*, one of his first essays in orchestral writing. It is lovingly played by the Concert Hall Symphony Orchestra conducted by Henry Swoboda (Nixa CLP 1087), but not quite so lovingly recorded.

For the perfect midsummer music, cool as the evening breeze and as lively as the song of the cicada, for my part I would go, for a while at least, to Telemann—*Concerto in G Major for Viola and Orchestra*. The reverse side contains *Two Pieces for Double String Orchestra*, by Giovanni Gabrieli. These old composers certainly knew what they were about. The Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra conducted by Karl Munchinger, with Heinz Kirchner solo viola (Decca LX 3102), bring out the beauties of the music.

## MIDSUMMER CHOICE

TELEMANN: *Concerto in G Major for Viola and Orchestra*, played by Heinz Kirchner (viola) and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, with two pieces by Giovanni Gabrieli on the reverse side. . . As refreshing as a long drink of cold water (Decca LX 3102).

SCRIABINE: *Poeme d'Extase*, played by the Paris Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Manuel Rosenthal. . . Not as ecstatic as Scriabine must have felt it, or the record cover would have us believe, but music of considerable interest. Finely played (Capitol CTL 7033).

BRUCKNER: *Symphony No. 4 in E Flat ("Romantic")*, by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under Otto Klemperer. "Longwinded," or "elemental and taurian strength," depending on the way you hear Bruckner (Vox PL 6930).



and her masterly control of all sections of the orchestra leaves us wondering what she will achieve . . .



at the full maturity of her powers.

(C) Punch