

THE OTHER SIDE

TO COMMEMORATE the fiftieth anniversary of its composition, HMV has recently recorded "Ein Heldenleben" in a resplendent interpretation by Sir Thomas Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (HMV DB 6620/4). By now the discursive whimperings and humorless pomposity to which Richard Strauss fell prey in the course of this tone-poem are something of which I, personally, am impatient; but could any of our contemporaries communicate such exultant *joie de vivre* as is to be found in its opening pages? Beecham's crisp, neat musical personality never appeared to better advantage than in this super-charged music. Save for a slight chamber resonance, HMV sound engineers have well met the standard set by a truly brilliant performance.

Artur Rubinstein and the music of Rachmaninoff present an amalgam which has lately proven of such prodigious popularity that one can safely predict a ready welcome for the new English recording of "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini" (HMV DB 6556/8). Do not despair, however, if you already own the celebrated Rachmaninoff-Stokowski version. What the newer recording gains in decibels and frequency range it loses in musical suavity. Britain's Philharmonia Orchestra led by Walter Susskind strikes one as anemic, not to say ascetic, when compared with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the redoubtable Leopold, and Artur Rubinstein somehow misses that shaggy abandon with which the composer invested his own interpretation. The last side in this set is badly overcut.

Two refulgent reputations are represented in the new Rachmaninoff recording. "Tarnished" would be a more appropriate adjective to apply to the reputations of composer and interpreter in another recently arrived import. Neither Sir Edward Elgar nor John Barbirolli, who leads the Hallé Orchestra in the "Enigma Variations" (HMV C 3692/5), will find many partisans on this side of the Atlantic. The one is traduced as an Edwardian overstuffed bore, the other remembered chiefly for his unfortunate post-Toscanini seasons with the New York Philharmonic. My minority opinion is therefore offered a bit diffidently. In Elgar's lustrously orchestrated "Enigma Variations," I find a work of bewitching fancy and touching nobility of soul. Further, I can imagine no more satisfying performance than that given by Mr. Barbirolli and his splendid Manchester Orchestra. The recording is spacious and resonant.

R. G.



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THE JAZZ BEAT

THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

WITH his abrasive brass aided and abetted by other sections only slightly less aggressive, Stanley Newcomb Kenton has cut quite a swath for himself in this jazz business. (The word *business* is used loosely, for an alarming number of practitioners are finding themselves in the midst of an employment doldrum, forced to pound the street instead of a drumhead.) Whether Kenton is working in heroic bronze or merely fashioning half-baked ceramics only time may tell us.

So you can leave the evaluation to a better-perspectived historian at a later date. What is with the status as of quo? Well, it seems that Kenton, abetted by his able arranger and number one factotum Pete Rugolo, has just been delivered of his *chef d'oeuvre*: "A Presentation of Progressive Jazz" (Capitol Album CD 79, \$3.91.) On these eight sides you may find Kenton and company at their creative height. The most concise and admirably integrated three-minute utterance of the group to date is in the recording entitled "Monotony." If, as he has implied on several occasions, the leader has tried to mirror musically the complex neuroses of our time, "Monotony" is, literally, a resounding success. To get abjectly subjective, it may be said that the composers have uprooted today's psychoses and examined them under the light of a ram-jet exhaust against a background-sound of raucous war-babble and coursing traffic.

One historic thing that Kenton has done is to assimilate into a large, modern band, the color and the texture of the Cuban rhythm section. The incisive comments of the small bongo drums (masterfully played by Jack Costanzo), the chattering of the maracas against the pleasant hubbub of the cow bell, the conga drum, and the usual bass, guitar, and trap drum have done as much as anything to give the Kenton aggregation a New Sound. After hearing "Cuban Carnival," "Fugue for Rhythm Section," and "Lament," you will find the conventional big-band rhythm sections strangely wanting.

Also in the album are two warmly-intoned pieces which exhibit the legitimate playing of altoist George Weidler—"Elegy for Alto" and "Impressionism." There are two songs for June Christy. She sings "Lonely Woman" beautifully but you may find Rugolo's orchestral setting incon-

gruous. In the other song, "This Is My Theme," Kenton has striven for an unusual effect: to sketch in music something of a poetic recitative by the singer. The band is a sound track for the lady's narration. The wordage is such to give a finished actress pause. Miss Christy is no actress and the piece is a pretentious failure.

All the same, this is a great album of impelling performances. When you remember the overly-syncopated matter that Kenton churned out back around 1942, it is astonishing that the same leader has created such estimable music. Kenton and cohorts, along with the badgered beboppers are among the few musicians today who are making new things happen, who stimulate and thrill, who, if nothing else, are actuating the young players to strike out along new paths.

JACK PARNELL QUARTET: "Scrubber Time"; "On the Sunny Side of the Street." (London 162, 79¢.)

Notable more for the realism of the frr recording process than the musical content. The quartet dispenses tasteful, pleasant music but it is the reproduction of it which commands the attention. Try this one on the highest-fidelity reproducer you can find. You will find it difficult to equal such sound anywhere.

SCAT MAN CROTHERS: "Dead Man's Blues"; "The Thing." (Capitol 15076, 79¢.)

Two fine, commercial blues by Capitol's newcomer, a Pacific Coast character who, it is said, has a vogue in that sector. The Scat Man sings with an amazing coarse huskiness, as if he had just swallowed a trombone mute. Nevertheless, the chanting is good humorous entertainment, certainly one of the provinces of music.

BENNY GOODMAN QUARTET: "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise"; "Shirley Steps Out." (Capitol 15069, 79¢.)

The madly-paced "World," while not up to the similar "Shoeless Joe Jackson" opus on Commodore (actually also by Goodman) is still quite moving by virtue of its staggering facility and momentum if nothing else; it is reminiscent, in fact, of the halcyon Krupa-Hampton days, praise be. The second offering is a relaxed, melodious original by Mel Powell—all in all, the best pairing by Goodman in many, many months.

GILBERT MCKEAN.