# PELICANS

*YOU AND MUSIC, by Christian Darnton.*
*OPERA, by E. J. Dent.*

These two little books are among the few really interesting introductory works on musical subjects that I've come across. As an engagingly written historical survey I do not think Professor Dent's book could be improved, and his historical references and parallels are so illuminating that I doubt if anyone, musically knowledgeable or otherwise, could read his book without enjoying opera more, or at least wanting to know more about it. The historical method has of course its limitations, chief of which is an implied assumption—not Professor Dent's, but perhaps the superficial reader's—that one can explain an aspect of an art by citing the historical reasons why it took the form it did. As long as one realizes clearly that Professor Dent's account of the relation between operatic gesture and ballet, and of the significance of the Handelian *ritornelli* (for instance), don't by themselves take us a step nearer to an aesthetic of the fundamentals of opera one can find them extremely valuable; and one has to admit that in its very unpretentiousness this volume is more helpful than most books (such as the Key to Opera reviewed in the last number of *Scrutiny*) which make more extravagant claims. Actually Professor Dent hardly touches on the question of Music and the Dramatic which I tried to discuss last June: by implication he does however indicate certain issues concerning music and the pictorial arts (or spectacle) which I might consider at some later date.

Mr. Darnton's volume is less successful than Professor Dent's but the task he has set himself—or has been set—is considerably more complicated. In less than 150 pages Mr. Darnton covers the physical basis of music, the nature of musical thought and musical forms, the history of notation and instrumentation, the relation between music and ritual and social function, the history of music from 1940 to 1100, the problems of popular music, of interpretation, and of active listening: so that it is not surprising that his book should appear at times somewhat cynical in its compression. I think its effectiveness might have been greater

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if its information had been less dissipated, but it is free from all the usual prejudices and makes more of the salient points essential in the initial stages of a musical education than is customary in books of this type; it impresses one throughout as being the work of a real musician. Occasionally its simplicity may be deceptive, for I'm inclined to think that some of Mr. Darnton's most acute quasi-conversational remarks could reveal their full significance only to a reader with a degree of musical knowledge such as the author says he doesn't presuppose. But this is not a point of much consequence; this book, though it might have been less perfunctory if more rigorously restricted to fundamentals, has the right kind of enthusiasm behind it, and those who, having read it, have no desire to listen to the music it refers to, can hardly be said to deserve a musical education, anyway.

There is a helpful, if apparently arbitrary, list of gramophone records as appendix.

W.H.M.

*WHAT IS ART? by D. S. MacColl.*

*MODERN ARCHITECTURE, by J. M. Richards.*

I wonder why the Penguin Publishing Co. reprinted Mr. MacColl's book. He has a lively controversial manner, now elegantly ironic, now scurrilously abusive, and a good eye for the inconsistencies of others. But nearly half the book is ephemeral matter, interesting and useful enough in its day, which has been superseded—I do not know whether he first noticed ' the existence of " symbolic " and " metaphorical " elements in technique,' but this idea is at least implicit in most recent writing about art. The liveliest chapters for the contemporary reader are those in which he takes side against Roger Fry on Cézanne, the Post-Impressionists and others. The *advocatus diaboli* is always welcome and one agrees when Mr. MacColl refuses to admit excessive claims for their greatness, especially in the case of Matisse. He makes it clear that in theory he has no interest in mere realism, though I fancy most of the academic critics do that. Nevertheless his destructive analyses fail to convince. He describes pictures that are not typical or he cavils at details of others on mainly realistic grounds, saying that a serviette looks like tin or a hat is not on a head, which observations are either nothing to do with the case—to say that the serviette was

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