

THE QUINTESSENCE

THIS is the 13th review of new recordings in these columns. Not that I imply any mystical significance in this occasion; but quick computation will indicate that there must have been 12 other reviews—in fact, a complete year of listening; and you know what that means. It is customary to celebrate such an anniversary with the selection of the "ten best" delivered with proper critical omniscience. While not given much to the strict observance of custom myself it seemed that there might be pleasure for all in making obeisance to the discs that have come our way in the past 12 months. I was about to indulge in this pleasant pastime when the peace of untroubled introspection was interrupted by an unexpected shower of records so exciting that, even allowing for the spontaneity of new acquaintance, they could not be ignored nor left sequestering for another month. So here goes.

Most beautiful of all and as fine as anything to come my way this 12 months is a disc modestly captioned, *Music for Soprano*. The music is by the

A Monthly Review by
OWEN JENSEN

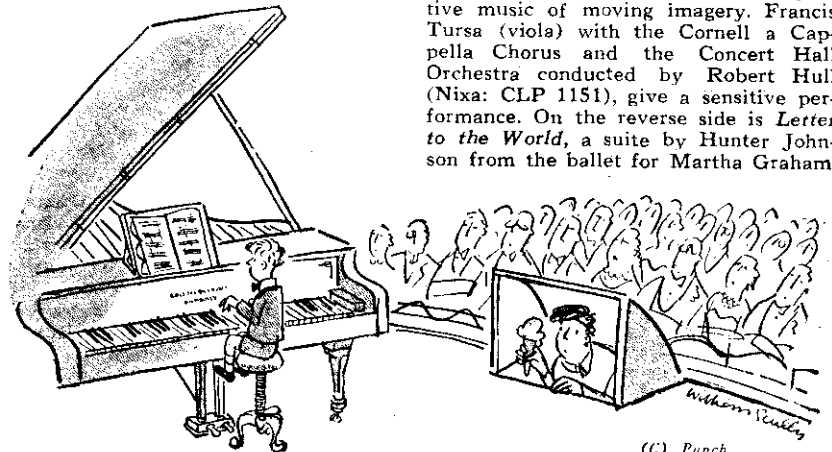
seemingly inexhaustible Joseph Haydn, being occasional arias contributed by him to other people's operas and other odd pieces allowed to gather dust among the archives. Fortunately, someone or other has rediscovered them. This is music that, if you have an affinity with Haydn and the 18th Century, you will not wish to miss. The singing of Gertaude Hopf is superb and the Vienna Symphony Orchestra conducted by Meinhard von Zallinger contributes all that is expected of it. The record is by Nixa (ALP 2045).

The extraordinary thing about these 18th Century men is not just their remarkable fecundity—as composers, that is—but their almost unvarying consistency. Bach is another who seems to have been able to say what he wanted to whenever the occasion arose. Two more cantatas, No. 40, *Christ Lay in the Bonds of Death*, and No. 140, *Sleepers Awake*, both performed by the Choir and Orchestra of the Bach Guild under Felix Prohaska (Nixa: BLP 311) are as

satisfying as you would expect and as meticulously and sympathetically performed as you would wish. Before we leave the 18th Century there is also Mozart's *Missa Brevis*, K.194, and some part-songs and motets, all sung by the Wiener Kammerchor directed by Ferdinand Grossman, with strings and organ where required (Selmer LPG 8331). This, too, is beautiful listening, especially *Adoramus Te* and the well-known *Ave Verum*.

The most brilliant of this month's discoveries is undoubtedly Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* for solo viola and

orchestra. As played by William Primrose and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Thomas Beecham (Columbia: CX1019), the effect is astonishingly exciting, making Berlioz's romantic fancies as lively as he must have imagined them and far more vivid than the mere notes would suggest. This is a must for all Berlioz enthusiasts and those others who like the Byronic flavour. Another work for solo viola, but a very different one in mood and texture, is Vaughan Williams's *Flos Campi* for viola, voices and orchestra. This is one of Vaughan Williams's most impressive works, sensuous, introspective music of moving imagery. Francis Tursu (viola) with the Cornell a Cappella Chorus and the Concert Hall Orchestra conducted by Robert Hull (Nixa: CLP 1151), give a sensitive performance. On the reverse side is *Letter to the World*, a suite by Hunter Johnson from the ballet for Martha Graham.

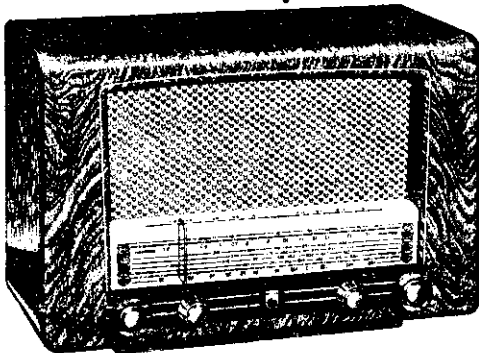


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