

THE 20th CENTURY

SHOSTAKOVICH and Stravinsky—two Russians worlds apart. Shostakovich, warm, vital, a 20th century romantic. His Symphony No. 10 in E Minor, written in 1953, is rich, colourfully orchestrated music, although the years have toned down Shostakovich's flamboyance. Some of the ideas seem to lack strength enough to carry the flow of the music, but this Symphony is nevertheless a work of epic quality. The Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Efrem Kurtz makes a fine job of the performance (H.M.V. ALP 1322).

Oedipus Rex, an "opera-oratorio" based on the Sophocles legend, is Stravinsky at his most ascetic. All the immediacy of romanticism is squeezed out to leave music in tune with the timelessness of the story. If you can forget your romantic musical connections, you may find Stravinsky's *Oedipus* moving. The soloists—Ernst Haefliger, Hélène Bouvier, James Loomis, André Vessières, Hugues Cuénod—give a reasonable account of the very difficult music. The male chorus of La Société Chorale de Brassis and L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande are first-rate. And, of course, Ernest Ansermet, as conductor, knows his Stravinsky well (Decca LXT 5098).

Music from Sweden makes an interesting addition to the contemporary music repertoire. The principal work on this disc is a Concerto for Violin and Orchestra by Lars-Erik Larsson. Rhapsodically lyrical, there seem to be reminiscences of Elgar in Larsson's writing. André Gertler gives an excellent account of the solo part with the Stockholm Radio Orchestra conducted by Sten Frykberg (London TW 91091). The other works in this programme of Swedish music are a charming, Ravel-like Concertino for Flute, Women's Chorus and Chamber Orchestra by John Fernstrom, and a not immediately ingratiating Pastoral Suite by Karl-Birger Blomdahl.

More impressive than these, however, is Concerto for Violin and Orchestra by the Swiss composer Frank Martin. Wolfgang Schneiderhan gives a brilliant performance of a virtuosic piece that seems full of good ideas. L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, conducted by Ernest

By OWEN JENSEN

Ansermet, completes the picture (Decca LX 3146).

But the most exciting piece of contemporary music is, after all, not so contemporary—Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*, glowing music, given a beautiful performance by L'Orchestre Du Théâtre Des Champs-Élysées, and the Chorus of La Radiodiffusion et Télévision Française, conducted by D. E. Inghelbrecht (London DTL 93048).

For Entertainment

Sentiment, sentimentality, the sensuousness of sound, or even the dissonant probings of musical thought—all these may be the makings of entertainment, according to taste and mood, and providing the probings do not go too deep.

I suppose one of the most famous pieces written for entertainment—if you regard a cure for insomnia as being in this line—is Bach's Goldberg Variations. Gustav Leonhardt (harpsichord) gives an authentic if somewhat stolid playing of the variations (Vanguard PVL 7010). For a little 18th century wit on the harpsichord, turn to Haydn's Concerto in D Major with Erna Heiller as soloist and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra (Vanguard PVL 7012). The reverse side carries the Haydn Trumpet Concerto with George Eskdale playing the solo part.

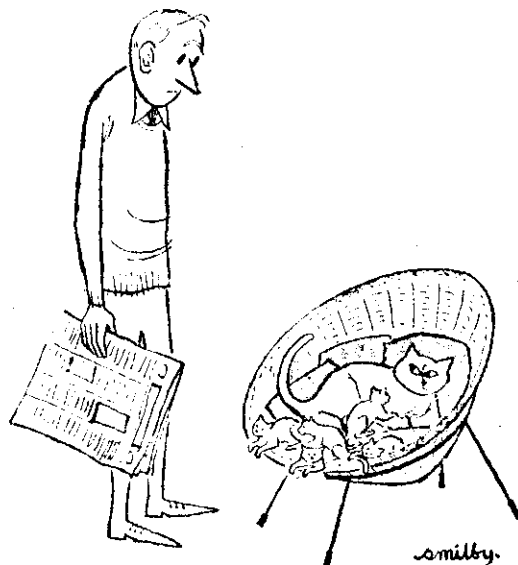
Respighi provides some gentle entertainment with his orchestral suite *The Birds*, adaptations of 17th and 18th century harpsichord pieces. It is sensitively played by the Vienna State Opera Orchestra, with Respighi's Suite No. 2 (Ancient Airs and Dances for the Lute) on the reverse side (Vanguard PVL 7025).

If sentimentality's your mood, Father Sydney McEwan's your man with a recital of Songs of the Gael (Nixa NPT 19008), a little more sugary than we seem to remember him in the old days of his New Zealand broadcasting tours. Or you may prefer A Music Box of Hymns (Vanguard PVL 7008), which has to be heard to be believed.

But if your taste runs to something more heady, there's Andalusian Dances (Parlophone CPMD 7), with some excellent guitar playing by Luis Maravilla. The Jose Greco Ballet (Volume 2), along the same lines, is even more exciting, made more so by first-rate recording (Festival FR 10-784).

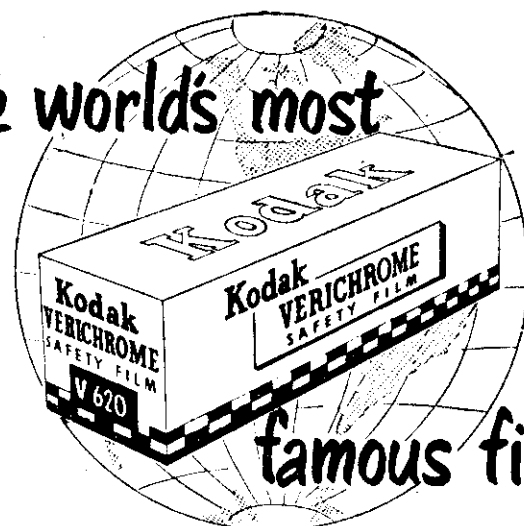
Coda

Putting the contemporary and entertainment aside for the moment, if you are a Brahms enthusiast, don't miss his Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, played by the Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult (Nixa NCL 16000). It's in every way fine. You'll probably enjoy, too, Bach's Cantatas Nos. 170 and 54 with Alfred Deller (counter-tenor), and the Leonhardt Baroque Ensemble (Vanguard). I can't say I particularly enjoy the quality of the counter-tenor as a voice, but Mr. Deller's musicianship is impeccable.



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