

# All the Best People

*APPOINTMENT WITH DESTINY.* By Rosita Forbes. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1946. 303 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by I. D. W. TALMADGE

**R**OSITA FORBES has written twenty-two books (we've counted them) and nothing we could say about her twenty-third book could possibly discourage her. Nor would we want to. She is indisputably a capable and entertaining writer. She has traveled extensively, visited—she admits—every country in the world except New Zealand (why not New Zealand we don't know), and has recorded readably and faithfully all she saw. She has been praised by Viscount Allenby and Anthony Eden, by "Slim Johnnie" Smuts (him of the Union of South Africa), and by George Bernard Shaw. Said G. B. S. to the author, "I used to think you were a wonderful woman—getting to all these places. But now I've seen you I realize it must have been quite easy for you." Miss Forbes is also extremely photogenic.

All this is to the good. If we have any quarrel with Miss Forbes and her writing, it is purely along class lines. She is just a mite too "upper class" to our taste. This upper stratum *Weltanschauung*, like an ill-fitted slip, seems to be showing. Embarrassingly, it reveals itself beneath the fine dress of her objectivity, while we're trying not to look. Of the Duchess of Windsor, Miss Forbes says, "As a Southerner, the Duchess is particularly well adapted to cope with color problems." (We doubt if A. Philip Randolph would agree with that.) The umbrella-wielding Chamberlain, she insists, "was a sincere democrat, an idealist and a Christian." And Unity Mitford—"Poor child, she had dreamed great dreams of young Germany and middle-aged England working hand in hand, and . . . saw her dreams turn to nightmare."

So much for the political coloring of the book. Now as to the book itself. "Appointment with Destiny" is a travelogue through time and space. Temporally, it covers the years 1935 through 1943; geographically, almost half of the globe—India, Soviet Central Asia, Kenya Colony, Union of South Africa, Central Europe, the Bahamas, French North Africa, England, Canada and the United States.

The first third of the volume is strictly travelogue stuff—competent, colorful, informative. The rest deals with the war years, the author's activities, the impact of the war on

England (Miss Forbes spent several months in London during the blitz), her lecture tours in Canada and the United States, and a great deal (too much in fact) about her building of a mansion, "Unicorn Cay," in the Bahamas. There is some good, vivid reporting about blitzed London, but again over-class-angled—too much emphasis on poor lady So-and-So, who has been bombed out of her

palace at the height of the social season and now has to stand in a queue.

If everyone mentioned in "Appointment with Destiny" buys a copy, the book should have a wide sale. Literally hundreds of members of the smart international set are in it. Many of them, we must admit shamefacedly, we never heard of. But they are all there—the clubwomen of the Bahamas, the Riviera, and Park Avenue. In fact, "Appointment with Destiny" would make a good selection as the Club-of-the-Month Book.

## Under the Enemy's Nose

*INTO SIAM: Underground Kingdom.* By Nicol Smith and Blake Clark. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1946. 315 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by BRIGADIER  
GENERAL DONALD ARMSTRONG

**W**HEN Siam became a shot-gun member of the Axis, it became simultaneously a *terra incognita* to the Allies. This was disturbing. A black-out on news of events and tendencies in Thailand



would hinder the war against Japan. General Stilwell needed to know how many troops Japan had in that country and where they were. He wanted to learn to what extent this probably reluctant belligerent would participate in the war against us. The Air Forces wanted information about suitable bombing targets. The State Department was curious about Siam's entrance into the war and about resulting political conditions there.

The Office of Strategic Services was elected to find the answers to these important questions. The OSS was lucky enough to enlist the indispensable aid of Siamese students in the United States, organized and directed by Siam's minister and military attaché in Washington. OSS assigned to this duty Nicol Smith, author of "The Burma Road," an officer who was familiar with that part of the world. He was charged with the administration of this group. His reports to Washington are the basis of this book that records the preparation, travels, hardships, and achievements of the expedition. Blake Clark,

who stayed at headquarters in Washington, helped to keep the record and to write the book. The story, told chiefly in the form of dialogue, rarely penetrates below the surface of events, but excels as a description of travel in exotic lands and of dangerous adventure in underground operations against the Japanese.

The initial difficulty of entering Thailand took long months of planning and cooperation with the Chinese secret service organization headed by General Tai Li. Eventually, the advance guard of the expedition started on their dangerous and difficult journey in spite of the monsoon season. Two of the young Siamese were seized and shot by the enemy immediately on crossing into Siam. Their radios were discovered, thereby warning the Japanese that agents were seeking to enter the country. But the returning native sons found a strong underground movement headed by the regent, Luang Pradist. Later a number of Americans, including Colonel Smith, landed by plane or submarine while the Japanese forces still occupied and ruled the country. The information collected by the OSS was sent from a radio station located, of all places, in police headquarters in Bangkok.

It would be difficult to invent a more audacious combination of circumstances, but it worked and the Allies profited greatly from the broadcasts from the Bangkok radio station. The espionage and underground operations of the Siamese and the OSS were most helpful to the campaign in southeast Asia. Messrs. Smith and Clark tell the story simply, without exaggeration or heroics. The accomplishments of the Siamese people in the presence of a ruthless enemy and the ingenuity of the OSS personnel in transmitting valuable military intelligence are eloquent proof of the contribution of courage and determination to winning a war even in the machine age.

# The New Recordings

COMPOSITION, PERFORMER, ALBUM, NUMBER, NUMBER OF RECORDS	ENGINEERING		REMARKS
	Recording Technique	Surface	
PROKOFIEFF, SONATA IN D (VIOLIN & PIANO) Op. 94. Szigeti, violin; Leonid Hambro, piano. Columbia M 620 (3) \$3.75	Balance grossly favors violin; piano is faint. By this time engi- neers should know in- struments in a sonata are equal partners, should be so balanced! Columbia seldom makes this mistake ... why here?	A	A delightful work, full of P.'s mannerisms (but isn't Beethoven "typically Bee- thoven"?); related to vio- lin concertos. Simpler, better integrated than re- cent large orchestral works by Prokofieff. Bad bal- ance obscures excellent playing of Hambro.
MAHLER, SONGS OF A WAYFARER ( <i>Lieder eines Fahrenden gesellen</i> ). Carol Brice, Pittsburgh Symph. Reiner. Columbia X 267 (2) \$2.75	Fine balance between orch. and voice. In soft parts singer is "built up" more than seems necessary— sounds as though she she had moved closer to you.	A	(See below) Carol Brice is equal to An- derson in vocal quality, and more at home in "classical" music; her younger voice is more flex- ible. May well be greatest, Negro voice.

## MAHLER IN BRIEF

COLUMBIA'S release of the Mahler "Songs of a Wayfarer" is another long step in making the genius of Mahler understandable for today's audience—so different from whatever audience (if any) Mahler envisioned for his gigantic symphonies. In spite of exceptions to prove the rule, today's musical taste calls for shorter and shorter works, of greater and greater relative concentration, along the lines of earlier music before the great physical expansion of the nineteenth century. Why else, for one reason at least, are the short works of Schubert, Mozart, Chopin increasingly popular? Not a little of this has to do with the requirements of radio and phonograph, but these in turn are no more than part of the increased tempo of the twentieth century—a tempo far too restless to take in Mahler-in-the-large, even in the dubious form of escape.

Mahler had the gift of song almost as did Schubert, and whatever he may have written it is the song element in his music that keeps it alive. Though Mahler specialists may disagree, it is the beauty of the individual thematic ideas in the symphonies that holds our wandering attention, not the over-all monumentality. They are of firmer stuff by far than, for instance, the popular Rachmaninoff themes, which are too short, too concise to be songs, yet too long for real symphonic material.

But where Schubert wrote his songs without a minute's thought, Mahler was obsessed with far larger

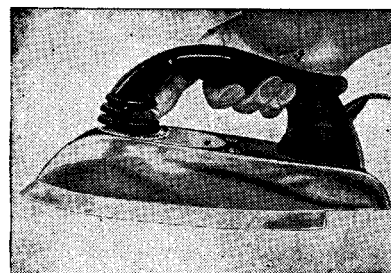
(and hazier) conceptions of greatness; and to complicate matters he was also a genius, technically, at handling the largest orchestra, which merely fed into his passion for huge music. Into the idea of symphonic monumentality the tiny *lied* could fit only as so much thematic material, incidental to the whole. Yet there are dozens of Mahler melodies which most of us wish could somehow be excised from their gargantuan settings as true *lieder*.

"Songs of a Wayfarer" answer that wish. They are a group of individual short songs, with accompaniment for full orchestra—and it is characteristic of Mahler that he dashed them off in preoccupation because he could not find the time to work on his obsession, the symphonies. Each is a true song, a musical unit, with its own highly individual material and mood, yet the rich orchestral accompaniment has the brilliant instrumentation and striking musical content of the symphonies. For our ears these trifles are masterpieces. In their brief brilliance we can easily find the real genius of Mahler—which, no matter how often we may read of it, is, in the endlessly long symphonies, just too much for the jaded ear to grasp. No matter what your previous opinion of Mahler may have been, this small album is guaranteed to please, and notably with the extraordinary voice of Carol Brice and the beautifully recorded Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

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