

The Basic Record Library

Schumann

PIANO CONCERTO

In A Minor. Opus 54. A survey of Schumann's recorded works with orchestra which began at this point six months ago would have been inauspicious indeed. However, two excellent versions have been offered to the public since then, establishing a much wider choice than existed before: a Rubinstein, with the West Coast RCA Victor Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Steinberg, and a new Serkin for Columbia. The latter is an issue not previously reviewed, but listed for release shortly. Its appearance is fortunate, for it has qualities to match the best in the Rubinstein issue, and some that are superior—especially, reproduction. The Rubinstein amounts to a studio-sounding version, on a high level of excellence: the Serkin (with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Ormandy, and the acoustics of the Academy of Music) a proper replica of a concert-hall performance. There is perhaps a little more pulsation, rhythmically speaking, in Rubinstein's playing, but fine solidity, weight, and power in Serkin's. There are some technical blemishes in the latter's performance, especially at the end of the first movement, where Rubinstein is all surety and finesse; but my preference inclines to the total of qualities in the Columbia issue.

Though the Claudio Arrau—Karl Krueger—Detroit Symphony issue is reasonably contemporary in sound (it appeared shortly after the war's end), it was not the kind of Schumann-playing I care about, even when it was without challenge the newest recording of the work. There are still those who cherish the Myra Hess of a dozen years back, which retains a bouquet of its own, even if one must strain a sense or two to apprehend it. Certainly it would seem that a new English version of this would be in order, for the Hess public in this country is greater than ever before. Dame Myra has remarked more than once on her discomfort in a recording studio, but it would seem worth her effort when the work is one as closely associated with her as this.

VIOLIN CONCERTO

In D minor. Menuhin's performance with the Philharmonic-Symphony directed by Barbirolli retains its singular place—both in respect to the performer's interest in the music and its lack of duplication in accessible form

(see imports below). As an interpretation it is one of the most impressive to Menuhin's credit, and Barbirolli was not wanting here, either.

CELLO CONCERTO

In A minor. Since Piatigorsky has relocated his cello with Columbia, perhaps one can anticipate a new edition from him of a performance which was generally admired when new, and suffers now only from the disabilities of age inherent in a recording first issued in 1935. Barbirolli and the Lon-



don Philharmonic were his able collaborators.

THE SYMPHONIES

No. 1 in B flat ("Spring"). Passionate youth and seasoned age are the opposing characteristics of the two standard versions of this music—Leinsdorf, in his Cleveland days, exemplifies the first, Koussevitzky in his perennial Boston ones (these of 1939), the second. Half a dozen years' progress in recording are also allied with Leinsdorf, but this is a work that Koussevitzky reads with force and clarity, no slight assets in association with the splendors of the Boston ensemble. For this "Spring," my fancy would turn to Leinsdorf, but I can see the contrary preference, too.

No. 2 in C. There are pros and cons to be considered in relation to both domestic versions: Mitropoulos, conducting a rather meager-sounding performance for Columbia, has a stronger sense of this music to convey than Ormandy, whose orchestra is the lush Philadelphia, enhanced by the handsome sonority of its Academy of Music. A guarded vote, then, for Mitropoulos, with the hope that a new

issue from abroad will give Schumann what is owing to him (see below).

No. 3 in E flat ("Rhenish"). Another consolation prize for Mitropoulos, for his RCA Victor recording, on balance, is more listenable than the distended sounds the Columbia engineers (circa 1943) made of Bruno Walter's performance with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. That performance, objectively, is a more attractive thing than the Mitropoulos, but the latter has its points, and they are not too few for a generally able performance of this score. The line of distinction, in any case, is slight.

No. 4 in D minor. The appearance last year of a Goossens performance with the Cincinnati Orchestra probably means the disappearance of the Walter-London Symphony album from the RCA-Victor lists. This is not as regrettable as it might seem, for Goossens works with purpose and authority at this music, and much more emerges from the speaker than was contained on the considerably older version by Walter. If the usual portents are reliable ones, Walter may have the opportunity to replace, for Columbia, its outmoded Stock-Chicago issue. That was musically of sound quality, but never more than an acceptable recording.

OVERTURES

"*Manfred.*" At last report, the sturdy, well-phrased performance of Adrian Boult was listed among the items withdrawn from the Victor catalogue since wartime. In the absence of anything more contemporary that is regrettable, for it had more than respectable musical merit.

IMPORTS

The record buyer in search of optimum quality regardless of cost or source has little consolation in the European catalogue of Schumann recordings. For no cogent reason, this composer has had little part in the renaissance of recording since 1945 followed V-J in the world march of initials. English Decca has new versions of the second and fourth symphonies in work (the conductors are Enesco and Muench, respectively), and Pathé, in France, has recorded André Navarre, a brilliant cellist of the younger generation, in Schumann's concerto for that instrument. That set has not yet appeared here, but a sampling of the same virtuoso in the forthcoming Beecham version of "Don Quixote" suggests that it may well be anticipated. Otherwise, the Kuhlentkamp version of the violin concerto has apparently vanished from circulation.

IRVING KOLODIN.

BEECHAM

Dance of the Persian Slaves from "Khovantchina"—Moussorgsky. Conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Record 12-0239, \$1.25.

BERNSTEIN

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1932)—Ravel. The Philharmonia Orchestra of London, Leonard Bernstein, pianist-conductor. DM-1209, \$4.75; DV-15, \$7.00.

DEFAUW

Water Music—Suite; Concerto Grosso No. 21, in D Minor, Op. 6, No. 10 and Largo (Xerxes: Act I)—Handel. Chicago Symphony Orchestra. John Weicher, Solo Violin. DM-1208, \$6.

ELMAN

Slavonic Fantasy in B Minor—Dvořák (Arranged by Fritz Kreisler) and *Aus der Heimat, No. 1* (From My Home)—Smetana. Wolfgang Rosé at the piano. 12-0241, \$1.25.

KOUSSEVITZKY

Brandenburg Concerto No. 6, in B-flat—Bach. Boston Symphony Orchestra. *Red Seal* Album DM-1211, \$4.75.

FIEDLER

conducting the Boston "Pops" Orchestra. *The Moldau*—Smetana, and *Husitská Overture, Op. 67*—Dvořák. DM-1210, \$4.75. *Orpheus in Hades: Overture*—Offenbach. RCA Victor Record 12-0240, \$1.25.

ITURBI

June (Barcarolle in G Minor) and *November (Troïka en traîneaux in E)*—Tchaikovsky. 12-0242, \$1.25.

Prices include Federal excise tax and are subject to change without notice. ("DM" and "DV" albums also available in manual sequence at \$1 extra.)

MENUHIN

Symphonie Espagnole, Op. 21—Lalo. Orchestra Colonne, Jean Fournet, Conductor. RCA Victor *Red Seal* Album DM-1207, \$6.00.

MERRILL

Brooklyn Baseball Cantata—Stratton-Kleinsinger. With Russ Case and his Orchestra and Chorus. Album DC-42, \$3.00.

Annie Laurie—Lady John Scott (Arranged by Liza Lehmann) and *Gentle Annie*—Stephen Foster. Leila Edwards at the piano. 10-1408, \$1.00.

RODZINSKI

Gayne, Ballet Suite—Khatchaturian. Chicago Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor Album DM-1212, \$3.50.

SHAW

Petites Voix—Madeleine Ley-Poulenc. (Five selections.) RCA Victor Chorale. Record 10-1409, \$1.00.

WARREN

Sea Shanties—Traditional (arranged by Tom Scott). "Blow the Man Down," "Rio Grande," "The Drummer and the Cook," "Shenandoah," four others. With Orchestra and Chorus, Morris Levine, Conductor. RCA Victor Album M-1186, \$5.00.



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RCA VICTOR RECORDS



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Reviews of the Month

The remarkable run of choral works which has distinguished record lists of the last year is continued this month with one of the best of them: a complete Mozart "Requiem" from Italy. Both American companies show indications of pre-Petrillo-ban progress in improving their recording processes, Columbia with a Kabalevsky album, RCA-Victor with its "Sleeping Beauty." Otherwise, re-issues predominate, from Brahms to Wagner.

Triumph of Song

MOZART: "Requiem Mass." Victor de Sabata conducting the EIAR Orchestra and chorus, with Pia Tassinari, Ebe Stignani, Ferruccio Tagliavini, and Italo Tajo, soloists. (Cetra-Soria album 101, \$15.70.)

For the Mozartian, for the lover of fine singing, or for the connoisseur of remarkable accomplishments in the lore of recording, this is a trove of interest and delight. Such beautiful sound through so long a sequence of records (sixteen sides) is a rarity to be put beside the Vienna "Rosenkavalier" or the Berlin "Magic Flute" as the level of art to which the phonograph should aspire, but seldom does. There may be Mozart "Requiems" to come which will surpass this in some detail, but hardly one which can challenge its collective virtues.

Of initial impact, though in no sense overbearing, is the art of de Sabata, who molded his excellent materials into an entity; in sequence come the fine quartet of Tassinari and Stignani, Tagliavini and Tajo. All have been heard amply on other recordings, but one did not realize, until the "Tuba Mirum"—the first quartet in the "Requiem"—how superbly the voice of one complements the voice of all. There is an evenness of vocal character in the passage of a phrase from one to the other which is not expected by a composer, but adds mightily to the effect he imagined. The "Benedictus" is a special example of this, affirming the fine lyric artist Tagliavini was before he took seriously his boyhood name of "Il Piccolo Caruso."

The catalogue of praise includes the superb choral singing—the "Confutatis" is an instance of the ability of massed voices to sing softly without losing audibility of tone — and the orchestral work, which is first class. Technically, the recording is highly expert, save for an occasional solo side in which the singer is closer to the microphone (and thus to the ear) than she was previously. The Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome, which was used for the sessions, adds majesty and depth to the sound that

is heard. The shellac surfaces are much above the American average.

Bright and Facile

KABALEVSKY: "The Comedians." Efrem Kurtz conducting the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. (Columbia album MX-295, \$3.50.)

Kabalevsky's previous status as an odd-side composer (his "Colas Breugnon" overture is a filler in two albums, at least) is nominally improved by this first extended work of his to appear on American discs. "Nominally" is indicated because the quality remains odd-side, even at album length. These are bright, facile pieces (originally written for a play called "The Inventor and the Comedian") which aim for the approximate level of Prokofieff's "Peter and the Wolf." However there is nothing like as much charm in the ideas, and they too often echo more of Shostakovich than just the xylophone in his "Age d'Or" à la polka.

It is exposed at this length to indicate the excellent quality of the recording that Columbia has contrived, presumably in Carnegie Hall. The highs, particularly, are accounted for as they should be, and though the final tympani passage on the last side booms rather than penetrates, there are evidences here that fine things may be expected of Columbia when recording is resumed. Kurtz performs with the fervor of a zealot, and the rhythmic pulse of his ballet days.

Relief from "Scheherezade"

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: "Antar" Symphony. Pierre Monteux conducting the San Francisco Symphony. (RCA-Victor album DM 1203, \$4.75.)

The old "Antar" was a casualty of the wartime cut-out lists, and it is gratifying to welcome this vigorous new version by Monteux to replace the outmoded one of Coppola, which first appeared here in 1934. As one of the earliest works by Rimsky to show the scope of his talent (1869, when he was but twenty-five years old), it is full of dazzling color and richness

of imagination which is familiar to all in the later works from "Scheherezade" to "Coq d'Or." Influences remain of such predecessors as Dargomizsky and Balakirev, but much more prominent are original procedures which prevail in Russian music even unto today.

Monteux, of course, has a superlative instinct for music of this genre, and he delivers it with breadth and fulness. His orchestra has not the richness of brass one would like to hear in some of the climaxes, and the recording hall sounds a little shallow for scoring of this character. In other respects the recording is thoroughly successful, and may be commended to anyone who would welcome a variant from "Scheherezade."

3 Sides to a Club Sandwich

HANDEL: "Concerto in B flat, opus 4 No. 6." Marcel Grandjany, harp, with orchestra conducted by Jean Paul Morel. (RCA-Victor album 1201, \$4.75.)

What the record buyer is confronted with these days is graphically illustrated by the charge he must pay to own and enjoy the work noted above. When it last appeared in the Victor catalogue, it was valued at \$1.50. Inflation is a small part of the spread since, but even more crucial a factor is the policy by which three odd-side pieces are added to the album for the doubtful purpose of accommodating mechanical record changers, and adding to the price of the album. Thus, in 1941 it was available on three ten-inch sides, with space for another work on the fourth side; now, the music of Handel is spread over three twelve-inch sides, and pieces by Couperin, Kirchnerhoff, and Francisque spread on the other sides. Moreover, the purchaser has no alternative, for the music is available only in this form.

For the work itself and the performance, I have only praise, though the lengthy cadenza at the beginning of the third side is too ornate for my taste. It is otherwise thoroughly delightful music, crisply played by Grandjany, and well-framed by the work of Morel. Of the smaller pieces, there is charm in the Couperin "Soeur Monique," which would have been welcome as the normal odd-side, if twelve-inch discs had to be used. The recording is excellent.

The Terpsichorean Tchaikovsky

TCHAIKOVSKY: "Sleeping Beauty" music. Leopold Stokowski conducting a symphony orchestra. (RCA Victor album 1205, \$8.75.)

In its first effort to parallel the open, spacious recording which Decca