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Scores of Scores and Awful Tripe

J. W. GOODWIN reports on London's latest musical controversies

ARE there too many composers and are they trigger-happy on sirens and foghorns? Should musicians listen to recordings? Are the classics hardly adults able to stand up for themselves or are they mentally and morally defective children in need of care and protection? These are questions being asked and hotly answered in the expresso bars of Hampstead and Chelsea after a speech by Sir Malcolm Sargent to the Incorporated Society of Musicians. Further fuel has been added to the controversy by the BBC ban of nearly all of a long playing record made by Cyril Stapleton conductor of his own Show Band. The banned numbers are branded as "hotted-up" classics.

"We have too many composers in this country," Sir Malcolm told the composers' own professional organisation. "I am not decrying modern music, but there's an awful lot of tripe written,

disguised by ridiculous complications of notation.

"If you saw the scores I see, you'd see the idiotic nonsense and triviality of ideas. It does not follow that because we have sirens and foghorns we need them in our music."

Of orchestras, he said: "There is nothing other parts of the world can show us that is better than we have." Of televised music: "We don't want to see the horn player shaking out his instrument." But he was not opposed to TV cameras at concerts.

Of other conductors, he said that many had much knowledge and a great love of music. "What is lacking is sufficient young people who really seem to have a flair for putting over the music to the orchestra and the public." The gramo-

phone could be a great disadvantage because young conductors were tempted to give a bad imitation of what they had heard. Of good light music, he said that it should be just as much part of the ordinary routine of an intelligent person as the good, more complicated classical music.

What do composers say about there being too many composers?

Sir Arthur Bliss, Master of the Queen's Musick: "We can't have too many composers. The more we have, the better the chance of the great man emerging."

Lennox Berkeley, Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music: "Certainly a lot of music is being written by people with no gift for it. There is also a lot of needlessly difficult music. But Sir Malcolm is rather sweeping."

Gordon Jacob, for 30 years professor at the Royal College of Music: "Much music is unnecessarily complicated, but it's a pity to discourage young composers. I hope Sir Malcolm's words will inspire music which is easy to perform."

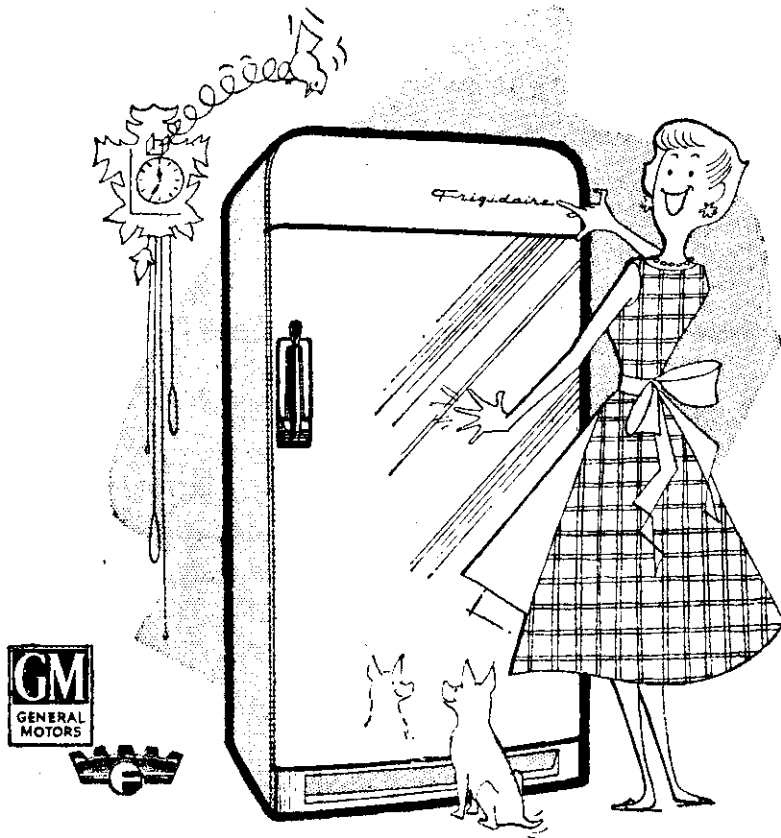
Sir Thomas Beecham, recently advising a young composer: "Not a symphony, my boy. There's a lot of English symphonies about this year—or any year, for that matter."

So far it looks like a draw, but batons are still flying and indignant keys being thumped.

No sirens then, no foghorns, no idiotic notation, let's have, instead, a lively interpretation of some favourite and rather weary classic. A BBC committee says that's just what Cyril Stapleton and some of his Show Band players have done with music by Brahms, Borodin, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Rubinstein, and Tchaikovsky. Twelve of the 14 numbers have been banned.

The conductor denies this, replying that the orchestra was composed mainly of strings with a little brass. "While playing in tempo we tried to retain the flavour of the original compositions. In some instances we have even kept the original scoring."

Sternly the BBC announces: "It has always been our policy to protect the classics." And that, I suppose, means protecting other scandalous examples of hotting-up—not by Stapleton, but by Brahms in his variations on Haydn, Vaughan Williams in his Thomas Tallis fantasia, Stravinsky's Pulcinella. Hotted-up scandals, or classics in their own right?



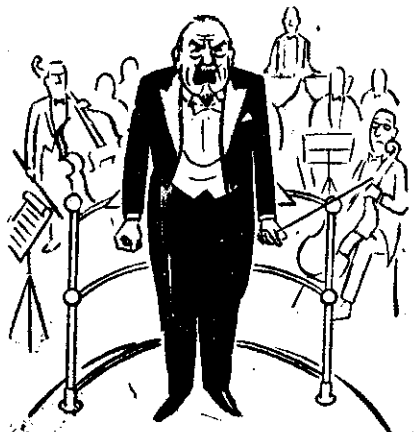
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