

The Year's Best Albums

ORCHESTRAL

- BARTÓK: "Concerto for Orchestra." (Columbia)
 BERLIOZ: "Symphonie Fantastique." (English Decca)
 DVORAK: Symphony No. 4. (Columbia)
 DVORAK: Symphony No. 5 (RCA Victor)
 GERSHWIN: "An American in Paris." (RCA Victor)
 LEHAR: Waltzes. (London)
 MOZART: Symphony No. 40 in G minor. (Columbia)
 STRAVINSKY: "Sacre du Printemps." (English Decca)
 VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Oboe Concerto. (Mercury)

INSTRUMENTAL

- ALBENIZ: "Iberia." (Columbia)
 BACH: "Tocatta and Fugue" in D minor. (Columbia)
 BEETHOVEN: Concerto No. 4. (Columbia)
 BRUCH: "Scottish Fantasy." (RCA Victor)
 IVES: "Concord Sonata." (Columbia)
 MENDELSSOHN: Piano Concerto in G minor. (English Decca)
 MOZART: Violin Concerto in D. (RCA Victor)
 SATIE: "Three Pieces in Form of a Pear." (Columbia)

VOCAL WORKS

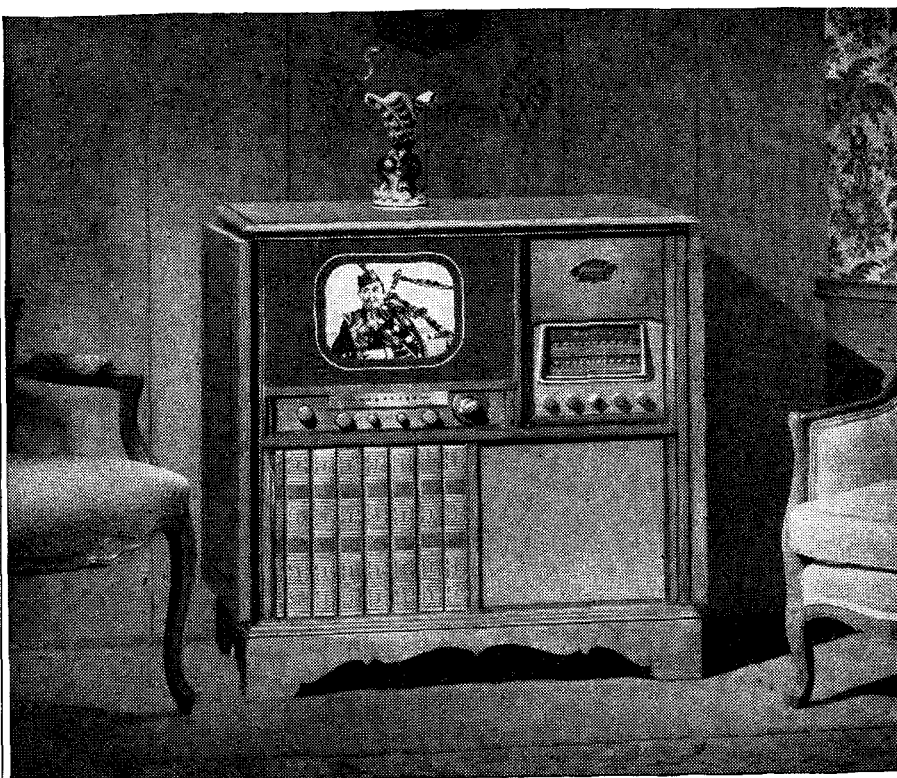
- BERLIOZ: "Grand Requiem Mass." (Columbia)
 BRAHMS: "German Requiem." (Columbia)
 BRAHMS: "Alto Rhapsody." (English Decca)
 BRITTEN: Folk Songs. (London)
 DEBUSSY: "La Damselle Elue." (Columbia)
 GRETRY, AND OTHERS: Operatic Airs (Teyte). (RCA Victor)
 MENOTTI: "The Medium" and "The Telephone." (Columbia)
 MOZART: Requiem Mass. (Cetra)
 PUCCINI: "La Bohème." (Columbia)
 RAVEL: "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges." (Columbia)
 STRAUSS: "Elektra." (RCA Victor)
 VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Mass in G minor. (English Decca)
 WAGNER: "Wesendonck Songs." (RCA Victor)

CHAMBER MUSIC

- BEETHOVEN: Quartet, Opus 18, No. 6. (Columbia)
 BEETHOVEN: Quartet, Opus 135. (RCA Victor)
 BLOCH: Quartet No. 2. (International)
 BRAHMS: Sonata in D minor. (Columbia)

MISCELLANEOUS

- "I CAN HEAR IT NOW." (Columbia)



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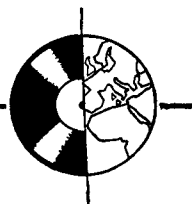
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THE OTHER SIDE

(IMPORTED RECORDINGS)



ROME. THE nicest thing about Italian record releases of 1948's dying quarter is the added proof they provide that Rome's symphony orchestra has just about recovered its pre-war excellence. In the years before World War II, the orchestra—then called the "Augusteo" from the great round mausoleum of the first Roman emperors where it held its concerts—ranked with the first two or three on the Continent.

Its troubles began when Mussolini, who sought ever to keep Fascist Italy's eyes fixed on the glories of the ancient empire, "restored" the Augusteo to a ruin, making the orchestra homeless. For a while it camped out at the Adriano theatre on Piazza Cavour, despite that building's acoustical deficiencies. But after the war the Adriano's owners turned it into a movie house. So the orchestra—at this time called simply the "St. Cecilia" after the fifty-five-year-old national academy which controls it—had to move to the hardly more satisfactory Argentina theatre. There, at the moment, it has its seat, while the Government ponders either reconditioning the Augusteo or building a proper concert hall.

Meanwhile, the group lost its long-time permanent conductor, the veteran Bernardino Molinari. In the last few years it has struggled along with guests of widely varying abilities, few of whom mount the podium twice in a season. And it has lost one concertmaster after another, as lucrative overseas posts were offered. Moreover, its *professori*, some of whom have held down their chairs thirty-odd years, are dying off or getting stiff-fingered with age; and there are not the youngsters to replace them: the Duce's decade-long mobilization kept them away from schools, or they have decided that music pays too little in inflation-ridden Italy.

So it is hardly less than a miracle that the orchestra (which last year, in consideration of the distance it had traveled along the comeback trail, resumed the proud name "Augusteo") plays the kind of music it does. Admittedly, it is still uneven. In my time here I have heard it give some fairly bad concerts. But under the right stick it can be superb. In October I noted three fine recordings with Victor de Sabata conducting. I have now to report another topnotch job under the incisive De Sabata, the

Beethoven "Pastorale," and two less pretentious efforts under Tullio Serafin, the Respighi-Rossini "Boutique Fantasque" and the overture to Rossini's "Italiana in Algeri."

Among previous recordings of the "Pastorale," connoisseurs are torn between the Walter-Philadelphia (Columbia) and the Toscanini-BBC (RCA Victor). The Walter is not available here for direct comparison. However, I have played the De Sabata alongside the Toscanini and the Paray-Colonne (Columbia). In my non-expert opinion, it outreaches the former, overshadows the latter. Toscanini's is to be preferred to De Sabata's perhaps, if flawlessness of performance be the sole criterion; but the Maestro's successor at La Scala excels him, I think, in his comprehension of Beethoven's programmatic purposes. Particularly impressive are the dynamics he elicits in the fourth, or "Storm" movement.

I doubt that the recording (DB 6473/7) will become available on American pressings in the near future, family considerations at RCA Victor probably barring this challenger to the established Toscanini set. But it is to be hoped that the New

York Philharmonic will let De Sabata program the "Pastorale" during his 1949-50 guest appearances so that American listeners may judge for themselves.

The Augusteo's performances of "Boutique Fantasque," Ottorino Respighi's fine (1919) transcription of Rossini piano pieces for the Russian ballet (S 1025/7), and of the "Italiana in Algeri" overture (S 10516) both benefit by Serafin's long career in opera. The former has three suites, of five, four, and three dance movements respectively; these range from March through Mazurka, Cancan, Cossack Dance, and Slow Waltz to the fugal Finale. Serafin also conducts the Rome radio symphony in two excerpts from Iginio Robbiani's 1924 opera "Anna Karenina," the Prelude to Act II and a passage from the second act duet, "Gli Amanti" (S 10517).

Lists of the other companies are thin in orchestral music. Columbia, as usual, concentrates on pressings from foreign masters. Cetra lists for November-December the Saint-Saëns symphonic poem "Danse Macabre," by the Turin radio orchestra under Arturo Basile, with Antonio Gramigna as violin soloist, and four "antique dances" from the pen of Scarlatti's contemporary, Leonardo Vinci, by the strings of the same orchestra under Mario Fighera. However, since Cetra often waits until dealers' orders are received to press, these records have not reached Rome shelves. The like is true of record-

Other Recent or Forthcoming English Releases

- BARTOK: "Concerto for Orchestra." Concertgebouw—Van Beinum. Decca.
 BEETHOVEN: Sonata in F minor, Opus 57. Louis Kentner. Col.
 BERNERS: Ballet music, "Les Sirènes." Philharmonic Orchestra—Irving. Col.
 BRAHMS: Violin Concerto. Ossy Renardy and Concertgebouw—Munch. Decca.
 DEBUSSY: "La plus que lente"; "Danse." Giesecking. Col.
 FRANCK: "Chorale, No. 1." Marcel Dupré. Decca.
 HANDEL-WOOD: Organ Concerto No. 9. Thalben-Ball and Philharmonia Orchestra—Süsskind. HMV.
 IRELAND: "These Things Shall Be." Hallé Orchestra & Choir—Barbirolli. HMV.
 KABALEVSKY: "Sonata No. 3." Moiseiwitsch. HMV.
 LISZT: "Rapsodie Espagnole"; "Sonetto del Petrarca No. 104." Walter Reberg. Col.
 MOZART: Sonata in B flat, K. 333. Lili Kraus. Parlophone.
 MOZART: "Ach ich fühl's" ("Zauberflöte"); "Deh vieni" ("Figaro"). Irmgard Seefried. Col.
 PURCELL: "Minuet"; and Schumann: "The Prophet Bird." Cortot. HMV.
 SAINT-SAËNS: "Danse Macabre." Concertgebouw—Munch. Decca.
 SCHUBERT: Octet. Vienna Octet. Decca.
 SCHUBERT: "Die Post"; "Der Lindenbaum." Heinrich Schlusnus. Decca.
 SCHUBERT: "Rosamunde" Overture. London Symphony—Krips. Decca.
 TCHAIKOVSKY: Fifth Symphony. London Philharmonic—Celibidache. Decca.
 TCHAIKOVSKY: "Swan Lake" (excerpts not previously recorded). Royal Opera House Orchestra—Rignold. HMV.
 VERDI: "Eri tu" ("Ballo in Maschera"). Inghilleri. HMV.
 WAGNER: "Lohengrin" Prelude. Philharmonia Orchestra—Kletzki. Col.
 WIENIAWSKI: "Polonaise Brillante." Ida Haendel. HMV.