

Paxinou receives no assistance from the cast Mr. Greene has assembled to "support" her; and practically no assistance from Mr. Greene himself, in his role of director. The level of Mr. Greene's direction is but one cut above the mounting of a high school play where the amateur director has considered himself fortunate if he can prevent the actors from bumping into each other.

This is a sad performance of what gives evidence, even now, of being a great stage play. I say even now, because we tend to forget, when watching certain dated plays, that they were of the essence of revolutionary thinking in their period. The truth about *Hedda Gabler*—as character—will always live, because her creator understood his creature. But the situation in which she finds herself seems somewhat artificial now.

ALVAH BESSIE.

"Our Singing Country"

A presentation of 250 tunes from folk song categories.

IN 1933 John and Alan Lomax, father and son, set out to gather and record for the archives of the Library of Congress the vast Americana that is folk music. Their findings have been published in two important volumes. *American Ballads and Folk Songs* appeared in 1934 and was one of the first comprehensive collections of American folk music. Now we have a second volume, *Our Singing Country* (Macmillan Co., \$5), which contains some 250 tunes sifted from the thousands found by the Lomaxes. The book presents a thorough cross-section of various folk song categories with chapters on Negro

and white songs of religion, play, courting, and work. There are numerous ingratiating samples of white ballads, Negro game songs, Cajun tunes, breakdowns, fiddle tunes, work songs and hollers. In addition there are some extremely interesting Negro songs from Bahama and a group of southwestern Louisiana French songs.

The authors have overcome a difficult problem common to such anthologies, that of a truly accurate recording of the songs. They tell us how this was done:

"A piece of folklore is a living, growing, changing thing, and a folk song printed, words and tune, only symbolizes in a very static fashion a myriad-voiced reality of individual songs. With the development of the portable recording machine one can do more than transcribe in written outline what they say. The needle writes on the disc with tireless accuracy the subtle inflections, the melodies, the pauses that comprise emotional meaning of speech, spoken and sung. In this way folklore can truly be recorded."

The records were then transcribed on paper by the young American composer Ruth Crawford Seeger, who has maintained the characteristics of the singing style and yet kept it simple enough for the average amateur to sight-read. However, the total absence of piano accompaniments is unfortunate, despite Miss Seeger's sound argument that "the piano is foreign to the spirit of the songs." Authentic presentation of folk songs is one thing, the practical use of this kind of album is another. Its value is around the parlor piano where the family or friends can gather for a song fest. Very few Americans, especially those who are able to pay the five-dollar fee required for this book, are accustomed to singing unaccompanied, as Miss



A drawing by A. AJAY

Seeger suggests. Long conditioning by radio, movies, and concert hall is not easily overcome.

In the preface the authors state that the function of the book is to let the American folk singer have his say. This is accomplished and eloquently. Important as this is, it is insufficient to the reader seeking the whole picture of folk music. The Lomaxes fail to make the reader conscious of the very real connection between the songs and the environment that produced them. True, the authors say that "The American singer has been concerned with themes close to his everyday experience, with the emotions of ordinary men and women who were fighting for freedom and for a living in a violent new world." Yet nowhere does the text establish the effect that "everyday experience" or "the fight for freedom" had upon the nature of the music. I do not believe that it is the province of the reader to discover these relations for himself. It is the expert and devoted students of folk art like the Lomaxes who should help us understand better the dynamic nature of their subject. Such understanding will inevitably lead to deeper appreciation.

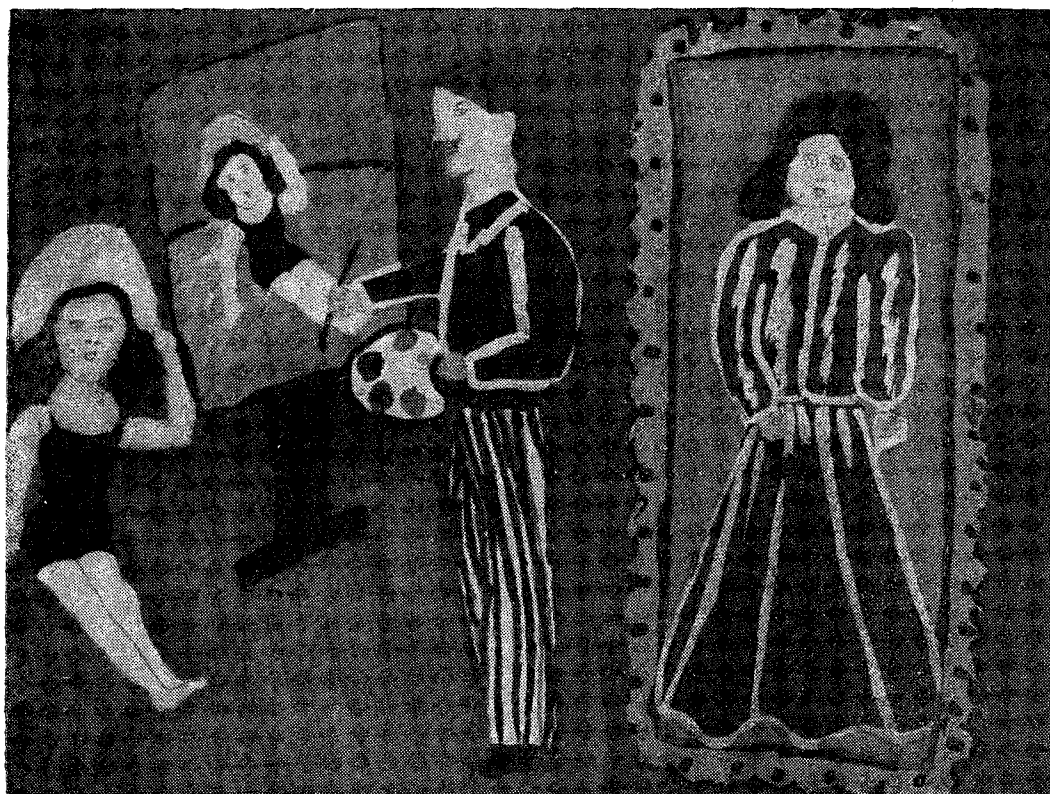
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Interesting Recordings

"Symphony in D Minor." . . . Marian Anderson in songs from Handel's "Messiah."

CESAR FRANCK'S "Symphony in D Minor," his only composition in this form, was written in his sixty-sixth year at a time when he was a professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory, and a highly respected figure in the musical world. Yet its premiere performance in 1889 was received with distinct hostility by both audience and orchestra, and occasioned violent critical invective on the part of the press. The celebrated English horn solo which opens the slow movement became a subject for ridicule solely on the basis that neither Beethoven nor Haydn had ever used it in their symphonies.

Today this music is among the best loved in the entire symphonic repertoire. The first movement is recognized as a powerful dramatic musical utterance, while the revolutionary use of the English horn—which apparently required the broader musical understanding of a later generation to be fully appreciated—is now considered brilliant.



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In an authoritative recording by Pierre Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, the Franck symphony emerges as a deeply moving work. Mr. Monteux, whose recent reading of Ravel's "La Valse" was well received, again demonstrates his sensitivity with the baton. Although the interpretations of the symphony by Stokowski and Mitropoulos rank higher, the Monteux version is decidedly an important contribution to recorded literature. (Victor \$5.50)

ARTUR RODZINSKI's flair for interpreting Tchaikowsky's music is vividly illustrated in his new release of the composer's fantasy-overture "Romeo and Juliet." While the word "overture" ordinarily is applied to an instrumental introduction to an opera, which outlines musically the characters and themes to be developed, it frequently describes an independent concert piece, highly descriptive or of dramatic significance. Thus, the "Romeo and Juliet" overture, inspired by Shakespeare's tragedy, is an overture but not a prelude to anything. Without a detailed story we can recognize unmistakable intimations of high dramatic moments. The violent, slashing rhythms which underline the bitter animosity between the Montagues and the Capulets, as well as the searing poignance of the love music, are driven home with fiery lyricism and impact by Rodzinski, and with superb playing by the Cleveland Orchestra. (Columbia \$3.50) *

JAN PEECE, the talented tenor long popular with radio and concert audiences, joins with Arthur Kent in a recording of the tomb scene from Donizetti's "Lucia." Peerce, who recently made his operatic debut with the Metropolitan Opera Company, sings with distinction, and Kent, a young American singer with a bright future, deserves praise for the intelligent use of his rich baritone voice. Excellent support is afforded by a chorus and the Victor Symphony Orchestra, directed by Pelletier. (Victor \$2.50) Donizetti does not fare as well, however, with Lily Pons singing arias from his "Daughter of the Regiment." Miss Pons' coloratura is, as usual, magnificent, but the charm of the music is somehow lost in its transmission to wax. (Columbia \$2.50)

MARIAN ANDERSON offers an album, "Great Songs of Faith," containing songs from Handel's Messiah, Mendelssohn's "St. Paul" and "Elijah," and Bach's "St. John Passion." Miss Anderson sings with dignity and flawless taste. (Victor \$3.50) Also recommended are Mozart's "Sonata No. 36 in E Flat Major" for violin and piano, as played by Albert Spalding and Andre Benoist (Victor \$2.50); and Enesco's colorful "Rumanian Rhapsodies No. 1 and No. 2," the first played by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Ormandy conducting, with Kindler and the National Symphony Orchestra presenting the second. (Victor \$2.50) * MICHAEL AMES.

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