

# Rolls and Discs

## By LAWRENCE JACOB ABBOTT

### Phonograph Records

**SYMPHONY NO. 1, IN C MINOR** (Brahms). Played by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokowski. In ten parts, on five records, with spoken analysis on sixth record. Victor.

**SYMPHONY NO. 8, IN B MINOR—"Unfinished"** (Schubert). Played by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokowski. In six parts, on three records. Victor.

A good many people, having heard Stokowski's spectacular recordings of Liszt's "Second Hungarian Rhapsody" and Weber's "Invitation to the Waltz," have no doubt been looking forward to something more substantial from the same orchestra and conductor. This month brings that something—twofold. By its performance of the Brahms symphony the Philadelphia Orchestra has filled a serious gap in electrically recorded music. There is already an electrical recording of the "Unfinished Symphony" available, but a performance as satisfying as this new one justifies its own appearance.

The Brahms symphony is one of heroic dimensions. It needs an impressive reproduction—or else it is apt to sound ineffective. From this standpoint, the Philadelphia's performance is a fortunate one. Throughout the orchestra remains a towering giant. For instance, after the *fortissimo* passage for full orchestra in the slow introduction to the first movement, the solo oboe sounds puny. That is as it should be. It is a mistake in an orchestral recording to allow a single instrument to sound as near as in a chamber music concert in a small room. And it is not that the oboe sounds too faintly, but that the full orchestra is so forceful. To get such volume, such a closeness of detail, and such a feeling of the nearness of the instruments is a real feat of orchestral recording.

In his conception of the symphony, Stokowski has shown a vivid sense of its nobility, of the struggle it portrays, and of its final mood of triumph. In the last movement he reaches his greatest heights. He builds up the movement steadily to an almost overpowering climax with the entrance of the choral-like theme, announced by the full orchestra. If Stokowski falls down anywhere, it is in the two middle movements. It seems as if he became too instilled with the bigness of the symphony; the orchestra appears to be shouting its message the whole time. In the second movement this lack of repression is especially noticeable. Stokowski does not always follow the score literally in the matter of observing *pianissimos*—and when he does depart, he is not always successful.

Though the recording was made in the Academy of Music, it shows little of the concert-hall echo which pleases some gramophiles and annoys others. Its brilliance perhaps makes unavoidable an occasional touch of hoarseness in the tone. One detail which is unfortunate is the beginning of Part 8. I cannot make out whether the horn soloist is flat (nearly half a tone flat, at that) or whether the recording instrument caused a faulty pitch. In either case, it is a pity to have such a blemish in a recorded performance which reaches the high-water mark in so many ways.

An interesting innovation is Stokowski's analysis of the symphony. Helpful explanations like this ought to be appreciated by many people.

Schubert's ever-beautiful "Unfinished Symphony" receives exquisite, if less fierce, treatment from the baton of the Philadelphia conductor. In speaking of the Brahms symphony, Stokowski says:

"Brahms loved melody so much that often he combined two or more melodies together at the same time." Somehow, that sentence peculiarly fits Schubert. Schubert's counterpoint is so lyric that one sometimes catches one's self vainly trying to hum both melody and counter-melody together! Stokowski and the Philadelphians have made a performance of this symphony worthy to be a standard by which to judge others.

**PARSIFAL—Good Friday Spell** (Wagner). Played by the State Symphony Orchestra, Berlin, conducted by Siegfried Wagner. In three parts, on two records, the fourth part being **DIE MEISTERSINGER—Apprentice's Dance** (Wagner). Odeon.

This is an unexpectedly gratifying performance. The interpretation shows an understanding of the spiritual quality inherent in the Good Friday music. Little of Wagner's music contains the feeling of reverence which is found in this excerpt—a mood in many ways the same as that of his "Siegfried Idyll." The orchestra is worth hearing. Its wind band has a nicety of balance, and its stringed instruments a soft, silky tone quality. The "Meistersinger" selection—one of the most delightful passages of the opera—is played with lightness and delicacy. Is not familiarity with contemporary and almost-contemporary popular music a handicap? For instance, near the end of this record the brasses solemnly announce the opening half-dozen notes of "Where Did You Get That Girl?" (A few months ago I was accused of implying that Beethoven cribbed from Sir Arthur Sullivan. I hope no one will accuse me now of suggesting Wagner's dependence on American ragtime.)

**MINUET—Opus 14, No. 1** (Paderewski); **MOONLIGHT SONATA, Opus 27, No. 2—Adagio Sostenuto** (Beethoven). Played by Ignace Jan Paderewski. Victor.

When Paderewski plays, we learn that to be a great pianist is not so much a matter of perfect fingering as it is of sureness and eloquence in interpretation. His familiar, tuneful minuet becomes first as light as gossamer, then as thunderous as artillery. Does not hearing the first movement of the "Moonlight Sonata" make one impatient to have him play it to the finish? Perhaps he will for us, later. The piano reproduction seems better in the minuet than in the sonata; that is probably because the middle register, which is the hardest to record, is more prominent in the sonata.

**PRESIDENT COOLIDGE WELCOMES COLONEL LINDBERGH—Washington, D. C., June 11, 1927.** Address by President Calvin Coolidge. In three parts, on two records, the fourth part being **COLONEL LINDBERGH REPLIES TO PRESIDENT COOLIDGE.** Address by Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh. Victor.

**ADDRESS BEFORE THE PRESS CLUB, Washington, D. C., June 11, 1927.** Address by Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh. In two parts. Victor.

There is something quite stirring about the surging, high-pitched enthusiasm of those who welcomed Colonel Lindbergh, even when their cheers are frozen into wax. These three discs reproduce what was actually sent into the ether by the National Broadcasting Company. It is interesting historically, not only because of the occasion but as an example of the art of radio broadcasting in 1927.

**THE MESSIAH—"He is the Lamb of God"** (Handel); **ELIJAH—He is Watching Over Israel** (Mendelssohn). Sung by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, directed by Anthony C. Lund. Victor.

These are as different from the early electrical Mormon Tabernacle Choir recordings as day is from night. The voices are well-balanced, they have volume, and they

separate out clearly in the contrapuntal singing. The acoustics of the Tabernacle can be appreciated.

**DER ROSENKAVALIER—Waltz** (Richard Strauss). Played by the Orchestra of the State Opera House, Berlin, conducted by E. uard Mörke. In two parts. Odeon.

Rich harmonies and skillful orchestration make this suavely conducted waltz a pleasant one to listen to. A praiseworthy recording—without stridency, although the orchestra's brilliance in the upper register is almost overpowering. Its violins are pleasing in tone.

**HEBREW MELODY** (Achroon); **ZAPATEADO** (Sarate). Played by Jascha Heifetz. Victor.

**LA ROMANESCA** (Gaillarde); **SOUVENIR D MOSCOW** (Wieniawski). Played by Misha Piatro. Brunswick.

There is something infectious in the gayety of "Zapateado"—and something uncanny in the violinist's skill which it uncovers. The "Hebrew Melody" is slower, more expressive, and brings into active Heifetz's rich lower tones. Its piano accompaniment is worthy of attention. Piatro's two selections are simple and melodious and are played sensuously.

**LULLABY** (Rossetti-Scott); **I WOULD WEAR A SONG FOR YOU** (Adams-O'Hara). Sung by Claire Dux. Brunswick.

**IL BACIO** (Arditi); **CIRIBIRIBIN** (Pestalozzi). Sung by Lucrezia Bori. Victor.

Sung softly to a rocking, rhythmic piano accompaniment, "Lullaby" is a charming song. The other three selections on the two records are either mediocre or trashy.

**SOLILOQUY** (Bloom); **WHEN DAY IS DONE** (Katscher). Played by Paul Whiteman and his Concert Orchestra. Victor.

"Soliloquy" is an interesting bit of orchestration in the jazz idiom. Its color is bizarre; its harmonies pungent. The use of two pianos as an instrumental group and of reed instruments as percussion deserve comment. "When Day Is Done," so to relate, is saccharine, played in what might be called "late Paramount style."

**HEAR, DE LAM'S A-CRYIN'; EZEKIEL SAW DE WHEEL.** (Negro Spirituals, arranged Lawrence Brown.) Sung by Paul Robeson and Lawrence Brown. Victor.

Robeson's singing contains a spiritual quality (I am using "spiritual" as an adjective, not a noun) which puts it in the class of really great music. "Hear, De Lam's A-Cryin'," sung as a duet with I accompanist, has this quality. "Ezekiel Saw de Wheel" offers sharp contrast, being more in the style of the usual colored quartet repertory.

**IMPRESSIONS OF LONDON—St. Margaret's Church, Westminster; Oh God, Our Help Ages Past.** Played by Stanley Roper. Victor.

A record that is worth hearing and owning, in my humble opinion, merely because it records Big Ben striking nine—nine wonderful musical tones.

### Piano Rolls

**POLONAISE IN C MINOR, Opus 40, No. 3** (Chopin). Played by Harold Bauer. Decca.

This is Chopin completely out of the effeminate, long-haired class. Bauer's powerful interpretation contains almost eloquence.

**RHAPSODIE IN E FLAT, Opus 119, No. 3** (Brahms). Played by Frank Sheridan. Decca.

One of Brahms's noblest piano works played with satisfying vigor. Such a pianist vindicates the piano style of Brahms. His heavy, growing bass in violation of musical theory—but what ruggedness it holds!