

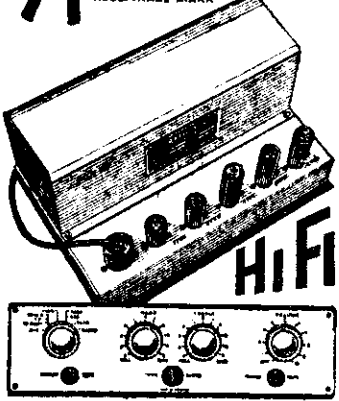
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## New Recordings

# EXOTIC PLEASURE

By OWEN JENSEN

OFF to the East for some excerpts from Chinese opera. If you enjoyed the incomparable experience of last year's Peking Opera season, you will welcome the opportunity to renew acquaintance with some of this fascinating music. And the record, by repetition, will make the music more easily assimilable. Moreover, what was some people's objection—the rather startling sound of the percussive effects—can be smoothed out with the volume control. And if you haven't yet listened in on Chinese opera, this is a disc which will open up new horizons. *Chinese Opera* was recorded in Paris at the second International Festival of Dramatic Art by the Peking Opera Company (Columbia 33 CCX 3).

Unfamiliar, but not necessarily exotic, are two symphonies by Albert Roussel. Contemporary with Debussy and Ravel, Roussel's light has been, until recent years, hidden under a bushel, largely because he did not subscribe to current musical fashions nor make any concessions to popular taste. His two symphonies, No. 3 in G Minor and No. 4 in A Major, Op. 53, are full of vitality, a combination of "robust extroversion and reserved lyrical intensity." In style the music is a little reminiscent of Carl

Nielsen. L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande conducted by Ernest Ansermet present Roussel's music; and a fine job they make of it, too (Decca LXT 5234).

Another new-old work is Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Snow Maiden*, performed by the National Opera, Belgrade, conducted by Kreshimir Baranovich (Decca LXT 5193-97). Rimsky-Korsakov's gift was for brilliant colours rather than for felicitous melodies. It is this quality which gives glitter to the dramatic fantasy *The Snow Maiden*. The performance matches the music.

Also from the region of Belgrade comes a recital of *Serbian Songs*, sung by the Chorus of the Yugoslav Army, whose members are no laggards at singing (Decca LW 5250). This is altogether exciting choral music.

## Chaff, Corn and Wild Oats

If you're a fan of Eddie Cantor you'll be interested in a disc of songs from *The Cantor Story*, sung by the maestro himself (Festival FR10-1187). Eddie's pep can make even a commonplace ditty sound well. But I do not find so much to excite in Jerry Lewis... *Just Sings* (Festival FR 12-1242). Maybe Jerry should stick to being a comedian.

And then there's Gordon Jenkins, who dishes up a corny fantasy called *Seven Dreams* (Festival FR12-1108). If soap opera's your line, this may be a suitable detergent. *Love Dreams*, by Alfred Newman and his Orchestra (Festival FR 12-1130), will add more sugar to the dish. It's not only what Alfred Newman plays (Liebestraume, Reverie, The Old Refrain, Moonlight Sonata, Clair de Lune, etc.), but the way his orchestra plays the music that gives a nauseating, saccharine quality to the programme. Maybe it is the influence of Hollywood, for you hear the same sort of thing in Alfred Newman conducting the 20th Century-Fox Orchestra in music from the sound track of *Anastasia* (Festival FR12-1326).

After all this, *Sweet Adelines*, a disc of Girls' Barbershop Quartets (official recordings of the 1955 McCallist Winners) sounds positively astringent (Festival FR12-1058). *Songs of Trinidad*, Calypso Classics composed and sung by Wilmouth Houdini (Festival CFR 10-568), have a down-to-earth sentiment as good as a tonic after so much sugar. Calypso is fashionable these days and probably it won't be long before it's commercial. Although I would hesitate to dignify Mr Houdini's songs as "classics," both songs and singing have an atmosphere that makes them entertaining.

As for Bob ("How Much is That Doggie in the Window?") Merrill's songs on the disc *And Then I Wrote* (Coral C12-1222), let them be a lesson to us all! Mr Merrill engagingly tells us how he came to write these songs. It appears that he resisted his mother's efforts to have him taught the violin; but as music, like measles, will out, he found himself one war and several decades later picking out tunes on a xylophone. He seems to have made a lot of money out of them. The moral may be—well, it depends whether or not you enjoy the naivety of Bob Merrill's xylophonic tunes.

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