

Champagne for New Year's

FOR RAVEL enthusiasts the holiday season is brightened with three handsomely rewarding records. The crescendo of interest begins on an already elevated plane with the two piano concertos, now mated on one LP (London LP 76, \$5.95). The Concerto in G is assigned to Nicole Henriot and the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra under Charles Munch. "A concerto in the strict sense," Ravel termed it, "written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns." It is precisely in this spirit that Miss Henriot plays. The fast outer movements sparkle drily, the middle adagio treads soberly, nobly: all is restrained and classical. Compared with this conception, which has the merit of jibing with the composer's, Leonard Bernstein's in an RCA album of two years ago emphasizes the jazzy element to such a point that an unsuspecting listener might almost mistake the composer for Gershwin. Which is the preferable manner? "Both," would be my considered answer; for each is cogent and revealing, and each bears its own brand of beauty.

Jacqueline Blancard negotiates the Concerto in D for Left Hand, abetted

by Ernest Ansermet and the Suisse Romande Orchestra. London's engineers have treated the Swiss team less sumptuously than the French. I find the sound here dull and two-dimensional. In fact, the whole enterprise—musically as well as technically—has a heavy cast to it, as if permeated by the damp grizzle of a Geneva winter. On every count I shall maintain my allegiance to the prewar collaboration of Cortot and Munch.

With the issue of the Sonata for Violin and Piano, as played by Arnold Eidus and Brooks Smith (Stradivari LP 1005, \$4.85), a last gap has been filled. No major work of Ravel is now left unrecorded (although "Daphnis et Chloe" is still to be offered in full). This sonata is remarkable for a "Blues" movement that sets the violin wailing like a tenor saxophone one moment and strumming like a Hawaiian guitar the next. As in the fox-trot section of "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges," the ingredients may be *d'outre-mer*, but the manner is inimitably Ravel's. Less immediately accessible, but of equal invention, are the two outer movements—an opening allegretto, which demonstrates how

"modern" this composer could be, and a scintillating final *perpetuum mobile*. My hat is off to Messrs. Eidus and Smith for pioneering so successfully. If I may make one reservation, it is that the piano does not always assert its full rights in the partnership. The "Blues" movement especially requires a stronger, more blatantly metallic, rhythmic base. On the LP's reverse is the Trio in A, this being its first appearance in uninterrupted form.

It is hard to say what gleams most brilliantly in the new recording of "Histoires Naturelles": the wit and charm of Jules Renard's texts, the allure of Ravel's music, or the genius of this re-creation by Pierre Bernac and Francis Poulenc (Columbia LP 4333, \$4.85). Here is not the place to dilate on the amenities of this famous cycle, which remains one of the glories of song literature. The interpretation of the Bernac-Poulenc team merits further appreciation. Whether it is the strutting pomposity of "Le Paon," the mincing, Caspar Milquetoast character of "Le Grillon," or the tender wonderment of "Le Martin-pêcheur," Bernac projects with rare and compelling craft the essential purport of each song. As a distiller of musical essences, he is, I believe, without a peer among contemporary recitalists. To any young

(Continued on page 50)



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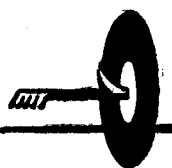
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HITS AND MISSES



THE SUGGESTION has come to me that W. A. Mozart was at work in Austria at a time when carillon balls, then the latest instrument of human maleficence, were flying past his gables. Scholars may write me at 2 Valley Road, Princeton, New Jersey, pointing out that it was not W. A. Mozart, but F. Schubert, D. Buxtehude, or Orlando Gross-Pantaleoni, and I will not care very much. The point is that Fred Ramsey, Jr., in this stern age of the world, has dug into his collections for the latest long-playing production of Folkways Records: "Jazz Vol. II; the Blues" (LP, \$5.95). This amounts to some of the best twelve-bar music you ever heard, nor is there a strict mathematical accounting of the bars. The cast of characters includes Blind Willie Johnson; Blind Lemon Jefferson; Vera Hall; Gertrude Perkins; Ma Rainey; King Oliver; Jimmy Yancey; Nolan Welsh; Jelly Roll Morton; the Original Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra; Bessie Smith; Louis Armstrong, and Johnny Dodds. Almost enough talent to make Ernest Hemingway miss a bullfight.

There is no accounting for taste, and when I last met Armstrong, and he pressed upon me the question of St. John Perse, I replied: "Louis, St. John is a beaut." Well, to get back to Ramsay, you could hardly do better than this disc for a Guy Fawkes Day gift. I will list a few others, all from the hot foundries of California. Peculiar as it may seem to the East, the horrors of Hollywood culture—and I do not exaggerate—have failed to discourage certain syncopators in that area. Behold:

Benny Strickler and the Yerba Buena Jazz Band: "Jazzin' Babies Blues," "Fidgety Feet," "Dippermouth Blues," and "Kansas City Stomps" (Good Time Jazz, Nos. 21 and 22, \$1.05 each). I leave to future investigators the precise analysis of the

transactions whereby a certain Lou Watters ceased to lead the Yerba Buena contingent (doubtless inside accounts are already in preparation) and the man Strickler, as they say, "attained." Let it simply be recorded that the Strickler records are corkers, in the New Orleans idiom, and if you wish more there are Watters's Yerba Buena efforts on a long-playing Mercury disc (C103, \$2.85). The subscribers are warned that the first number on side A is entitled "Emperor Norton's Hunch."

While Hemingway is putting up his guns, we pass on the intelligence that Turk Murphy is with us again, wielding his Dixieland trombone with all the sagacity of a Learned Hand. This California paragon, a one-man answer to what used to be known as be-bop, continues to discourage the progressive crowd on four Good Time Jazz labels: "Irish Black Bottom," "Darktown Strutters Ball," "Ragtime Dance," and "Trombone Rag" (Nos. 17 and 18, \$1.05 each). The last-named seems to us especially moving.

There are also four new sides by the pianist Armand Hug of New Orleans. It makes no difference what Armand plays; he is, as some of our choicest readers keep telling us, the real McCoy on the ragtime piano. There is not a flashy note in a billion. That is the negative side of the comment. The positive side you may hear on "Kansas City Stomps," "Good Gravy Rag," "Frog-I-More Rag," and "The Cosey Rag" (Good Time Jazz, Nos. 19 and 20, \$1.05 each). If we seem to lean too heavily toward one label, we cannot help it. This is California's month.

We now deposit Geer's Formula. To all ambitious ear musicians we say: "Think the note." Or, as Sergius Kagen puts it in his recent, widely admired book on vocalism (substitute any variety of ear musicianship):

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