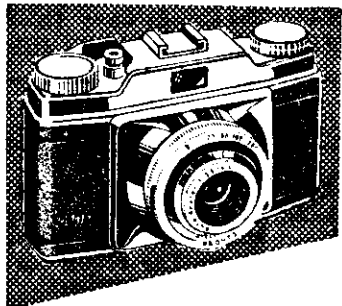


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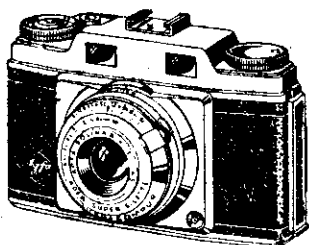
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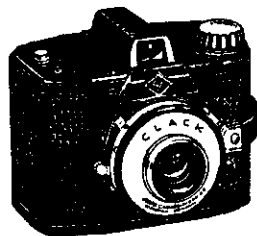
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Music on Record

DISCED FOLK SONG

by "DISCOBOLUS"

ONE of the most exciting records I have heard for a long time sneaked out quietly this month, "Ballad of the Boll Weevil," and other traditional American songs, on Argo TM 92. The singers, Gordon Heath and Lee Payant, are actors by profession, but they have, because of their handling of folk song, drifted into singing in their own cabaret in Paris. Their performance of Negro convict songs is deeply moving, as are the Appalachian songs with their echoes of Elizabethan English as distorted by the "poor white." Don't miss hearing this record whatever you do. With it, we might consider some of the other discs of traditional music recently out, notably Beltona LBEM 13, where Mary O'Hara sings "Songs of Erin" to her own accompaniment on the Irish harp. If you haven't fallen in love with the photograph of the charming Mary on the record envelope you will as soon as you hear her sing, with a voice as cool and clear as Irish spring water, the fascinating songs of the Irish countryside. This record has the ring of the authentic. I wish I could say the same of Patrick O'Hagan on Beltona LBE 11, "Dear Little Shamrock," for he has that clear Celtic tenor; but alas, the dressing up of these songs is as phoney as the picture of Irish lad on the record envelope. Celesta and organ, flute and strings, tempt the singer to drag the rhythm out whenever there is the slightest chance, so that some of Herbert Hughes's famous arrangements of traditional Irish airs don't quite come off. For lovers of the "Ould Sod," however, all will be well.

Three fine contraltos also have folk song records available; Marian Anderson on H.M.V. BLP 1060 sings 10 well-known Negro spirituals with that dark tone of hers, to make a record which I would say is one of the best spirituals available, at least until Paul Robeson records again. But even better I love Kathleen Ferrier's glorious tone in seven folk songs from the British Isles on Decca LXM 3040. What an incomparable artist she was! Yet with these two great singers the up-and-coming contralto Norma Procter is able to hold her own. She has a beautiful voice with very even production which is perfectly under control and her singing of seven traditional songs on Decca LWM 5248 is very pleasant to listen to. It is to

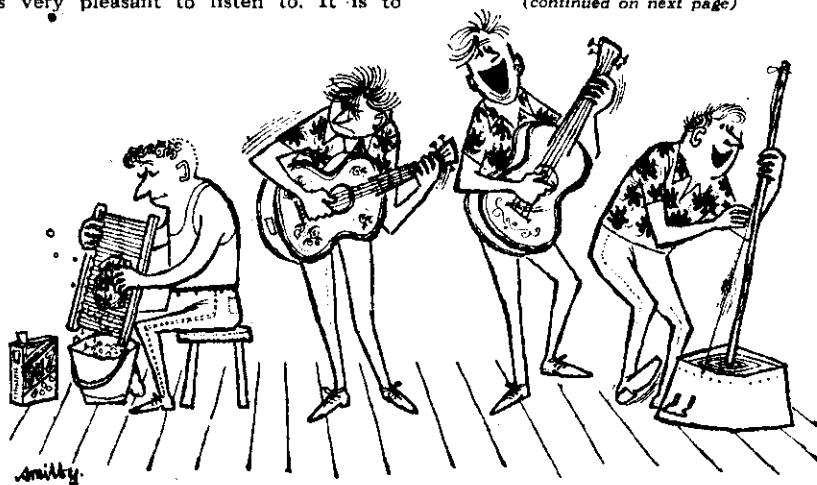
be hoped that she does a lot more recording like this. These three records have piano accompaniment, but Gloria Davy in six Negro spirituals on Decca LW 5215 has an orchestral accompaniment. I suppose it's coincidence, but she does exactly the same as Patrick O'Hagan, in that she sings very slowly indeed, so that one longs for her to get a move on. This is a shame, for she has a rich and dramatic voice.

One curious thing emerges when one listens to these records: the women singers are capable without a blush of singing songs whose sentiments are those of men. Kathleen Ferrier sings the "Sally Gardens," in which a man speaks of his love; Norma Procter sings "I'm Seventeen Come Sunday," with the soldier telling in the first person of his courting. I hope I am not peculiar when I say that this sets my teeth on edge. Men don't do this. When Patrick O'Hagan wants to sing "I Know Where I'm Going," which expresses a woman's feelings, he says "I know where I'm going (she said)," which puts the poem into narrative so that it is not unnatural for a man to be singing it.

The other two traditional song records out are by a man who never could be accused of singing women's songs—Burl Ives. He sings on Festival FR 10-809 "Songs For and About Men" with that husky charm which is his alone. If this record is right we men are bad lots, I'm afraid. His record of Christmas songs on Festival CFR 10-725 is less successful; the ones with choir and orchestra are not as good as those with his own guitar, but the songs themselves are not the most common Yuletide ones, and the record will be welcomed for that reason. It's a pity that Burl Ives's impressive list of Brunswick recordings isn't available in this country.

Elizabethan madrigals have been called vocal chamber music so often that I hesitate to say it again, but I'm afraid it's all I can say about Coronet KLC 500 which has a feast of 14 of them delightfully sung by six singers of the New York Pro Musica Antiqua. What makes this record different is that W. H. Auden speaks the poem of each before the performance. I didn't care

(continued on next page)



Smitty

(C) Punch