

expressionism as a force in the theater. Its depersonalized characterization made it unusable on the modern stage after the sheer sensation value of its novelties wore off.

Other answers are to be found in the social context of the play, its special place and time. *Gas* was first performed in 1910. It is full of production devices such as Max Reinhardt had made fashionable. But some forty years have gone by and the surprises no longer startle. In the "advanced" thinking of the German intelligentsia of 1910, industry was the monster that deformed men. Kaiser and similar thinkers called for a mass desertion of the machines and a return to the soil. But a trip to the countryside and a close look at the peasant would have shown the man at the plow to be as mutilated as the man at the machine. Not the machine or the plow, but the exploitation of the man at the machine and at the plow did the mutilating. That the German intelligentsia, some sixty years after the founding of Marxian socialism among them, could dither so over an anti-machine manifesto, symbolic or otherwise, is symptomatic of later morbidities.

The best that can be said for *Gas* today is that it documents the anxiety of German intellectuals in the years when the Kaiser and his Krupps were making it easy for the "accident" of war to occur. They saw the connection between militarism and a carteleer industry that calculated the profits of destruction. And, in fact, the best scenes in the play are those in which carteleers and their minister in the government put pressure on the realist-idealist to resume the production of gas despite its previous destructive explosion and the probability of a later and greater disaster. There is reality in those symbols and the reality gives them a certain grim humanity. But with that scene done the play returns to its dehumanized symbols and its foolish message.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

RECORDS

A BATCH of new recordings illustrate interestingly the progressive stages of a national music. Tchaikowsky's First Symphony, "Winter Memories," is of a comparatively primitive stage, abounding in the most engaging folk melodies, but doing little with them in the way of emotional development or musical construction. The fine performance and recording is by the Santa Monica Orchestra under Rachmilovich (Disc SR 102).

Rachmaninoff, however, in his Symphony "The Bells," for orchestra with voices, uses the tradition of Russian folk and choral music in a most imaginative way. The result is a set of four glowing tone poems of Russian life, full of surprises in timbre and harmony, and the best work of this composer on records. The same orchestra performs, with the choir and soloists of the First Methodist Church of Hollywood (Disc 804).

Prokofieff, for all his modern harmony, is wholly in the line of a Russian national art, as his Suite No. 2 from the ballet "Romeo and Juliet" proves convincingly. Typically Russian phrases form the basis for searching portrayals of human emotion in a framework of the most vivid color. Koussevitzky and the Boston Orchestra give an impassioned, well-recorded reading of four movements (RCA Victor 1129).

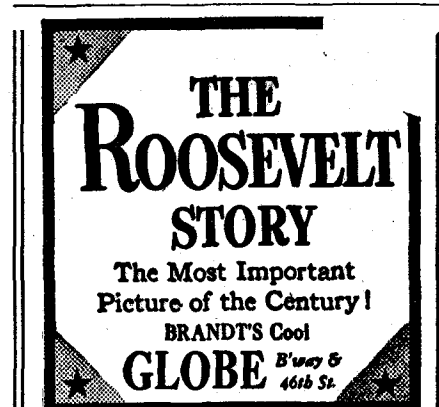
A complete "La Traviata" recorded in Rome displays very special qualities. It has a dramatic unity and punch which reveals that to the Italian people opera is a national theater as well as a national music. The singers are alive to every nuance of the words and Verdi's music. The voices are good, though not first-rate. The soprano Adriana Guerrini especially, in the difficult title role, forces a normally beautiful voice to the point where she cannot control its timbre. The recording is life-like (Columbia OP 25).

The Dvorak First Symphony, in D Major, takes us back to an undeveloped form of folk-inspired poetry, very delightful but too long for its emotional content. Leinsdorf leads the Cleveland Orchestra in a lively, musicianly reading (Columbia 687).

We also have three stages of jazz, starting with the classic style of Sister Ernestine Washington singing hymn tunes in a ringing voice reminiscent of Ma Rainey, with Bunk Johnson's band playing fine, straightforward jazz obligato (Disc 712). An album of Louis Armstrong records, made in Paris in 1934, show him no longer playing in contrapuntal blues style, but with an exuberance and rich fund of musical ideas that, both in serious mood and clowning, silences criticism (Vox VSP 300). Excerpts from a jam session feature the late guitarist Charlie Christian and the trumpet of Joe Guy. It is modern jazz close to its best, thin in its emphasis on the solo melodic line, but full of subtle, ironic and witty musical surprises (Vox VSP 302).

"Boogie Woogie, Vol. 2" offers through reissues a history of blues piano, close to its best, starting with the almost spoken blues of Charles Spand's "Hastings Street" and going through major work by Meade Lux Lewis, Jim Yancey, Mary Lou Williams and the two Johnsons, Pete and James P. It belongs in every record library (Columbia C 130). The ironic wit, sentiment and dizzy virtuosity of modern jazz, played by varied groups, may be found in Esquire's "All American Hot Jazz" (Victor HJ 10).

S. FINKELSTEIN.



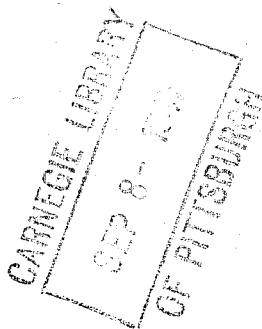
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