

from the double bass can be reproduced by that marvellous complexity of "push-pull amplifier, variable reluctance pickup, gate-circuit noise suppressor, thirty-watt output, multiple cone speaker, and reflex bass cabinet with infinite baffle." (How Mr. Buxbaum smacks his lips over the very names!) Yes, if the "Symphonie Fantastique" shows off a man's set more impressively than the "Goldberg Variations," then, from his point of view, Berlioz must be a greater composer than Bach. Of course, there is no question of listening to music when two or more men gather around a phonograph, except as the recording serves to illustrate some point of discussion. Every record offers endless incentives to conjecture and disagreement.

Loudly the gentlemen shout over the full blast from the machine, "Oboe's too close to the mike!"

"Why don't you use a magnetic pick-up?"

"Got any old, beat-up records? I want to hear how your scratch suppressor works!"

"What is this thing you've been playing?"

Finally, they all go home, and the wife, her head throbbing, says wistfully, "Dear, would you mind turning down the volume just a tiny bit?"

And the husband of her bosom snarls, "Say, what's the matter with you, anyway? Don't you like music?"

*Mrs. Halpern describes herself as a musical amateur, a record collector whose interest is "the Baroque period in particular and chamber music in general."*

## The Record Shop

By Bruce Fawcett

**G**ENIUS here is durable in wax. Souls made actual wait to be heard.

Ecstasy is yours for a price, plus tax. Between the cardboard and the useless word,

The seeds of total happiness and sorrow

Trust to electricity and desire

To unfold upon a never-over tomorrow  
Perfect, perpetual blossoms of ice and fire.

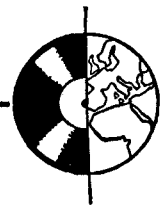
Music creates a landscape of its own, Peoples it, within a time, a place, Wherein the reason for all things is known.

Deliciously aware of this, you race, Lightly as if you had wings, and mount the stair

That, built of song, can lead you anywhere.

# THE OTHER SIDE

(IMPORTED RECORDINGS)



LONDON.

**Q**UITE the most important set that has reached me since I last reported is the Vaughan Williams Symphony No. 6 in E minor. The "Encyclopaedia of Recorded Music" has observed, not without justice, that "only something super-English, insular, and parochial in his personality has kept him from being a composer of great world-wide popularity." This symphony, however, should help to remove this last barrier between the world at large and a great composer of our time. Not only is the E minor Symphony Vaughan Williams's crowning achievement to date, it is unquestionably a composition of world stature. It may not achieve immediate popularity such as the music of Britten has so often succeeded in doing, but I am convinced that no sensitive musician could listen to it and not feel that he is in the presence of greatness.

There are four movements, played without a break—or, as the composer puts it in his own analytical notes, "each of the first three has its tail attached to the head of its neighbour." The first three follow the conventional pattern to some extent, but the Scherzo is succeeded, not by the usual kind of Finale, but by an Epilogue marked for its whole length "pp senza crescendo." This is a most extraordinary movement, and one that will baffle many people; yet even though its inner significance may escape us for the time being, we cannot but feel strangely gripped by its other-worldly desolateness. Is it a vision of a world destroyed by atomic warfare? I doubt whether even the composer could tell us. Yet the slow movement has so ominous a quality, is so sinister in its implications, that such a solution cannot be entirely ruled out. This second movement possesses perhaps the most immediate impact on the listener, though the splendid first movement, Allegro, is by no means "difficult," and the Scherzo—"fugal in texture but not in structure"—is explained away by such artless comments from the composer as "... the woodwind experiment as to how the fugue subject will sound upside down but the brass are angry and insist on playing it the right way up, so for a bit the two go on together and to the delight of everyone including the composer the

two versions fit, so there is nothing to do now but to continue, getting more excited till the episode tune comes back very loud and twice as slow."

When we come to the mysterious Epilogue, however, even Vaughan Williams cannot help us greatly, for he admits that "it is difficult to describe this movement analytically. It is directed to be played very soft throughout. The music drifts about contrapuntally with occasional whiffs of theme. . . ." The symphony is played by the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Sir Adrian Boult, and HMV have recorded it admirably. The last movement, however, presents a problem and would greatly benefit from quieter surfaces than shellac can give us.

It is perhaps a pity that such a pleasant and competent, if derivative, composition as Carl Nielsen's "Sinfonia Espansiva" should appear in the shadow of the Vaughan Williams, but it provides a welcome escape for those who do not feel able to face up to the stern realities of the far greater symphony. Nielsen's genial, and often lovely score has been excellently recorded by Decca with the Radio Symphony Orchestra, Copenhagen, conducted by Erik Tuxen. Decca also provides us with a lovingly moulded performance of Schumann's Symphony No. 1 in B flat, the "Spring" Piero Coppola, an old friend to record collectors through his work with French HMV, conducts the National Symphony Orchestra.

Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic give an outstanding performance of the much-recorded "Siegfried Idyll." Leaving the Toscanini-NBC version, which has never reached this country, out of it, this is the most satisfactory recording of the "Idyll" so far. A picture postcard trifle perhaps, but nevertheless worth a couple of lines, is Glinka's "Jota Aragonesa." An exciting reading by Malko and the Philharmonia Orchestra glows in the light of one of HMV's best recordings to date.

The pianist Michelangeli gives further proof that he is the nearest approach to Horowitz on this side of the Atlantic with his playing of Brahms's "Variations on a Theme by Paganini," Books I and II. Only the absence of a few variations and the fact that the remainder are not all played in

the correct order mar an otherwise astounding HMV set.

At last we over here are permitted to listen to the Elektra excerpts, recorded by HMV with Beecham in charge. Since SRL readers will have had more opportunity of listening to these than I, only the bare fact need be set down. Flagstad this month demonstrates her versatility with a remarkable performance of "Dido's Lament" ("When I am laid in Earth") from Purcell's best known opera. She proves ideal for this—her lower register has the requisite alto richness, and we need not fear for the repeated high G's (to the awkward words "remember me") near the end. Coupled with it is another lament, Orfeo's "Che Faro" from Gluck's most famous work, but here an interesting rendering is somewhat marred by excessive portamenti.

We have only heard one previous record by a soprano with the colorful name Victoria de Los Angeles, and though she impressed greatly with two excerpts from Falla's "La Vida Breve," those who have heard her latest disc of songs by Granados and Fusté have been quite staggered. I for one have not heard anything to compare with it since Supervia, and she has one asset even her great compatriot did not possess, a really beautiful voice. Of course records have been known to deceive, and we have not yet heard her in the flesh, but there can be no room for doubt that this HMV record is absolutely outstanding.

That last remnant of princely patronage, the Maharajah of Mysore's Medtner Society has given to the world the third volume of works by Nicolas Medtner. I fear that I cannot share the worthy Maharajah's enthusiasm for this music, in which academic devices galore are unhappily wedded to undistinguished thematic material, the whole being permeated by a sentimental romanticism. Much of the pianistic writing is as skilful as we would expect from a virtuoso-composer and some of the smaller pieces for piano and one or two of the songs are pleasant enough. The large-scale works, however, I find most indigestible.

The third volume contains the First Piano Concerto in C minor, Opus 33 (in one gigantic movement), two works for piano alone—"Canzona Matinata" and "Sonata Tragica," Opus 39, Nos. 4 and 5—and two songs—"The Ravens," Opus 52, No. 2 and "Serenade," Opus 28, No. 2. The composer is at the piano throughout. He is supported by the Philharmonia Orchestra under George Weldon in the Concerto, and the singer is Oda Slobodskaya. —THOMAS HEINITZ.

## Memories of "South Pacific"

"SOUTH PACIFIC" came to town the other day, captured in seven discs of wax, retailed at \$7.26 (less if you are LP equipped). What seems real is real, and the magic of genius and song has created in this best musical play of them all a reality quite outside—and more real than—the actuality some of us found in the glare of tropic sun on cannon, ships, planes, and men snared in the unreality of war. The things we knew are quite diffused now by that merciful mist of forgetfulness with which time shrouds all our pasts, which robs pain of its memory. In this year 1949 we are ready for a "South Pacific," though the Pacific we knew contained no Mary Martins, no Pinzas, no tender love.

The Pacific we knew seems now too harsh to be real, too cruel to be believed, too dull to be remembered.

"Some Enchanted Evening" . . . Our ship pulls into Noumea. We see the smoke, green-yellow as chlorine, billowing from the stacks of the smelters. We are taken into the hills and deserted by the friendly trucks in a dank, muddy valley where the casuals, those lost souls who are the transients of war, exist in a limbo of hope and frustrations. Days—weeks—even months—we wait in the mud, in the tents, under the clouds that pile up like snow banks against the mountains, in the rain that pours from them in torrents. Just when we have surrendered all hope, the orders arrive. The ship is in the harbor. We must board her and away.

"Bali Ha'i Will Call You." . . . Away to Finschhafen, another replacement depot, more mud, more rain, more sweat in a valley the wind never reaches. A week—two weeks—then away to a dot on the map called Owi, crowded between Biak and New Guinea, an islet of coral and scrub typhus and Jap planes overhead. An adjutant who wonders where we came from, who requisitioned us, what he'll do with us now we've arrived. He's pleasantly frank about it—he's never heard of us before and wishes we would go away and leave him alone. Oh, dear—where now? A day—a night—a day—a night—in another replacement depot—and finally orders. Hollandia. There we join a new outfit, all of them strangers to us, all old-timers. It's awkward for a while, but Leyte is coming up, and there's dread and excitement, last letters home, packing, boarding ship—we begin to feel like veterans ourselves.

"Dites-Moi, Pourquoi". . . Leyte—

mud, rain, Jap parachutists, bombs, machine-gunnings, dehydrated potatoes, powdered eggs, spam, a wax-white moonlight to guide the bombers to us, their targets, ship cannonading off-shore, Halsey and his dubious strategy and a beachhead almost lost, Navy pilots landing on unfriendly, alien earth, Tacloban a sea of mud, caribous stiff in death, Filipinos ragged and hungry, long sleepless nights and hot restless days, a bloated corpse beside a rutted road, overturned jeeps.

"There's Nothing Like a Dame" . . . Manila—public buildings a diabolical giant has reduced to rubble, blocks of empty walls, charred remnants of a people's life—a toilet seat scorched and left inexplicably on the sidewalk, the twisted metal of a bed, a stove collapsed in heat too great for any cooking except perhaps a devil's brew. On some forgotten alley there is a brave bistro, The Top Hat, where two women light the yellow tapers that float in oil and sell gin and nipa and tuba to men who will drink anything.

"I'm In Love with a Wonderful Guy" . . . The other is a white Russian—small and chic, all alabaster skin and black hair and gray eyes. Her husband is upstairs, a Notre Dame alumnus and a hopeless diabetic. He must have his adrenalin. The Navy, the Army, the Marines, the Coast Guard—they gather at the feet of this little woman, and she favors a few of them. Her husband pretends not to notice. Then one day a big bomb is dropped, far to the north—then another—and it is over. The little white Russian kisses the boys, and sets up the drinks. The war is over . . .

We return home, and begin forgetting. And then, one fine spring day, we buy an album of records called "South Pacific." Our heads tell us that nothing ever existed like this on earth or in heaven. We search our memory, but the mist is too deep. We listen, and we decide that the music we hear is good enough for us. And it is.

—HOKE NORRIS.

