

A Happy Marriage, and Others

ONE rare variety of light musical pleasure is the offering, by a first-class artist, of some of the choice but lesser known works of ranking popular composers. This is exactly what happens in a new album entitled "Mary Martin Sings for You" (Columbia album 843, \$4.25). What with "South Pacific," this is obviously a Mary Martin year, and we are now indebted to that ebullient siren not only for the happy role of Ensign Nellie Forbush but also for some of the nicest exercises in sentimental chamber music that have come along in some time. The songs, as indicated, include certain gems scarcely ever displayed—Rodgers's and Hart's "My Funny Valentine" and "Glad to Be Unhappy," Gershwin's "A Foggy Day," and Vincent Youmans's "I Want to Be with You." There are also four more conspicuous sparklers—Gershwin's "But Not for Me" and "Maybe," Dietz's and Schwartz's "I See Your Face Before Me," and Berlin's "It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow." These are sung against subtle backgrounds by Ben Ludlow for one musician tripling on the flute, clarinet, and bass clarinet, and others on the string bass, guitar, harp, and piano. Miss Martin does her romantic part with an artistry quite as telling as those more muscular Southern Pacific efforts in which she washes Ezio Pinza out of her hair or proclaims herself corny as Kansas in August. Her handling of sentimental music reinforces a point we have several times stressed regarding the best popular singers: one of their secrets is the happy marriage of a lyric warmth, which gives full value to the melodic line, with a certain impersonal restraint in the matter of the words, which keeps the situation from getting mawkish. Most popular songs when sung in a personal way are repellent. But there is never any danger of this with Mary Martin; it is difficult to see what, if anything, she lacks in the way of popular musical equipment, unless it be a personal witchcraft of the sort this department has felt, at one time or another, in Marlene Dietrich and Gertrude Lawrence.

The many loyal constituents of Andre Kostelanetz and David Rose may be interested to learn that there is an eager contender for their favor in the person of one Percy Faith and His Orchestra, now presenting six light classics: "Begin the Beguine," "The Touch of Your Hand," "That Old Black Magic," "All Through the Night," "Dancing in the Dark," and "Temptation" (Varsity 151, 152, 153, 39¢). Having very little taste for this

sort of musical chiffon we may fail to appreciate the details, but we would say offhand that Mr. Faith's violins offer just as many veils and drapes of tone as are customarily found in the musical yard goods of Kostelanetz and Rose, and that there is also the same tendency toward rhapsody, or at least spasm, and the same habit of changing the fundamental beat, which is disconcerting to one brought up in the tradition that in American popular music the beat is a laudable fixture.

We have also been unsettled this month by certain practices of Vaughn Monroe, a man with a good, conservative dance band and an appealing masculine voice. His album "Silver Lining Songs" consists of time-tested numbers from the current movie "Look for the Silver Lining" (RCA Victor P246, \$3.25) including the title song and "A Kiss in the Dark," "Who?," "Shine On Harvest Moon," "Time on My Hands," and "Avalon." In the main the band plays well, but Mr. Monroe's agreeable voice is usually joined by one of those mechanical mixed choirs which take the joy out of so much light music nowadays, and in the only number where the choir is absent, the ineffable "Avalon," Mr. Monroe's solo is followed, inexplicably, by a cumbersome swing passage which completely breaks the song's mood.

Further breakage has been inflicted on the work of Tchaikovsky. That melancholy man is said to have broken into tears of unhappiness one evening as he strolled along Broadway. Per-

haps there was no specific connection with the American scene, but it is well that the Russian never heard the supercharged operation of a coloratura named Kathryn Grayson on one of his finest melodies in a record called "Waltz Serenade" (MGM 30210, 79¢). Miss Grayson has the gush of an Old Faithful, and on the other side she drenches Jerome Kern's "They Didn't Believe Me."

The month has provided a few modest rewards. Esmerelda's "The Pictures on the Wall" (MGM 10483, 63¢) struck us as cruder but also funnier than most of the efforts of Dorothy Shay, "The Park Avenue Hill Billy." A melodious lullaby, "Luna Lu," seems worthy of more distinctive handling than it gets from Blue Barron (MGM 10490, 63¢). Marjorie Hughes offers a tasteful revival of "I Never Knew (I Could Love Anybody)," accompanied by Hugo Winterhalter's orchestra, which seems to us one of the handsomest dance bands we have heard recently (Columbia 38524, 63¢). And the seasoned New Orleans gentleman with the soprano saxophone, Sidney Bechet, has made still another album featuring his hot virtuosity, "Sidney Bechet's Blue Note Jazz Men" (Blue Note 105, \$3.95). This time his able associates include "Wild Bill" Davison on the trumpet and Art Hodes at the piano. The ensemble interplay is scarcely of the top New Orleans grade, and the rhythm section is often rather pedestrian, but Bechet's own work is as usual a joy, and "Cake Walking Babies" and "Tiger Rag," taken for once at a moderate tempo, will be welcome in the best Crescent City company. —WILDER HOBSON.



—Charles Farr, Graphic House, Inc.

Mary Martin recording—"the happy marriage of a lyric warmth with a certain impersonal restraint."

Some Highs and Lows

THE CONTROL-LESS AMPLIFIER

WHEN this writer first began enthusing over the separate-unit phonograph system things were fairly simple. The original Consumers Union system, for instance, comprised a one-speed changer, an amplifier with one input and a single tone control adjuster (Bogen PH 10), a single speaker. But this sort of thing never ends (that being of course its fascination), and nowadays the available units for a "complete" system run into the dozens. The three-speed era has multiplied the front end of any system to the point where the possibilities are exhausting to think of (and this column postpones such a discussion yet awhile). The close race between the new magnetic pickups, GE, Pickering, and the like, and the much improved crystal pickups means a further complication; the magnetics need preamplifiers, the crystals and the new ceramics must avoid them, as must AM and FM radio tuners. At this point preamplifiers may come as separate units, or built invisibly into your amplifier, or tucked into a radio tuner, even combined with other assorted separate units—if you don't look carefully you're apt to find yourself with two or three of them.

And the need for specific tone controls, matching varying pickups to varying records (equalization) as well as for seasoning your music to taste and to match room acoustics, has led to still another batch of separate units that can be patched into your system to make life still more involved. (See RECORDINGS, Feb. 1949.)

Indeed, so devious have the combinations of all these items grown—almost any two or more can be lumped as a "separate unit"—that there's a move on now towards making the amplifier, heart of your system, into a unit with no controls on it at all, the whole of them being centered elsewhere. Often they are mounted in an associated radio tuner. But a more radical departure towards ultimate simplicity (if you will believe me) is to relegate all basic controls to a new and autonomous unit of their own which can be compact and easily mounted wherever you wish. An excellent idea, for it is not good to place your hot amplifier at the operational center of things where it may overheat records and pickups—not to mention yourself, on a sizzling day. Far better to isolate it, minus the controls that must be at hand, where it can

manage to stew safely and alone.

At the present time all of this is more tendency than fact, though I'm ready to bet on a rapid increase in



such arrangements. A number of home-type amplifiers without controls are already on the market. Most are sold to go with matched radio tuners, the controls and even the phonograph preamplifier simply being built into the tuner instead of the amplifier. The Collins home system, the Altec Lansing, Radio Craftsmen, Espey, Knight (Allied Radio), and doubtless others are of this sort. Some of these control-less basic amplifiers are already available separately if you want them. The Brook ten-watt triode amplifier can be had minus its separate control box.

But needless to say if you plan on such an amplifier you must have your controls elsewhere. The new trend towards giving them their own container is barely under way. The Brook control unit, sold only with its own amplifier, and a similar "remote control" system in the Bell amplifier are moves in this direction. (The Brook controls are not the type I like—see RECORDINGS, Jan. 1949). Electronic Workshop in New York has two interesting separate control units now ready to match its own interchangeable control-less amplifiers of various sizes, but adaptable to other amplifiers.

Both models include in place of a standard volume control a gadget that has attracted much interest recently among engineers, the *compensated loudness control*, which automatically changes the proportion of bass and treble as volume changes, in order more nearly to match the human ear, which hears quite differently at high volume than at low. (You can have the loudness control, to replace your regular volume control, from Livingston Electronics for \$10.) The simpler of these two control units, at about \$15, is a three knobber, size of a small cigarette carton, with the approved type of bass and treble "boost-attenuate" knobs (the flat position in the middle), plus the loudness control for volume. The larger unit adds to this a built-in preamplifier for magnetic pickups and a step-type tonal range control for noisy records. A knob selects any of four inputs to take your assorted players and radio tuners; each input has its own level adjustment so that all the signals may enter the control on an equal footing, a good point since you'll find that signal strength varies greatly from one type of unit to the next. This really fancy separate control unit, an amateur engineer's dream (and a beginner's nightmare?) goes for about \$45. The rest of your equipment should be fancy too, to do it justice.

All of which may leave some readers gasping with bewilderment or (more likely) annoyance. If you think such complications are out of bounds for the mere record lover, I can only suggest that the whole industry has been well out of bounds these many months! I'm doin' my best.

—EDWARD TATNALL CANBY.

**BRILLIANT NEW
AMPLIFIER!**



**EXCLUSIVE
G-E PICKUP CIRCUIT**

New circuits enable you to attain full benefit from the new G-E Variable Reluctance Magnetic pickup. Employs an exclusive, humless pre-equalized pre-amplifier to produce the most satisfying musical amplifier the world has ever known. If you are a perfectionist, you are the one for whom the ACA-100GE was designed. Send for technical literature.

★Wide-Range
★Scratch
Suppressor
★Volume
Expander

Supreme performance with any variable reluctance pickup.

AMPLIFIER CORP. OF AMERICA
396-14 Broadway, New York 13, N. Y.