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New Recordings

BALLET COMES ALIVE

By OWEN JENSEN

BALLET is theatre; and the music alone is but half the picture. Nevertheless, it is not so difficult to fill in the rest with your imagination in the versions of *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* put out by Mercury Recordings.

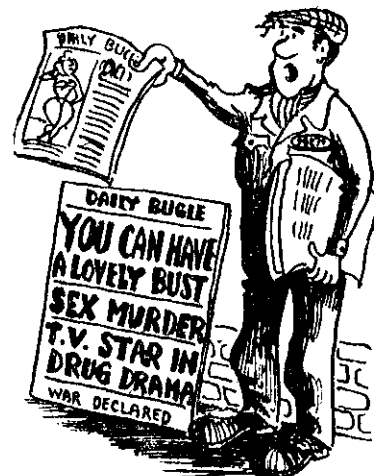
For one thing, the music is given complete, which makes for a continuity that the more often played suites of dances lack. The ballet, in each case, sounds like a ballet. Furthermore, what the eye misses in choreography, dressing, lighting and all the rest of the theatre trappings is filled in with a handsomely printed story of the ballets, supplemented with appropriate pictorial material. And each recording is parcelled up in an elegant album. But, most important of all, the music is vividly recreated by Antal Dorati and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra—*The Nutcracker* (Mercury MG 50031-32), *The Sleeping Beauty* (Mercury MG 50061-63), and *Swan Lake* (Mercury MG 50050-52).

Less plush but serenely beautiful is Stravinsky's ballet *Opello Musagetes*. This is Stravinsky in mellow mood and, for those who may find him more usually ascetic and forbidding, much more approachable music. The playing by L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under

Ernest Ansermet (Decca LXT 5169) makes the best of the music. The fill-in on the reverse side of the disc is Stravinsky's amusing ballet with singing, *Renard—A Burlesque*. In this, to the playing of the orchestra is added the singing of Michel Senechal and Hugues Cuenod (tenors), Heinz Rehfuß (baritone) and Xavier Depraz (bass) with Istvan Arato (cimbalon).

From the dance of the theatre to the salon brings us a bunch of Strauss waltzes—*Wiener Blut*, "Wine, Women and Song," "Tales from the Vienna Woods"—admirably played by Dorati and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (Mercury MG 50019). And round the corner to the café for an *Anthology of Cante Flamenco* (London TKL 93094-96), presented by a number of singers with guitarist Perico el del Lunar. This is by far the most comprehensive and authentic collection of flamenco music to come our way. To anyone who enjoys this virile folk music from Spain, the set of three discs is a must.

Is there any connection between music and colours? Sir Arthur Bliss thought so when he wrote his *Colour Symphony* in



(C) Pluck

1922. Whether or not you agree that "Purple—the colour of Amethysts, Pageantry, Royalty and Death," or "Blue—the colour of Sapphires, Deep Water, Skies, Loyalty and Melancholy," can be translated into sound, does not matter very much. This is colourful music in its own right, rich in contemporary romanticism. One wonders why it has not been recorded previously, for it is an ingratiating and easily assimilable work. The second side is completed with a brilliantly sounding Introduction and Allegro for orchestra by Bliss. Both works are played by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer (Decca LXT 5170).

Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* is a simpler story, and more fragile music, a little faded these days, perhaps, but music which gives us Ravel at his most individual. With it, there is Ravel's sensuous *Rapsodie Espagnole* and *Une Barque Sur L'Océan*. L'Orchestra du Theatre des Champs-Élysées conducted by D. E. Inghelbrecht give a sympathetic account of the music. (London DTL 93087).

If, however, I had to choose between any of this batch of discs, it would be in favour of a programme of Bach by the Russian violinist Leonid Kogan with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Otto Ackermann. This is beautiful playing of music that needs no recommendation—Violin Concerto in E Major, Double Violin Concerto in D Minor (with Elisabeth Gilels, wife of Kogan and sister of the Russian pianist Emil Gilels), and the Sarabande from the Unaccompanied Violin Sonata No. 2 in B Minor (Columbia 33 CX 1373).

Speech becomes music when spoken by Sir Laurence Olivier. This you will remember in excerpts from the films of *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, with the Philharmonia Orchestra surrounding the speeches with Walton's music (H.M.V. ALP 1375).

Jazz Coda

Lionel Hampton and his Orchestra reproduced from a Carnegie Hall concert of April, 1945 (Festival CFR 12-798), plough familiar paths of swing, but rhythmic zest and some improvisational originality keep their furrows from becoming ruts.

The Jimmy Raney Quartet (Esquire 20-070) gives it lighter and quieter and pleasantly enough; but the Tommy Whittle Quintet (two sax, piano, drums and bass) turn it out more subtle (Esquire 20-048). As for the "Multiple Talents of Victor Feldman," which display the said Victor in simultaneous dubbings of his various talents on piano, drums and vibraphone (Esquire 20-045), if his union doesn't object I don't suppose anyone else will. It's slick but not all that ingenious.

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 22, 1957.

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