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# THE RECORD CABINET

by HOWARD L. GOODKIND

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THE past few months have added many new albums to the already phenomenal collection that is available to the record-buying public. Some have been excellent, more of them good, and a few frankly disappointing. *Handel's Messiah*,<sup>1</sup> *Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony*,<sup>2</sup> Ezio Pinza's *Mozart Arias*,<sup>3</sup> the *Bach Arias*<sup>4</sup> sung by Marian Anderson, *Handel's Great Elopement*<sup>5</sup> and Ravel's recently issued *Daphnis and Chloe Suite*<sup>6</sup> come to mind as the better releases. Among those that could have been improved were Serkin's *Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1*,<sup>7</sup> the Helen Traubel *Italian Arias*<sup>8</sup> and the little-performed *Second Symphony*<sup>9</sup> of Tchaikovsky.

Out of the entire crop of releases, however, three sets are outstanding: one because of its great scope and contribution to the world of music; another because of the new process employed to record it; and the third, because of the superb quality of the performance.

The first set is the complete collection of *Handel's Concerti Grossi*<sup>10</sup> in three albums, performed by the Adolf Busch Chamber Players. The Columbia people have displayed unusual courage and public spirit in manufacturing a set of this type which, despite its excellence and worth, will probably never make money in the record-stores. Its price is a considerable outlay for the average collector.

The *Concerti Grossi* were composed and put down on paper — rough drafts, final copies, etc. — in the incredibly short period of one month. There are twelve of them, and each is so different from the next that the entire set may be played at one sitting without causing the listener to feel that he is revisiting familiar ground.

The concerto grosso is a form of music which

preceded and offered a model for the concerto as we know it today. Instead of pitting a solo instrument against the entire orchestra as does our modern concerto, the concerto grosso contrasts one group of instruments against another. Handel's interpretations of this musical form were never twice alike — some with four movements, some with five, some with six. All vary in character with the master's mood. Some are joyous and bright — others gloomy and pensive. All, however, are carefully thought out and stocked with interesting harmonies and themes, set off by imaginative rhythmic devices.

Mr. Busch handles the entire set with an admirable technique and skillful manipulation of tone and color patterns.

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From a purely mechanical point of view, far and away the outstanding recording of the year thus far is the breathtaking performance of *Beethoven's Eroica Symphony*<sup>11</sup> by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Victor de Sabata. This album was issued by Decca as part of its "ffrr" (full frequency range recording) series, which is recorded and manufactured in England. I use the adjective "breathtaking" without experiencing any compunction. This set has the finest tone rendition of any recording I have ever heard including the plastics that have been released on this side of the ocean. Whatever the new process may be that Decca uses to record its music, it has made possible a strikingly new and worthwhile treatment of both the standard classics and less familiar modern music.

This new *Eroica* puts the Bruno Walter, Toscanini and Weingartner recordings out of the picture. From the first, powerful chords that open the symphony to the crashing coda of the last movement, this performance is an endless succession of magnificent effects. French horns sound richer than they do in concert halls. Violins are as thin and fine as spun-glass and the percussion section takes on brilliance and power

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<sup>11</sup> Decca EDA19, 7 records, \$15.75.

<sup>1</sup> Columbia MM666, 19 records, \$24.60.

<sup>2</sup> Columbia MM688, 4 records, \$5.85.

<sup>3</sup> Columbia MM643, 4 records, \$5.85.

<sup>4</sup> Victor DM108, 3 records, \$3.85.

<sup>5</sup> Victor DM1093, 3 records, \$3.85.

<sup>6</sup> Decca EDA29, 3 records, \$7.00.

<sup>7</sup> Columbia MM652, 6 records, \$9.35.

<sup>8</sup> Columbia MM675, 3 records, \$4.60.

<sup>9</sup> Columbia MM673, 5 records, \$7.10.

<sup>10</sup> Columbia MM685, 25 records, \$34.30.

that must be heard to be believed. Conductor de Sabata here proves himself to be among the world's finest interpreters of Beethoven.

Owners of record-changers that operate on the "knife" principle will find that the discs are one-half inch smaller than our twelve inch records and that they slip through two or more at a time. According to the classical music department at Decca, however, steps have been taken to mold all future sets in the standard American size.

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The Victor recordings of *Bach's Second and Third Suites in B Minor and D Major*,<sup>12</sup> and the *Second and Fifth Brandenburg Concertos*,<sup>13</sup> all performed at Tanglewood, Massachusetts, by Dr. Serge Koussevitsky and the Boston orchestra comprise another superb performance. In each of these albums, Bach's delicate and complicated improvisations are played meticulously, leaving little to be desired. It is always a pleasure to hear these pieces played, as they were scored, by small orchestras using authentic eighteenth-century instruments. The Boston group uses only half or less of its members in these recordings as contrasted to the Mengelberg recordings (also Victor) which employ the full modern orchestra with less pleasing results.

Especially noteworthy is the third movement of the Second Brandenburg Concerto with its spirited, staccato trumpet solo. Roger Voisin uses a tiny trumpet only ten inches long to perform the passage. The midget, valveless instrument is called a clarino and even experienced trumpeters shy away from it in fear of the flawless technique that it requires.

The masterly piano-playing of Lukas Foss in the Fifth Concerto also helps to make this album a memorable item for collectors. His performance is remarkable for its control and evenness; parts of his fluid cadenza are machine-like in their preciseness, yet free from the heavy-handed coloring that too many pianists allow to taint their Bach. Both albums are superior with respect to surface and instrument-balance. There are no disturbing mechanical defects. Although a choice between the excellent Busch recordings of the Brandenburg Concertos (Columbia) and the Koussevitsky album is difficult, prospective buyers would do well to choose the latter, which has better over-all performance quality.

<sup>12</sup> Victor DM1118, 4 records, \$4.85.

<sup>13</sup> Victor DM1123, 5 records, \$5.85.



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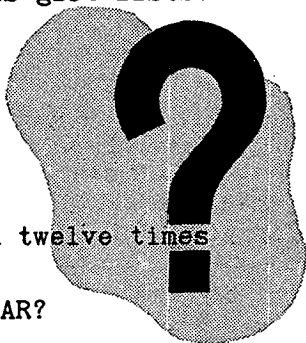
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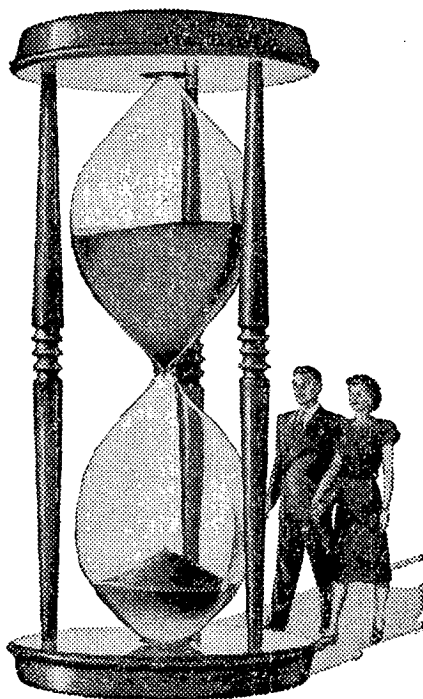
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