

Pickings From the Air

By Leonard Liebbling

THESE days one misses the Saturday Metropolitan Opera and Sunday Philharmonic. Only excerpts from the operas substitute for the entire performance, but some regular symphonic programs remain, with more to come, and various "Pop" orchestras are gradually joining the more serious organizations for summer activity. No need to worry, therefore, about plenty of the best music for its army of addicts.

The taste of the dialers is heartening, for whenever polls are held to determine the relative popularity of music on the air, the selections made rank as tops. In the symphonic field, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms—yes, Sibelius too—usually lead, with Tchaikowsky, Franck, Mozart and Dvorak not far away. In operatic choice, Wagner of course holds abiding first place.

It was interesting recently to note whom the readers of MOVIE AND RADIO GUIDE elected as leaders in the vocal "classical" solo department. They were Nelson Eddy, outstanding in number of ballots; then followed in order, Margaret Sparks, Jessica Dragonette, Jeanette MacDonald, Jean Dickenson, Donald Dickson, Grace Moore, Lily Pons, Lucille Manners, Jack Baker, Frank Munn, Lawrence Tibbett, Gladys Swarthout, Marian Anderson, Mary Eastman, John Charles Thomas, Felix Knight. To my mind, Lily Pons should have had higher rating, and also Tibbett, Thomas, Anderson and Knight. However, the figures are the result of 830,000 votes, and perhaps if several million had been received, the results might have been altogether different.

Of all the Latin-American rhythms which have crept into our popular and some of our symphonic music during the past few years, none is more characteristic or compelling than that of the tango.

Where did it come from originally? Not from Spain, as some imagine, and not from Argentina, as most guesses have it. Then where? From the African jungle, like the forbear of jazz. The savages had a dance called "tangano," and tied it with their naked feet while primitive instruments sounded the rhythm and tunes for their weird rites. Slay while men saw the dance



Captain William H. Santelmann is director of the U. S. Marine Band, which will be heard Saturday, CBS

and came away to tell of its strange, sensuous charm. Later the Africans were taken to Central America as slaves, and the "tangano" accompanied them to the western hemisphere. Slaves turned up too along the Platte River, boundary between Uruguay and Argentina. There the gauchos of the pampas saw the dance, stole it for their own, and modified some of its early savagery. From the Argentine, the new tango spread to Europe and then to the United States, where it had an immediate enthusiastic reception. A far cry from the wild African jungle to the gilded American dance emporiums of today!

New Books and Records Reviewed

UNFINISHED SYMPHONY, No. 8, in B minor. By Franz Schubert. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Bruno Walter.

Admittedly influenced by the success of book-publishers with their high-class reprints of standard works at lowered prices, Victor now issues its new Black Label Classics, "popular editions" of former quality releases and currently selling for 75 cents, 10-inch size, and \$1, 12-inch size. (Plus 25 cents for albums to contain the larger examples.)

In effect, the Black Labels are repressings from master matrices whose previous cost made it difficult for many of us to build up any sort of extensive library of the best records.

Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony" is a convincing proof of the excellence of the Black Label undertaking. Clarified tone and fine balance and precision supplement the affectionate and stylistic interpretation of Bruno Walter and the famous Vienna organization.

THE PIANO: Its History, Makers, Players and Music. By Albert E. Wier. (Longmans, Green & Co., New York.)

Rich treasure for piano practitioners and lovers, this unique book contains material heretofore scattered through dozens of separate specialized volumes. Now, in this single publication, one reads about early and modern pianos and the music composed for both; about pedagogy, technique and interpretation; the keyboard in ensemble performance; the leading repertoire of various periods; biographies of pianists past and present; listings of phonograph records devoted to the piano. Wier's articles are as factual and direct as his compilations are practical in content and arrangement.

MUSIC: ITS HISTORY AND ENJOYMENT. By Glenn Dillard Gunn. Harper & Brothers.

Totally different from Krenek's book is this one by a former Chicago critic, an excellent pianist, now teaching in Washington, D. C.

Gunn endeavors (and successfully too) to contribute to our understanding and appreciation of all music; to give a broad panorama of the history of music from primitive times to the present day; to elucidate the technique of music, especially the subjective and psychological factors and powers that make the enjoyment of music an emotional experience.

Definitions and musical examples illustrate the author's meanings clearly. Three chapters are devoted to American music, the last one featuring analyses of twentieth-century examples.

Musician of the Week

Sergei Rachmaninoff

"I HAVE lost everything—my library, my manuscripts, my house. But all that is not important. What matters most is that I have lost my country."

Sergei Rachmaninoff of Russia nodded his head in mournful understanding as Pablo Casals of Spain (world's greatest cellist) poured out his story after the close of the Spanish Civil War last year. Both men were appearing at last summer's Lucerne Music Festival in Switzerland. One a victim of the Left and the other of the Right, both now found themselves members of that rapidly growing procession of heart-sick,

casting is the only thing he listens to on the radio.

Rachmaninoff and Fritz Kreisler are the only great contemporary musicians who have not yet been heard on the air. Rachmaninoff's early objection to radio was based on the fact that he considered it a bad reproduction medium for the piano. However, gradually he has been persuaded to change his mind, and it may be that in the not too distant future American dialers may yet know him not only as a composer but as one of the outstanding pianists of our time. Since leaving Russia, Rachmaninoff has devoted himself almost wholly to the



Sergei Rachmaninoff, almost the only great contemporary musician who has not broadcast, may change his mind about radio soon. Since leaving Russia the composer-pianist-conductor has devoted himself to the piano (right)

homesick exiles cast out by their own people yet acclaimed by all the rest of the world. Casals at that time was the latest to join the ranks; Rachmaninoff enjoys the bitter distinction of having started the weary procession twenty-three years ago.

In those years, since he crossed the Finnish border in 1917, in flight from the Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff has achieved the cold comfort of world citizenship. He has hardly needed more passport than his reputation as one of the greatest of contemporary composers and pianists. But in his heart he echoes the words of Casals.

Closest and most familiar to him of all the countries that have welcomed him is America. Here, more than anywhere, the ache of exile lessens somewhat. Because of that, and because of the security and safety he can still find here now, at the age of sixty-seven, he has decided to become an American citizen. That, however, does not mean that he considers himself cut off forever from Europe. A daughter in France whose husband is in the French army is more than enough to keep him anxiously waiting for cables, studying the newspapers and tuning in faithfully to Raymond Gram Swing, whose news-

piano. He has done practically no conducting (although he was for some years conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra) and comparatively little composing.

As he talks, in precise, correct English, his hands are busy fitting another of an endless chain of half-inch demicolonized cigarettes into a holder. They take only a minute to smoke and he is never seen without one. His long, lined face, with its expression of an anxious retriever, is probably the most melancholy face in music. Immensely tall, he plods wearily onto the stage and stares gloomily at the audience before striking the first two or three introductory chords. However, he denies vigorously that he is mournful while he plays.

"I am not sad when I play," he protests. I enjoy playing. The stage is my life. I would die if I lost the stage. So how could I be sad when I play?

An aristocrat in more than his piano playing, Rachmaninoff's exquisite courtesy stamps him as belonging to a vanished era. His music, too, is not contemporary in the sense of being "modernistic." But it has the timeless quality which marks it as immortal.

—Viva Liebbling.