

**Music.** *The year is supposed to belong to Johann Sebastian Bach, but despite the fuss being made over the Bach bicentenary it seems evident that when the returns are added up on December 31 the most feted composer of 1950 will be Franz Joseph Haydn. Each month brings a freshet of new Haydn recordings, and in Vienna the first volumes of a complete edition of Haydn's music are already rolling from the presses. This month we review below two recent books devoted to the composer's life and works. . . . In her review of "On Studying Singing" (page 28) Maggie Teyte makes the very shrewd observation that singers "will believe almost anything." Thus, it is valuable to have Mme. Teyte's expert assurance that Sergius Kagen's recent guide to singing is well worth believing. . . . Other books this week deal with Debussy's piano music and Handel's oratorios.*

## Austrian Music Maker

**HAYDN.** By Rosemary Hughes. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy. 244 pp. \$2.50.

**JOSEPH HAYDN, HIS ART, TIMES, AND GLORY.** By H. E. Jacob. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Rinehart & Co. 368 pp. \$5.

By C. G. BURKE

THE BENEFICENT chemistry which transmuted the seed of a wheelwright in lower Austria into a human tonal apparatus proliferous of symphonies and sonatas is a biological mystery. Haydn became a composer by bent and happy chance; he became a great one by nourishing his x-quality—his gift—with an unprecedented dosage of hard work in an extraordinarily favorable environment. His cloistered life was placid beyond compare. He died at seventy-seven the most famous composer of the preceding thirty years, after a life in which nothing violent had ever happened. He was untouched by the intellectual ferment of the times, and aloof from the resounding procession of bloody wars, including the Seven Years' War—the first world war—and the wars of the French Revolution under republican and imperial guise, which exterminated the characteristics of his century. Devout, diligent, and routinized, he made music. His conflicts and his victories were inner, no doubt the most satisfying kind for an artist, but forever invisible and unproductive for the artist's biographers.

The two new books on the composer reveal their authors' recognition of the paucity of their material. The avowal is differently accomplished: Miss Hughes narrates what is known of Haydn's life from examination of the

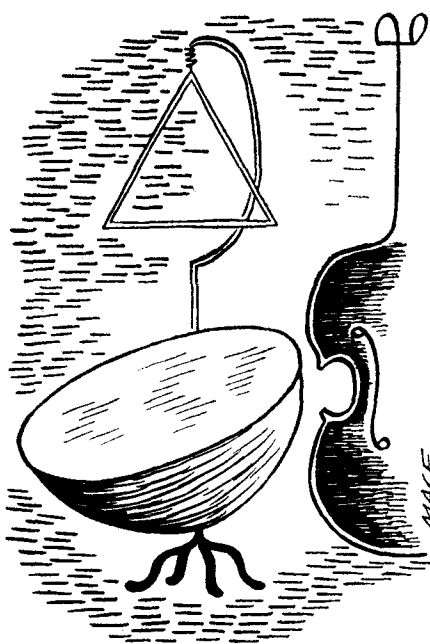
existing authorities, and Mr. Jacob, working with the same elements, attempts to supply the deficiencies in our knowledge of Haydn's personal existence by generous embellishments. Indeed, the disparity in bulk between these two biographies may be accounted for by the bulk of Jacob's conjecture. His book is rich in dubious matter following prolocutions like these: "We cannot doubt that Haydn"; "We must assume that he"; "Joseph's mother probably felt otherwise"; "he may well have murmured"; "We may well imagine"; "he might well have thought"; "He must have reasoned that"—all of which quickly succeed in exciting a reader's skepticism. The method may owe a little to Plutarch, but it owes more to Parson Weems. It seems after a time to have depressed Mr. Jacob himself, for we find careless contradictions in the text, as if he

did not care what his wordage meant as long as it was wordy. Thus a two-storeyed house is described as having "two large, stuccoed rooms." The next sentence details the six rooms on the ground floor. Two paragraphs later we find a miracle: Haydn sold a house which "had twice been burned down." An example of the composer's Christian forbearance is routed by a contrary example in the following sentence. On page 68 Haydn falls in love at twenty-seven; on page 127 "Master Haydn was in love—for the first time in his life" (at forty-seven). An important musical comparison is based on the belief that Haydn's life was twice Beethoven's; but this is to subtract nineteen years from Beethoven or add thirty-seven to Haydn.

These fatal wounds may have been inflicted in part by the translators, gifted with a faltering syntax and a carefree understanding of verbal precision; or they may be results of the general lassitude provoked by the book's tiring conjecture. It is fair to add that Mr. Jacob's musical good taste and sympathy for the work of Haydn are not those of a neophyte. It is too bad that the process of discovering this is so painful.

Thank God for the antidote of Miss Hughes's excellent "Haydn." This is a handbook of competent and unassuming scholarship typical of the series—Eric Blom's *Master Musicians*—which it truly adorns. The matter is understood and well organized; the writing is direct and literate. Her material is very similar to that of Mr. Jacob, but her exposition is nowhere padded. No psychoanalysis, no guessing, no introduction of livestock to provide a colorful background. First, the life—about as much of it as is known—, then analyses of typical works, then careful, helpful appendices. Devoted editing assigns a pertinent heading for every odd page, a procedure extremely helpful for students. The yearly calendar is very valuable and so is the catalogue. The author's musical penetration is persuasively and sometimes eloquently conveyed. Examples in musical notation are abundant in both books, but Miss Hughes has a more comprehensive selection, and it has been placed where it belongs and can be found.

Her book has a pleasant quality of emotional sensitivity illusive to analysis, so that her words and rhythm are warm when that is the prevailing tenor of her substance, and cool when events and persons dictate dispassionate reflection. We do not insist on literature in biography although we may crave it: if the facts are solid we can forgive a flabby vehicle. The sturdy, honest "Haydn" of Rosemary Hughes rides smoothly.





"There is a Debussyian magic, but it would probably take a poet to describe it."

## Magic on the Keyboard

**THE PIANO WORKS OF CLAUDE DEBUSSY.** By E. Robert Schmitz. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 236 pp. \$5.

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

THE LATE E. Robert Schmitz was a pianist and teacher who knew Debussy. In recent years he had come to be accepted by a small group headed by Virgil Thomson (who contributes an enthusiastic foreword) as a definitive interpreter of Debussy's music. Whatever one may think of Schmitz's piano playing—and opinions sharply varied—there is no doubt that he had closely identified himself with the great French composer, and his love and belief in the music shine through every page of this book.

Of the 236 pages forty-one are of a general nature, dealing with basic Debussyian concepts, a tiny smattering of biography, and some terminological background. The rest are concerned specifically with the piano works, beginning with the two "Arabesques" of 1888 and proceeding chronologically to the 1915 "Etudes." Nothing is omitted. As the treatment is largely technical ("In measures 15-16 observe the accent and tenuto of the second beat of measure 15, then render the ascending scale intelligible to set into value the successive dominant seventh—measure 16, first beat—with appoggiaturas, then tonic-seventh...") most of the book will make little sense unless the reader knows the

music well enough to visualize chapter and verse. Which means that pianists and piano students are the primary beneficiaries of Mr. Schmitz's work.

As a reference book, of course, the text is of value. Schmitz prefaces each piece under discussion with dates of composition, pertinent data, perhaps an anecdote or two. Throughout the discussions, moreover, he does valuable work stressing the fact—which deserves wider acceptance than is its lot—that there are strong classic elements in Debussy's music. As a pianist, too, Schmitz has hints and suggestions about interpretive details—especially about pedaling, which seems to be an *idée fixe* with him. He himself, in his concert appearances, used relatively little pedal—much less than other Debussy specialists like Casadesu or Gieseking—and he insists that there should be no "blurring or melting together of unrelated elements, which unfortunately happens so often."

Schmitz never quite puts his finger on the magic he is trying so hard to conjure (which does not in the least invalidate the objective, factual merits of his book). There is a Debussyian magic, but it probably would take a poet to describe it. Schmitz is too much of a musician to do this, even if he does indulge in a touch of the favorite parlor game of present-day biographers—amateur psychology-psychiatry—and even if he does occasionally slip into an ecstatic type of rich, brocade prose, which on him does not sit so well.

## Besides "Messiah"

**THE ORATORIOS OF HANDEL.** By Percy M. Young. New York: Roy Publishers. 244 pp. \$4.50.

By HERBERT WEINSTOCK

PERCY M. YOUNG is the English musician and musicologist who wrote the pleasant and useful brief life of Handel included in The Master Musicians series edited by Eric Blom. Now he has placed Handelian further in his debt by writing an entirely delightful book made up of musical history, criticism at once keen and readable, and illuminating remarks on the Handelian period and the Handelian style. Mr. Young clearly knows the music of "Jephtha" and "Samson" and "Saul" as well and as affectionately as he knows that of "Messiah." The result of his catholicity of knowledge and sympathy, unfortunately unusual, is that he has been able to give his book a structure too solid to be overborne by the fortuitous and repertoire-narrowing popularity of "Messiah."

Starting off with really enlightening chapters on the Italian origins of oratorio and Handel's apprenticeship in Italy, Mr. Young proceeds through the oratorios (except the "secular oratorios," which he leaves aside for future treatment) in chronological order. The conciseness of his style leaves him comfortable room for a valuable chapter on oratorio singers, one on the conditions of oratorio performance, and a four-page conclusion in which the essential Englishness of the Handelian oratorio is properly and humorously stressed.

In spite of "Messiah," Handel continues to be one of the least heard of the great composers. Neither an occasional singing of "Israel in Egypt" nor welcome recordings of the *concerti grossi*, harpsichord suites, and separate numbers from the oratorios and operas will alone restore the greatness of Handel to our musical public. The desirability of knowing the best things that his tender and majestic talent produced is clear. But if we are to know him—not, say, with the relative completeness with which we know Beethoven but at least with the increasing completeness with which we are being allowed to recognize Bach, Haydn, and Mozart—one prerequisite is performance of at least a dozen of the sacred oratorios, a half dozen among the odes, masques, pastorals, and serenatas, and a representative handful at least of his Italian operas.

This is an intelligent and charming book about some of the most beautiful and—in the United States, at least—most neglected music ever composed.