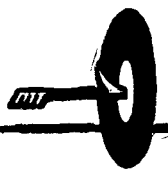


HITS AND MISSES



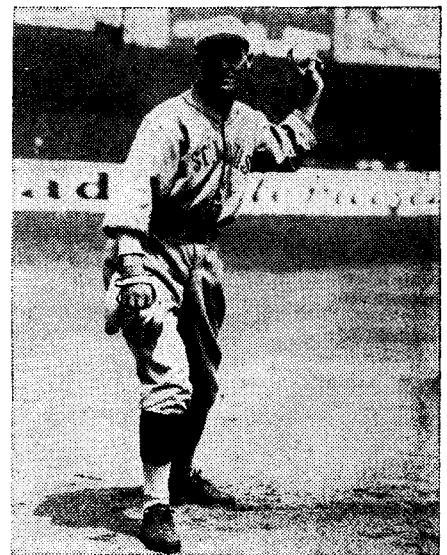
WE STAGGER on the scene this month under one of the heaviest cornucopias in the history of this column. Fun for all!

First there is a magnificent samba, "The Mambo," by D. Perez Prado, played with irresistible wallop by Dave Barbour's orchestra (Capitol 937, 79¢).

Second—good news from the piano department. The distinguished James P. Johnson, who has outlived his famous pupil "Fats" Waller and himself shows no sign of artistic decay, has made an LP disc of eight of his own compositions, including "Old-Fashioned Love" and "If I Could Be with You" (Decca DL5190, \$2.85). The Johnson piano playing is one of the happiest things in this bitter world; it is all sunny, syncopated elegance, the most salubrious music imaginable. The two-piano team of Cy Walter and Stan Freeman presents an album named for their radio show, "Piano Playhouse" (M-G-M 52, \$2.85), with Joe Bushkin appearing here and there as guest pianist. The tunes are Grade A—including "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World," "Falling in Love with Love," "Lady Be Good," and a piano jam session on "Indiana." We have never felt the specific magic of the highly embellished, two-piano cafe style; the textures almost inevitably get too thick and ornate for our taste. But Walter and Freeman are skilled at keeping their music articulate; they are leaders in their league, separately gifted, positively glittering together. From the laboratories of Dr.

Hubert S. Pruett, of St. Louis, a ragtime addict, comes an album of "Pianola Ragtime" (Circle CD 302, \$3.94) recorded from player rolls made by the legendary masters Scott Joplin and James Scott. Dr. Pruett once made headlines, as a pitcher with the St. Louis Browns, for striking out "Babe" Ruth. Now he's a well-known obstetrician in St. Louis with a hobby as a pianolist. It would be pleasant to report that the vicarious way of arriving at their music was satisfactory. It is not—being one whole step less efficient than pianola rolls themselves. The reconstructive ear, however, will have little difficulty in deciding, from what does come through the process, that Professor Joplin must have been a mighty man at the keyboard.

Continuing last month's lecture on Dixieland, we would say the best bands have been notable, among other things, for three qualities: (1) lyric spirit, (2) rhythmic ease, and (3) ensemble transparency. In other words, they have been melodious rather than shrill, relaxed rather than panicky, and lucid rather than scrambled. These virtues are generally conspicuous this month in three records by Dixieland veterans. Tommy Dorsey and his Clambake Seven play "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" (RCA Victor 20-3791, 79¢) and "Tiger Rag"—the old master operates in the tailgate, as against the seraphic, range of his trombone. The cornetist Phil Napoleon and his revived Memphis Five offer a blithe revival of "Copen-

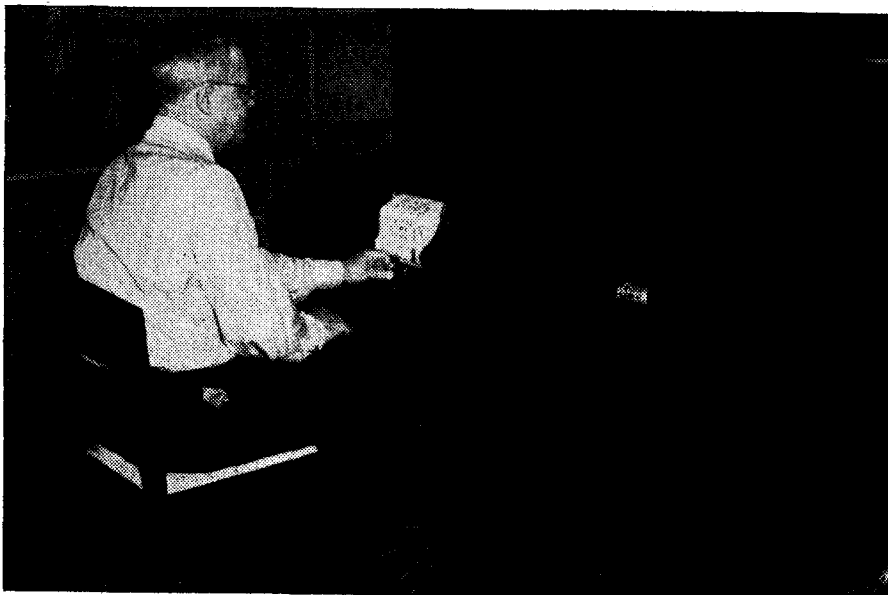


... once made headlines as a pitcher."

hagen" (Columbia 38820, 79¢). And Sharkey Bonano's New Orleans troops continue their traditionalist campaign with "In the Mood" and "Solo Mio Stomp" (Capitol 951, 79¢). This last combination includes some of the most respected Crescent City personalities and can be counted on not to spoil. The Dixieland virtues are rather too thoroughly mixed with the vices in the LP record "Dixieland Express" by another New Orleans group, Phil Zito's (Columbia CL 6110, \$2.85). The band is given to forcing and clamor; all hands would do well to recall Hugues Panassié's early remark to the effect that even when the great jazz musicians are playing their fastest they play with legato feeling. The Dixieland form lends itself with treacherous ease to musical slapstick, and the best we know is by a California organization called the Firehouse Five Plus Two. We have eight 45-rpm sides of this exceedingly athletic music (Good Time Jazz, 45001-2-6, 79¢) and specifically recommend "Brass Bell" and "Everybody Loves My Baby" (45005). The comedy is much subtler than Spike Jones's and the band performs its own gymnastic feats in the way of lyricism, ease, and transparency.

At the other end of the decibel range is another curiously titled outfit: the 6 and 7/8 Band. This is a quartet of New Orleans gentlemen—a doctor, a customs official, a pine-oil manufacturer, a shipping man—who perform the music of their native town upon the mandolin, steel guitar, guitar, and string bass. They grew up under the horns of the jazz pioneers, and in an album called "6 and 7/8 Band" (Circle CD 301, \$2.89) they play "Tiger Rag," "High Society," and "Clarinet Marmalade" in very dulcet and delightful style—a twangy chamber music of true New Orleans charm.

—WILDER HOBSON.



Hubert S. Pruett, an "obstetrician with a hobby as a pianolist who . . .

AT PRADES (Continued from page 51)

posters proclaim that Columbia is recording the major events of the festival. The posters, by the way, are cause for raised eyebrows because under the large name of Pablo Casals one notices in smaller type the names of such other Columbia artists as Herbert von Karajan, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, and Walter Gieseking. The linking to Casals of these artists feted not long ago in the Third Reich is odd indeed.

The recordings, carried out by English engineers though financed by the American company, are being made in the *Collège Moderne de Jeunes Filles*—dubbed by the irreverent foreigners as the School for Young Filles. The girls' dining room serves as the recording studio; it is also where the orchestra rehearses. Red brocade tapestries surround the room for the double purpose of shutting out street noises and dampening an initial excess of resonance. Outside is parked a shiny blue truck, which houses the latest British tape-recording equipment.

When the idea of recording the Prades festival was first mooted, Co-

lumbia wondered whether local conditions would be favorable. Any initial misgivings proved unwarranted. Proper electric current was thought to be a major bugaboo but the Prades authorities solved this quickly by dropping a wire to the recording truck from a main overhead power line. Another anticipated difficulty was the lack of a proper studio. Yet the young fillies' dining room seems remarkably good. Occasionally the trains which pass directly behind the improvised studio ruin a section of tape. For the Casals waxings a French railway timetable has proved to be an indispensable piece of equipment.

EXACTLY at five o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday, June 4, Casals and the Swiss pianist Paul Baumgarten arrived in the studio to record the first two movements of Bach's Sonata in G minor for cello and piano. From my seat four feet behind Casals I studied the proceedings with fascination. A single microphone pickup was used, placed about three feet from the cello and fifteen feet from the piano. Each movement was recorded first in sections (to make it easier for Casals) and then in uninterrupted form. This mode of recording, I was informed, has nothing to do with long and short play. Whichever tape Casals approves

will be used for all disc speeds. On several occasions that afternoon it was necessary, because of outside noise or because of a slight musical imperfection, to remake a section of tape. Yet no matter how many times he had to repeat a portion in the midst of a movement Casals was able always to recreate perfectly the intensity and fervor of his musical conception. Never once did he question the necessity of doing the job again.

As I finish this report the clock on the thirteenth-century church of Vernet has just struck noon. Along the street below an old woman of the village clad completely in black walks toward her home. Presently a large Buick of latest and most elaborate model comes around a corner. A party of American women is off for an afternoon excursion to while away some hours until the evening concert. The old woman moves over to the protection of a doorway and gazes benignly at the bright car and its elegant passengers, but somehow the *vieille dame* with her weather-tanned skin and her bag of provisions seems much closer to Casals and Bach. For music at Prades is something other than music in Carnegie Hall. Here under the hot sun of the Pyrenees the simple and essential core of great art is revealed with awesome clarity.



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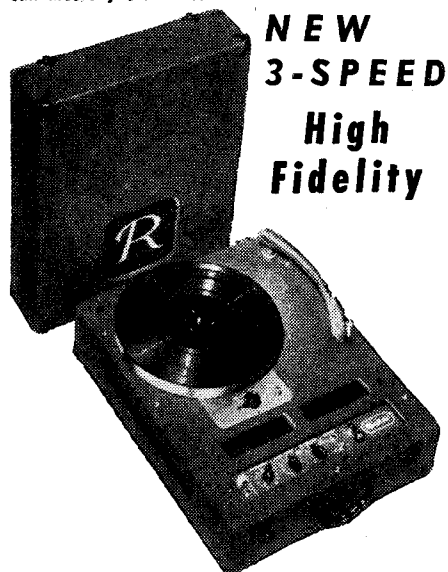
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Points on Portables

SUMMER of 1950 brings the first settled situation recordwise in two years, especially as concerns the frequently indispensable portable phonograph. Thanks to recent improvements in records and reproducing equipment, the quality standards in portables have been revised upward to the extent that a few may actually be judged in terms of real fidelity and others embody more utility, in compact form, than ever before.

At the risk of praising the 45-rpm system for the wrong thing, I would say that the self-contained RCA Victor selling at \$29.95 is the ideal answer for the person who wants music in a summer place in a minimum space. This is the one which contains its own amplifier and speaker, with the changer-player mechanism. Its performance is limited in the degree that the personal radio compares with the multi-tube console but it can make either the back or front porch a livelier place. To be sure, the owner will be dependent on the makers of 45-rpm records—largely speaking, RCA and Capitol—but for summer purposes the range is wide and inexpensive. For \$79.95 there is RCA model 9Y7, which provides an excellent radio as well as the 45-rpm player in a good wood cabinet. A small selection of records is provided with both.

In the three-speed field the range is wide, both in price and performance. There are several available makes without changer for less than fifty

dollars. One vest-pocket job trade-named Vanity Fair sells in the New York market for \$49.95. It is hardly larger than a good-sized handbag and performance characteristics are necessarily limited. It will, however, reproduce records at all speeds with reasonable clarity. Decca makes one of the same general type, which also includes AM radio, for \$44.95. Both are adequate for pop, vocalists, ensembles up to Kostelanetz-size; not recommended for more than background service in the classical repertory.

Moving into the changer-category, there are numerous possibilities. A simple solution for the records-during-summer problem is a Webster three-speed changer—about \$45, the price varying in locality—which can be jacked into most radios. Even some table models these days have such facility. Quality: fair to good, depending on the size of the radio.

Webster's self-contained changer portable, priced at \$79.95, is standard in its field. This plays all speeds automatically and is a great favorite among the college crowd. Provided the speaker is not overloaded, it will give acceptable reproduction of most records—LP or otherwise—now on the market. Similarly versatile, though with better speaker and amplifier, is the Gotham. This uses the Webster changer mechanism, with dual point, but the eight-inch speaker can accommodate more sound with less