

THE CONTEMPORARY TOUCH

By OWEN JENSEN

[T takes all sorts to make a world, today's world perhaps more than any—and not the least, the world of music. Contemporary music has diverse aspects.

The complaint about 20th century music—and one must admit that there are complaints from time to time—is that it numbs the mind with complexity and tickles the melodic ear too little. Nothing of this could be laid against Prokofiev's String Quartet No. 2, Op. 92, nor about the contemporary Italian Gian Francesco Malipiero's String Quartet No. 4 (Columbia 33CX 1295).

Prokofiev's quartet, written in 1942 when the Russians were sorely pressed and fighting for their lives, shows nothing of turmoil or conflict. Prokofiev, with other important creative artists, was evacuated to a quieter part of the country, and the folksy character of the music, melodically and rhythmically strong, reflects his more peaceful environment. It is straightforward music and, despite some harmonies which might have surprised Brahms, traditional in style. Malipiero in his quartet favours the sensuous, melodic approach characteristic of Italian music. Both works are therefore easy on the ears, but if your ears have been sharpened by much listening to contemporary music you may not find them all that exciting. The Quartetto Italiano plays both quartets with chromium-plated polish.

Straightforward, but for a different reason, is Milhaud's music to Paul Claudel's *Christophe Colomb*. Milhaud had already written an opera on this subject to a libretto by Claudel (1928). In this incidental music to Claudel's drama which Milhaud wrote in 1952, he not only uses entirely new material but a distillation of style which makes the music not so much subservient to the drama as enhancing its moods and atmosphere. The drama takes up as much if not more space than the music, so if your French is no better than mine you must be content, for the most part, to savour the magnificent dramatic

So they were more inclined to put the Immigration Chief in gaol, and nearly did, round about 5.30. Fortunately talk, plenty of fluent Mexican talk, was all that was needed, because legally Mrs. Szekely was not protected. She had sought a status known as *immigrado*, but had not completed the process, and had got by on courtesy all those years until she met an Immigration Chief who was short on courtesy.

It was humiliating. There was nothing for it but to gather up all the available influence and make a quick trip to Mexico City and put herself right. That took a week and cost plenty. But she came back full of bounce, laden with some wonderful bargains in clothes and furnishings, some of which she had to take to San Diego to show friends. That meant more haggling with the Customs, but she always had an answer for them, and it seemed she had one for the Immigration Chief, too, because both Spanish and English local newspapers ran a campaign against him and he was transferred to parts unknown.

— G. leF. Y.



George Gershwin

overtones of the Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault Company. The music, conducted by Pierre Boulez, is well done (London TW 91084-85).

The playing of the pianist Sondra Bianco and the Pro Musica Symphony Orchestra of Hamburg, conducted by Hans-Jurgen Walther, in Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, and his Concerto in F (Parlophone PMC 1026), is brilliant, let there be no mistake about it. And the recording is fine, too. But the odd thing about the performance is that, with Gershwin as American as they come, pianist and orchestra accomplish their assignment not only with Teutonic thoroughness, but with a similarly inspired seriousness. There is no hint of Gershwin's ingratiating vulgarity and the expected sentimentality is given a Brahmsian solidity. You

may, if you're a Gershwin fan, yearn for a touch of Oscar Levant and Paul Whiteman, but I think you'll like the playing all the same.

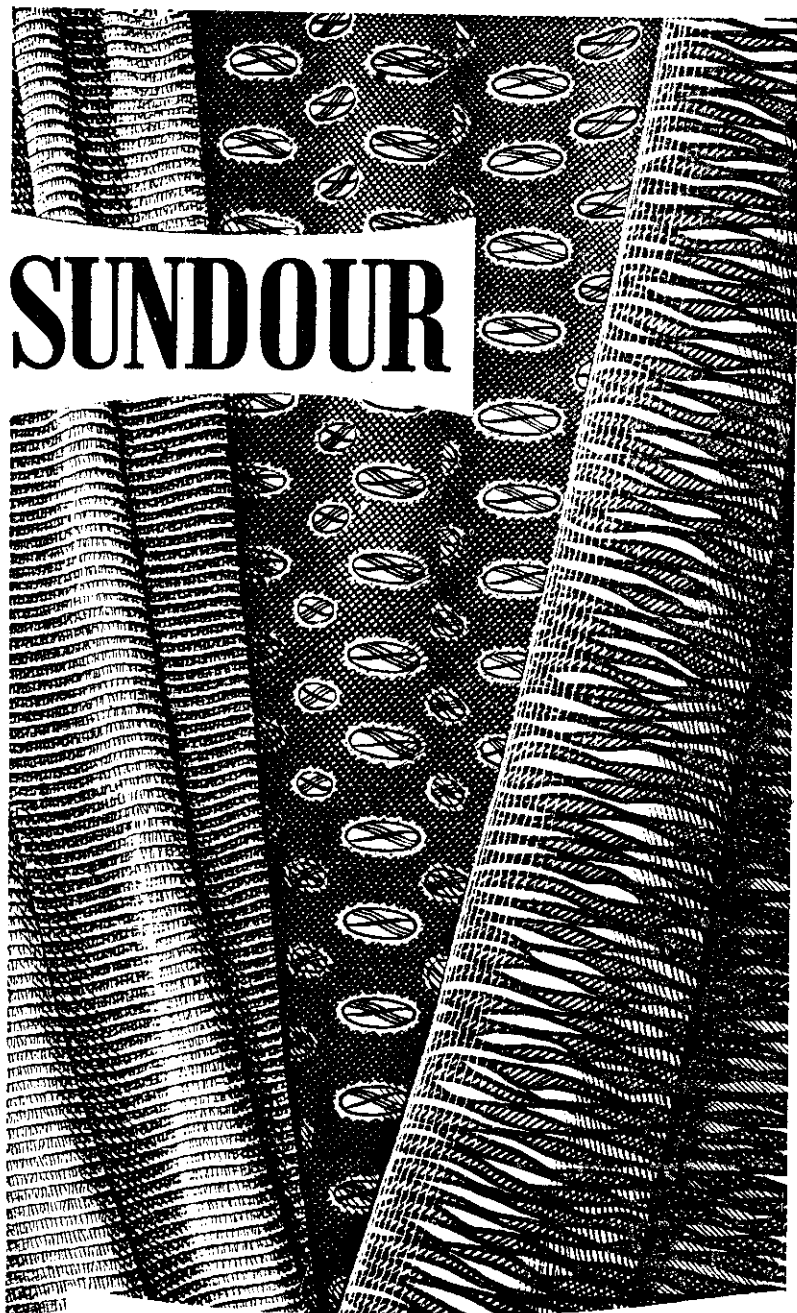
Moussorgsky's opera *Boris Godounov* is a long way from Gershwin, but not so far off our time, despite the seventy or so years since its first performance. In fact, its dramatic strength and the vitality of its music give it quite a modern tang. There are no stars among the singers in this latest version by the National Opera of Belgrade conducted by Kreshimir Baranovich (Decca LXT 5054-56), but the general approach to the performance suits the homespun character of the music. All in all, it is a quite exciting performance.

Ernest Chausson's Concerto in D Major for Violin, Piano and String Quartet is by no means modern, being very much a part of French Romanticism. Colour is restored to the somewhat faded charm, however, by the rich playing of Menuhin, Louis Kentner and the Pascal Quartet (H.M.V. ALP 1285).

Schubert does not fade, especially the songs. Gerard Souzay's Schubert Recital No. 2 (Decca LXT 5023) includes some of the more familiar songs with, as well, a number of less well-known masterpieces such as "Der Atlas" and "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus." Souzay, and his pianist Dalton Baldwin, make the best of Schubert.

More Mozart

Christian Ferras (violin) with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra conducted by Karl Munchinger, gives attractive performances of the Mozart Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major, K.216, and the doubtfully authenticated but nevertheless delightful No. 7 in E Flat Major, K. 268 (Decca LXT 5044). An important contribution to the Mozart repertoire is a recent recording of his not-so-well-known *Litaniae Lauretanae in D Major, K.195*. This is very beautiful music. It is given a loving performance by Jennifer Vyvyan (soprano), Nancy Evans (contralto), William Herbert (tenor) and George James (bass), with the St. Anthony Singers and the Boyd Neel Orchestra conducted by Anthony Lewis (London OL 50085).



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