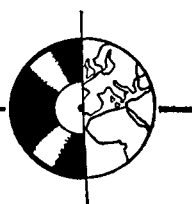


THE OTHER SIDE

(IMPORTED RECORDINGS)



LONDON.
IT WAS courageous of Decca even to consider a complete "St. Matthew Passion" in these austere times. HMV's dubbing of a wartime German set was not really satisfactory; the performance was badly cut and left much to be desired, in spite of Karl Erb's incomparable singing of the Narrator's lines. Furthermore, a text of this kind, which is familiar to countless people who may never before have heard Bach's Passion, should be given in a language that the audience can understand. Bach's music is so closely wedded to the words that a foreign language is more of a barrier here even than in the opera house.

The performance, familiar to London music lovers for many years, is given by the Bach Choir under its conductor, Dr. Reginald Jacques. It is so nearly complete that it is difficult to justify those cuts that were made, the only serious one being the

bass aria with viol da gamba obbligato. The soloists range from mediocrity to excellence, the outer limits being represented by the two female voices (Elsie Suddaby and Kathleen Ferrier). Bach may be partly to blame for this discrepancy, for I have never yet heard the "St. Matthew" with a really good soprano or a really bad alto. The Narrator, Eric Greene, would be excellent were he not quite so self-conscious and "arty"; he entirely lacks the simplicity and burning conviction with which Karl Erb endowed this noble part. Henry Cummings, as Christ, starts disappointingly but improves greatly as the work proceeds; William Parsons gives a very good account of the bass arias, his singing of the beautiful air "Make thee clean my Heart from Sin" is quite lovely; the minor roles in the narrative are very well handled by Bruce Boyce and Gordon Clinton.

The orchestra, conducted by Dr. Jacques, is excellent throughout; the choir suffers somewhat in the recording process, for the big choruses tend to sound woolly—the chorales on the other hand come across beautifully. It is difficult for one who has heard the performances of Dr. Jacques Easter after Easter for more than a decade to criticize his reading objectively; there is no real yardstick in this country by which to measure it. He tends to take rather slow tempi, with the result that here and there he entirely misses Bach's dramatic effects. This is particularly noticeable in the accompaniment to the alto recitative "O Gracious God!", where, instead of scourging, we merely hear dotted quavers and semiquavers. He is altogether a little too suave.

Technically, the recording varies a good deal, both in quality and in dynamic level. The soloists are generally too loud relative to choir and orchestra, and the female voices occasionally overload and distort. The orchestra is beautifully captured, and never before on records has the continuo harpsichord sounded so delightful. In spite of many shortcomings, these forty-two sides embrace a recording of the first importance.

Two months ago I wrote enthusiastically about Flagstad's "Tristan" excerpt. Now she has surpassed that magnificent effort with her "Götterdämmerung" Finale, a recording likely to remain unchallenged for a great

many years. I have always preferred her as Brünnhilde, for her voice has that superhuman quality Wagner must have had in mind for this great character. Here is Wotan's proud daughter indeed; though her father robbed her of her immortality at the end of "Die Walküre," her divine ancestry is here for all to hear. She is worthily partnered by Furtwängler, who directs the Philharmonia Orchestra (HMV). The recording sounds immensely exciting, though engineers still seem to be unable to cope with those majestic top notes.


Like the *SRL*'s reviewer, I was enchanted with Ravel's opera "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges"; it deserves to be a huge success. The Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française, which plays such a distinguished part in this recording, is also heard in a new version of the same composer's *pièce de résistance*, the "Boléro." The early pages of this score are a stiff test for any orchestra, and it must be admitted that these players, conducted here by Paul Kletzki, suffer a few casualties en route. On the whole, the Decca-Münch version is to be preferred.

A fascinating novelty is the Violin Concerto No. 1, Op. 35, by Szymanowski, the distinguished Polish composer who died in 1935. This is by no means an easy or accessible composition, and Parlophone is to be commended for its courage in giving us this superb recording. As far as one can judge, the performance is completely authoritative; the Philharmonia Orchestra is directed by Gregor Fitelberg, a friend of the composer, and the soloist is Eugenia Uminska, a fine player new to our records. The concerto is scored for a huge orchestra, yet the clarity of detail leaves nothing to be desired. The recording is, from the technical

Highlights from Paris

Another complete opera recording has just been issued in France, this one of Offenbach's "Tales of Hoffmann." Raoul Jobin heads a distinguished cast from the Opéra-Comique. André Cluytens conducts this Columbia recording, which a French critic has acclaimed equal to the Glyndebourne Mozart sets.

The French Polydor firm has recorded an "Unknown" Piano Concerto in E flat major by Beethoven, soon to be available here from Vox. Never published, the work has been termed "a revelation." . . . Other recent French waxings include Honegger's "Symphonie Liturgique," the Third Symphony (for strings) of Jean Rivier, and a phonographic "first" of Mendelssohn's Octet.



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point of view, one of the most astonishing I have yet heard.

Münch's performance, with the Paris Conservatory, of Tchaikovsky's B minor ("Pathétique") Symphony has met with a mixed reception from critics. I liked it immensely; there is plenty of light and shade, it is exciting and not over sentimentalized. Decca's recording is wonderfully clear, though this company's peculiar timbre is apt to exaggerate the thinnish tone of the French strings and the "edgy" quality of their brass. HMV, this month, have given us a slightly-better-than-average performance of the same composer's F minor Symphony, by the Philharmonia under Dobrowen.

Artur Schnabel's third attempt at Beethoven's mighty E flat Concerto ("Emperor") is his finest to date. Not that his playing has improved greatly in the last two decades (the quota of wrong notes is certainly higher now than it was in 1932, though this is balanced by the even greater wisdom he brings to the music), but the recording is excellent and he is, for the first time, really well supported—by Alceo Galliera and the Philharmonia.

At last we have a first-rate version of Mendelssohn's youthful Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream." We can only wonder why we have had to wait all this time for Sir Thomas Beecham to undertake this task. From those first, magic wind chords, no one listening to these HMV records can doubt that they are "just the job." (EDITOR'S NOTE: Next month, *Toscanini*.)

Chamber music receives scant attention this month; apart from Beethoven's Cello Sonata in D, Op. 102, No. 2 (Piatigorsky and Berkowitz), those wanting more intimate fare have to console themselves with the return of Wanda Landowska, who gives us a delightful record of a Concerto in D major by Vivaldi, arr. J. S. Bach.

Opera is represented, in addition to Wagner and Ravel, by the "Prologue" from "I Pagliacci," capably sung by the Italian stage and film idol Tito Gobbi, and by the Marschallin's "Monologue" from Act I of "Der Rosenkavalier." Hilde Konetzni essays Lotte Lehmann's great part with considerable success, but even the Vienna Philharmonic's beautiful accompaniment cannot make us forget the greatest Marschallin of them all.

I should not like to finish without mentioning a charming little disc of two songs by Villa-Lobos, "Viola" and "Cantilena No. 3." The composer accompanies Frederick Fuller, a young English baritone with a small but attractive voice and a superb sense of style, who has made a special study of South American songs.

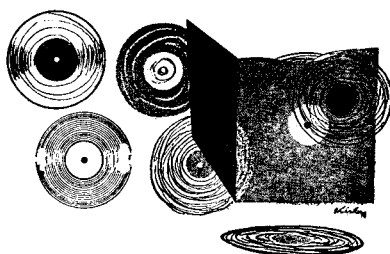
—THOMAS HEINITZ.

Some Highs and Lows

TONE JUGGLING

THERE didn't used to be much question about the control. It was just a knob that cut down the squawks and the static (and the music) as you turned it around. It was almost always turned all the way "down," anyway. It might as well have been built in and a knob saved.

But now we are more conscious of tonal possibilities. Most of us are convinced, at last, that "highs" can be respectable and even something not to be missed. The tone control accordingly has burgeoned and multiplied in a way that can be appalling. It's equalization now or compensation or boost-attenuation (dreadful proximity of Latin and Anglo-Saxon). A proper phonograph has at least two tone knobs, all too often a whole batch,



gaily lighted in Christmas tree colors. Just push the button—but which? Additional tone controls have a way of appearing in the most unexpected places. Some will be found built into the preamplifiers used with magnetic pickups. Others turn up perched on the rear works of some large speakers.

Without much question there is usually a gross overlapping of action. But each of these may have a special purpose, most likely with one particular tonal problem in view, and therefore it may be highly desirable to have it, duplication or no. For example, the differing reproduction of crystal and magnetic type pickups must be compensated for, "equalized." But once that is done, there is the problem of widely varying types of records to be brought into line with each other. Sometimes several specific tone choices ("response curves") are built into the preamplifier used for a magnetic pickup, to match certain general well-known types of records, especially as to bass strength. This type of tone control is favored by engineers who must know exactly what they are getting. Some of these preliminary tone-control centers are most elaborate, with perhaps five positions for the bass, an equal number for treble,

in order to have maximum flexibility to match all sorts of records.

However, most of us non-engineers do our tone controlling by ear, not by formula, and in truth even an engineer must allow large leeway for the highly variable acoustical conditions under which we all listen to the same record. What's more, there's no accounting at all for tastes—certainly not by formula! Hence, for the home phonograph the basic tone control is still the front-panel type, and it is best continuously variable, for plain and simple ear adjustment—with one big reservation in favor of the engineers. It is essential for them, and a good thing for us too, to know exactly where the "normal," i.e., non-functioning position of every tone-control is, the point, specifically, where the system takes what it gets—however cockeyed—and passes it on, unchanged, as well as it may. It is astonishing how hard it is to find this on most phonographs! Some controls go from normal to increase (of bass or treble) some from normal to decrease—and how one is to tell which end is "normal" I do not know!

Since it is just as likely that you will want more bass as less bass, and the same with treble, by far the most effective kind of control, now increasingly used on commercial amplifiers and home phonographs, is one where normal (neutral, zero, "flat," etc.) is *in the middle*, and so marked, the control pointing straight up. Down-to-the-right increases (boosts); down-to-the-left decreases (attenuates). Two of these knobs, one for treble, one for bass, are necessary, and you'll find them usually right next to each other. Most engineers wouldn't mind having these controls in addition to the specific formula-type ones that reduce some specific tone control problem to exact, known factors.

Though the type of tone control here described is not, of course, absolutely essential (the Bogen amplifier we have recommended has, instead, four fixed tone settings) its presence in any amplifier or phonograph can be regarded as a good "plus" point when it comes to totaling features. With this as a basis—and especially with the vital "normal" points known, so that you can entirely remove this system from consideration, *and be sure of it*—you may well find that other supplementary tone systems can be helpful.

—EDWARD TATNALL CANBY.