

Reviews of the Month

This would indeed be a summer of discontent were we dependent on American sources only for material; but the dribble from these plus the freshet from others amounts to a near flood. Kodaly's "Dances from Galanta" will interest many, as will the "Good Friday Spell" and Dvorak's "American" Quartet on London LP. Special attention may be directed to the Raphael Arie "Death of Boris" on page 56, also to Munch's "Danse Macabre."

Boom in Sibelius

SIBELIUS: *Symphony No. 1 in E minor. Tor Mann conducting the Stockholm Radio Orchestra. (Capitol-Telefunken album 8020, \$7.25.)*

SIBELIUS: *"Tapiola." Sir Thomas Beecham conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. (RCA Victor set 1311, \$2.50.)*

What ever became of the Sibelius vogue? In its cosmic aspects it was largely an American—perhaps it would be better said, a Boston—phenomenon, radiating therefrom by disc and air to the subordinate centers of symphonic culture. I may be tempting fate by saying that I can't remember when the last Sibelius set came from Koussevitzky—there'll probably be three in the morning mail—but it is significant of that lag in interest that the Doctor's gala season at Tanglewood this year included no work (even an itty-bitty one) of the Finnish Franck.

It might be thought that Capitol would be invading a clogged market in producing another version of a work once as popular as the Sibelius No. 1, but it is an oddity confirmed by the reference books that there are currently but two versions of this work in circulation (three if one counts a duplicated Ormandy, the old Minneapolis still available in England) and these are both American in origin (Ormandy - Philadelphia, Barbirolli-Philharmonic). I find too, in re-reading some old comparisons, that the good, sound, energetic work of Tor Mann is more in the spirit of the old Kajanus issue than those of domestic origin—the spirit of modesty and unpretentiousness in which the home folks view Sibelius, rather than the "significance" attributed to him by *auslanders*. There is a good deal of virtue in the recording, also, though this orchestra has not too much inherent brilliance. The scherzo is rather weak, tonally, but I can listen to the whole of it with more pleasure than to the gesturesome Ormandy.

As a replacement for the Koussevitzky "Tapiola" of early 1942, this



—Finnish National Travel Office.

Jan Sibelius — "the spirit of modesty and unpretentiousness."

Beecham may be somewhat premature, for that was a brilliant exposition of the score, and a master recording for its time. Needless to say, the orchestra is more nearly itself in this contemporary version, and Beecham's view of the score is both penetrating and sympathetic. However, I'd rather have his "Don Quixote" of Strauss than this.

The Galanta of Kodaly

KODALY: *"Dances from Galanta." Victor de Sabata conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. (Deutsche Grammophon album 12, \$6.)*

What went on in Berlin in 1939 during the visit of De Sabata, which resulted in the present set and the one of Respighi's "Feste Romane" discussed last month, may be clarified when the Italian maestro visits us for his concerts here next fall; but it is plainly apparent that the German technicians produced their most talented microphones and choicest wax for their Axis guest. As the "Feste Romane" was a remarkable example of reproduction in the first issue of Deutsche Grammophon reissues, so

these two discs are outstanding among the second batch.

Those who have overlooked the Fiedler - Boston "Pops" version of these spirited and artfully arranged dances (of itself a superior example of American recording methods, in RCA Victor album 834) will find, in De Sabata's more personalized treatment, music which shares some of the characteristics of the Liszt and Enesco rhapsodies without being exactly like either. Its tziganerics are deeper, of a more passionate character, its gaiety less abandoned.

To a degree, this may be just the impact of De Sabata on the music, for he seems that shrewd kind of conductor who attempts—in the spotlight glare of the phonograph, at least—nothing for which he does not have an active flair, a creative understanding. Here he commands wonderfully rich and plastic playing from the Berliners in a virtuoso performance of the Mengelberg or Stokowski emphasis and brilliance. The recording will support comparison with the very best of today.

A Bizet Riddle

BIZET: *Symphony in C. Artur Rodzinski conducting the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. (Columbia LP ML 2051, \$3.85.)*

It is not our custom to revalue, at length, reappearances on long playing discs of works already in the catalogues, but I have had so much pleasure from a rehearing of this work in its present performance that I feel inclined to underscore it for those to whom it may be a novelty. Certainly there is no other symphonic music in the month's issue which has a like degree of freshness and charm.

Though few of us conceive Bizet as a youthful prodigy in the sense of a Mendelssohn or a Schubert (omitting Mozart, for whom there is no parallel) it is a fact that this work of his seventeenth year is teeming with a musicality, a control of his craft no less exceptional. Why it was not immediately performed while he was a student at the Paris Conservatory, none of his biographers can tell us. That it waited until 1935 for its world premiere (under the direction of Felix Weingartner in Basle) is a further element in a riddle which appears to have no solution.

Bizet's able biographer Martin Cooper sees in the first movement the influence of Beethoven, in the second Mozart and Rossini. I agree with these, but find still more potent the likeness of Schubert, especially in that same second movement which

risers to a lyric exaltation rare indeed in the works of others than those commonly considered the most "inspired" composers: Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Chopin. Again, the trio of the scherzo has that alternation of melodic and rhythmic phrases which seems to me characteristically Schubertian. Likewise the second theme of the finale.

However this may be, it is certainly an addition to the symphonic repertory of rare delight, and Rodzinski's performance is one of the most appropriate, skilful, and surehanded he has ever given us. Moreover, the playing shows the really amazing organization the Philharmonic was under his direction, while the recording is exceeded by few LP's for the crispness, balance, and articulation of all the elements involved. I'd like to say more, but I can't add anything to this catalogue of praise.

LP's from London

WAGNER: "Good Friday Spell" ("Parsifal"); *Prelude* and "Love Death" ("Tristan and Isolde"). Clemens Krauss conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. (London LP 14, \$5.95.)

DVORAK: *Quartet in F* ("American"). Griller Quartet. (London LP 4, \$5.95.)

To have either of these standard repertory works in performances of first technical excellence would be a privilege; to have them, as well, in understanding interpretations on long-playing discs is a consummation for which we have wished these many months. By a fortunate coincidence, they duplicate nothing in Columbia's list—though others of London's initial issue do—and are thus absolute additions to the growing repertory of continuous music.

The first question in most listeners' minds will be, I imagine, how do these compare with London's own standards; and, thereafter, how do they compare with Columbia's LP's? Candor compels the admission that there is a small but appreciable decline in quality, though the results are of the same order. The tone is not so consistently suave and opulent, the climaxes are more astringent than in the best first. Moreover, there are crackles from the surface instead of the barely perceptible swish of the English shellac.

This leaves them, however, inferior only to the very best Columbia LP's, the equal of most and the superior of all but a few. Considered as an initial venture, against two standards that were the product of much trial and error, I think they represent a

striking accomplishment. Certainly if one had never heard either first or LP they would be considered miraculous. One word of warning seems in order: they require a bit more pressure on the point than the *minimum* that suffices for Columbia. On most pickups this can be achieved by adjustment of a spring, on others by adding a bit of weight externally.

Evaluated purely as performances, they compare impressively with the best available of any of the music involved. I have not heard Furtwängler's "Good Friday Spell" recently enough to have much recollection of its detail, but the Krauss performance is a calm, deeply moving one, certainly the superior of the recent Koussevitzky or any American predecessor. Moreover, the London Philharmonic plays beautifully for him, and the oboe—surely it is Leon Goossens—is especially fine. His *Prelude* and "Liebestod" are similarly in the restrained, consecutive vein.

As for the Grillers' Dvorak, it is, in totality, the best there is—including in that estimate a recorded definition superior to the Budapest, if an execution not quite so ruggedly individualistic (assuming, of course, that one regards that as indispensable in a work labeled "American" here, though "Nigger" abroad). This has its compensation in the *lento*, which is deftly, delicately played, with a composure more appealing than the exaggeration some quartets permit themselves.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

Bruckner's Eighth

BRUCKNER: *Symphony No. 8*. Eugen Jochum conducting the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra. (Deutsche Grammophon album 17, \$28.50.)

Elsewhere in this issue the editor has commented upon an influx of music by Marschner, Flotow, and company recently arrived from Germany on records. It was concluded that though charity rightfully begins at home it had better sometimes also stay at home; moreover, that an out-and-out dullard remains a dullard no matter how exquisitely performed or meticulously recorded.

Is Anton Bruckner yet another native son who has been inflicted upon us by well-intentioned but poorly-advised propagandists? The question in this instance is not so easily answered. Certainly, only a prejudiced ear could fail to detect virtues in such a work as the Eighth Symphony, which has just come to us on records from Hamburg. The second movement, with its sparkling, deftly orchestrated scherzo and its vaulting trio, is as concise, meaningful, and well-inte-

grated a piece of writing as one could desire. And if the outer movements have little to recommend them (here Bruckner tries to make momentous symphonic fare out of nondescript material), there are undeniable nuggets in the long, swelling adagio—though what total effect this slow movement provides must depend on the listener's capacity to put himself at the disposal of Bruckner's sluggish manner of exposition.

Yet granted all these individual excellences, the work as a whole adds up to an amorphous and chaotic lump of sound. After putting myself at Bruckner's disposal for the three hours which two playings of his symphony require, I confess to have been appalled anew at the composer's ponderous, prolix style of musical expression, at his lamentable weakness in organization. Bernard Shaw once took Schubert to task for the utter mindlessness of his symphonic writing. He would have done better to save his strictures for Bruckner, the composer who once advised Felix Weingartner to cut what he wanted from a movement because "it might be too long."

For the recording *qua* recording there can be only praise. Jochum and the Hamburg Philharmonic play this music with full respect for its traditions and an obvious awareness of its many beauties. The recording was made in February of this year and demonstrates the extent to which German orchestras have recovered their former estate. It shows, too, that the Deutsche Grammophon engineers are still in the vanguard of high-fidelity phonograph reproduction.

—ROLAND GELATT.



—By Heinrich Gröber, from Bettmann Archive.

Caricature of Bruckner receiving ovation—when Brahms saw it "he died laughing."