

MAN, MIND AND MUSIC. By Frank Howes. (Secker and Warburg; 12s.6d.)

This stimulating book provokes more questions than it answers. Its lack of conclusiveness may be partly due to the fact that it was not designed as a continuous argument, but grew out of papers and lectures given on different occasions; but it is also inherent in the range and depth of the problems discussed—the relation of music to anthropology, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Under these four main headings the book opens fascinating lines of thought—for example, has music an ethical content, is there a musical counterpart to logical thinking, how far is the personality of a composer revealed in his music?—and challenges further study. And on two points the author makes no secret of his convictions—that music can throw light on other branches of knowledge and they in turn on music, and that music has a moral, emotional or philosophical content—in other words, a ‘meaning’—related to the rest of human experience, and is not a purely abstract and self-contained art: a view debated by professional musicians, but one which seems to accord with the age-long response to music of the human mind and heart.

ROSEMARY HUGHES

SERGEI RACHMANINOV. By John Culshaw. (Dobson; 8s.6d.)

Rachmaninov is one of the most problematical figures, both as a personality and a composer, amongst contemporary musicians. By this it is not intended to imply, as some purists have maintained about composers generally, that the relationship between the man and the musician is non-existent or unimportant: indeed, one of the chief merits of Mr Culshaw's book is its excellent balance and sanity, the admirable unity and synthesis which have been achieved in spite of the ‘life and works’ method. Such a method is very frequently the most satisfactory for the discussion of a composer, but it cannot be successful unless the writer has a very real familiarity and sympathy with his subject. These qualities, as his book undoubtedly proves, Mr Culshaw has in abundance; and he has at the same time preserved a lucid critical sense and detachment.

The account of the life of this almost Chekhovian character is fascinating, and one only regrets that more time was not spent in exploring in greater detail his early life as a uniformed student in Sverev's house, for example, or even more, the extraordinary collapse after the failure of the first symphony and the powerful influence of Dr Dahl. Rachmaninov's psychiatric condition suggests a comparison to that of his idol Tchaikovsky, though it was, of course, quite different and has not yet been satisfactorily explained. However, this task, as Mr Culshaw has tacitly and wisely admitted, awaits the doctor rather than the musician.

In his account of the music the author is rarely commonplace and often instructive, rarely untidy in expression and often penetrating in thought: and, unlike many writers, he does inspire one