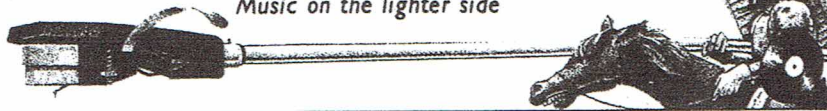


Nights at the Round Table

Music on the lighter side



Brass & Military



Harry Mortimer on Brass, an autobiography written with Alan Lynton (Alpha Books: £8.95), appears in nice time for its subject's 80th birthday on April 10th. I have often been struck by the resemblance between the Mortimer and Strauss families—a father and three sons, all immersed in music, with the eldest son outstanding in each case.

The book opens: "1902 was a good year—the Boer War came to an end, Foden's Band was founded, Black Dyke achieved maximum marks at the National (and Empire) Championship, and I entered the world. My father's instant reaction was 'I'll make him the best cornet player in England'. So is one's destiny decided at birth." The birth was at Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire, where father Fred had been appointed bandmaster of the local band at the age of 21.

Harry started on the cornet at about five years of age and at nine brought home the first of what is estimated to be about 350 medals and trophies earned by his playing. In 1910, Fred Mortimer was appointed to the Luton Red Cross Band and Harry became a member as a matter of course, standing on a ginger-beer case at contests to make him look less incongruous and enable him to see the conductor. While still a boy he was appointed to conduct the Luton Junior Band.

In 1923, the Luton band made history by becoming the first brass band from the South to win the National Championship. By this time Harry's younger brothers, Alex and Rex, were playing too—euphonium, not cornet—and it was Alex who led the way back North again. He was appointed to Foden's Band and soon father Fred, Harry and Rex all joined him. The band came to be called the "Mortimer Band" and its successes in the major contests were quite phenomenal.

In addition to being solo cornet with Foden's, Harry played trumpet in the Hallé, Liverpool and BBC Northern Orchestras, and still found time to be Professor of Trumpet at the Royal Manchester College of Music for several years. He stayed with Foden's until 1942, when he was appointed Supervisor of Brass and Military Bands at the BBC, an appointment he held until he had to retire under the Corporation's age rules. It was during his years with the BBC that the urge to conduct became irresistible. It is, of course, by his conducting of massed bands in particular, training bands for contests, adjudicating here and abroad, and similar activities, that the younger generation knows him best.

All this and a lot more is told in racy style and with humour in this impressively-produced and lavishly-illustrated volume. There are also many entertaining stories, true and apocryphal.

As Fred Mortimer's ambition for his eldest son was that he should become the best cornet-player in England, it is right and proper that the first of a two-record set called "Man of Brass" (EMI @ DUO130; TC-DUO130) released simultaneously with the autobiography, should be devoted to cornet solos and duets. Some of the recordings go back as far as the late 1920s but their sound, as now refurbished, is remarkably fresh and true. They include old favourites such as *Shylock*; *Zelda*; *Hailstorm* and the duet which Harry wrote for Jack Mackintosh and himself to play, and to which he gave the apt name *Mac and Mort*. There is also his famous recording of the Haydn Trumpet Concerto in E flat with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by George Weldon. These demonstrate admirably

how one critic came to say that Harry Mortimer does not play, he sings. The second record displays him as conductor of a wide variety of music. It ranges from the Cantaloube *Bailèro*, Grieg's *Spring* and Gilbert Vinter's *Blazon to The Barber of Seville Overture*, *The Ride of the Valkyries* and Bliss's *Kenilworth*. The bands heard individually include the Morris Concert Band, the Fairey Band, the All-Star Brass and Men O' Brass, and there are also combinations of leading bands recorded at the Royal Albert Hall concerts which conclude the National Championship festivities each year. A thoroughly worthy tribute to a man who, by following in the line of succession to John Gladney, Edwin Swift, Alex Owen, William Rimmer and William Halliwell, has far exceeded his father's ambition for him. W.A.C.

Miscellaneous



ROBYN ARCHER SINGS BRECHT. London Sinfonietta / Dominic Muldowney. HMV © ASD4166; TC-ASD4166.

The young Australian singer Robyn Archer has shown here great enterprise in her choice of songs, for apart from such established favourites as *Alabama Song* and the *Song of Surabaya Johnny*, both products of Brecht's collaboration with Kurt Weill, she has also selected songs by Hanns Eisler, a pupil of Schoenberg and Paul Dessau, once an assistant to Bruno Walter and Otto Klemperer. As an artist who has appeared in her own one-woman shows she seems to me to possess the correct vocal requirements for this music which never strays far away from the intimate late-night world of cabaret and revue. Brecht himself believed that his songs "should communicate the attitude of the writer" and as John Willett continues in his absorbing sleeve-note he "has to be performed in a language that the hearer will understand and by a singer who speaks direct to every member of the audience". In this Robyn Archer is admirably aided and abetted by the London Sinfonietta with notable contributions from John Constable on the piano and harmonium and Timothy Walker on the guitar. Since the recording clearly delineates the instrumental lines of the ensemble this seems to me a self-recommending issue. The difference between cassette and record quality is marginal, though some listeners may prefer the slightly more intimate balance between vocalist and instrumentalists I noted on the cassette.

ADRIAN EDWARDS.

AS TIME GOES BY. Benjamin Luxon (bar); National Philharmonic Orchestra / Owain Arwel Hughes. RCA Red Seal © RCALP6015; RCAK6015.

This is a most enjoyable follow-up to Benjamin Luxon's record "Some Enchanted Evenings" (RCA RL25320, 5/81) which figured in my "Critics' Choice" list last year. The arrangements are informed with the touch of someone who knows these film scores intimately, but it is Luxon's handling of the songs that one admires so much; you might think with a voice of his size that such material would wither on impact, but he manages to produce just the right degree of intimacy so that you never feel that here is an opera singer doing his 'bit' for the popular repertoire. As for the songs (they include *As time goes by*; *My foolish heart*; *Moon river*; *Gigi*; *Love is a many-splendoured thing*), the titles speak for themselves. *As time goes by*, is given a most

evocative treatment with the soloist taking over from the celebrated piano introduction in a gentle hum; this song had been written 12 years earlier, and it was Max Steiner's brilliant decision to use it in *Casablanca*. Luxon gives Victor Young's *My foolish heart* a most touching rendition, making it sound like a brand-new ballad, while *Laura* has a suitably spooky prelude and postlude complementing Mercer's lyric about the face in the misty light and the footsteps that you hear in the hall. Another *tour de force* is *Spring spring spring* which vibrates with the vernal freshness of April, while a trumpeter decorates the scene with a *Wunderhorn* obligato. *Gigi*, one of Loewe's strong diatonic tunes, receives just the right degree of tenderness from Luxon, while in contrast *Love is a many-splendoured thing* rings out loud and clear, with the 20th Century Fox fanfare reminding us of Alfred Newman's opening title-music which filled the stereophonic sound systems of cinemas in the 1950s as the cameras rolled over the panoramic coast line of Hong Kong. The recording is even finer than the one made by this team on their last collaboration, and I have no hesitation in declaring this issue the stuff of which 'desert island' selections are made.

ADRIAN EDWARDS.

Classical Pops

KETELBEY. ORCHESTRAL WORKS. Laurence Dale (ten); †Michael Reeves (pno); †Ambrosian Chorus; London Promenade Orchestra / Alexander Faris. Philips digital © 6514 152; TC 7337 152.

In a Chinese temple garden. In a monastery garden. Sanctuary of the heart. Bank Holiday. Dance of the merry mascots. In a Persian market. In the mystic land of Egypt. Bells across the meadows. The clock and the Dresden figure. With honour crowned.

Albert William Ketelbey was born in Birmingham on August 4th, 1875, and William Aston was a name under which he wrote two or three compositions. No one excelled Ketelbey in expressing the spirit of his time in terms of light music. He was not only a great tunesmith but also a well-trained and sensitive musician. In the years of the First World War, and the decades immediately following, his music was heard everywhere but more often than not in truncated versions played by small and frequently inadequate groups. It is good therefore to have full-scale versions such as are heard here. Ketelbey's scoring is worthy of a full orchestra, and the sparingly used voices have real parts to play in the orientally-inclined and other romances. The piano too adds piquancy to such pieces as *The clock and the Dresden figures*, which I have long known and enjoyed, and the *Dance of the merry mascots*, which I do not recall. The latter, dating from 1932, starts in provocatively tinkling style, followed by a reference to Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*, after which the music takes an oriental turn which is followed by a section in Spanish dance rhythms. Weber's waltz returns eventually and the jolly little piece ends with clock chimes followed by *fortissimo* chords. Splendid performances and equally splendid digital recording.

W.A.C.

J. STRAUSS II. DANCE MUSIC. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan. DG digital © 2532 026; TC 3302 026. From 2741 003 (8/81). Kaiser Waltz, Op. 437. Tritsch-Tratsch Polka, Op. 214. Rosen aus dem Süden, Op. 388. Annen Polka, Op. 117. Wein, Weib, Gesang, Op. 333. Auf der Jagd, Op. 373. Der Zigeunerbaron—Overture.

This second instalment from Karajan's Strauss box is slightly less attractive than the first (reviewed last month on page 1295). The *Kaiser*, after a refined introduction, refuses to catch fire completely although it is beautifully played. The rest of the programme goes well enough: the highlight is the *Zigeunerbaron* Overture which sounds freshly minted. The digital sound is firm, full-bodied and brilliant. I.M.