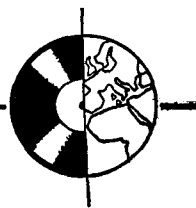


THE OTHER SIDE

(IMPORTED RECORDINGS)



LONDON.
HMV's special birthday tribute to the recent festivities on behalf of Sir Thomas Beecham is entitled "Eighteenth Century Music" and contains the Overture and "Pastoral Symphony" from Handel's "Messiah" (presumably from the complete set, released in the U. S. by RCA Victor, but not yet available over here), a charming and unpretentious little Symphony by Haydn, No. 40 in F major, and a magnificent early work by Mozart, the Divertimento in D major, K.131. Beecham, who gives us subtle and beautifully molded performances of these works, has come in for a good deal of criticism because he includes a Minuet from a later Divertimento in place of one of the two Minuets of K.131. I should like to hear his reasons for this substitution which, on the face of it, seems difficult to justify.

No such doubts assail the reviewer of the really splendid performance by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Strauss's "Don Quixote." In contrast to his earlier version with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, which was disappointing, I feel this to be one of the greatest recordings Beecham has ever given us. For the important solo cello part, the fine French cellist Paul Tortelier was imported, with the rather less exacting viola solo most competently handled by Leonard Rubens, the Royal Philharmonic's leading violist. The recording is technically superb and marks a truly notable achievement on the part of all concerned.

Another Strauss tone-poem to be successfully re-recorded is "Death and Transfiguration." Clemens Krauss conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra on Decca, and proves once again how well he interprets this composer's music. The LPO plays very competently, but the strings lack the kind of opulence the Philadelphia Orchestra used to give us, and without which this composition sounds somewhat faded.

The current visit to this country of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Ormandy has caused Columbia to release a sudden spate of Philadelphia records including the Sibelius Second Symphony and a "Rosenkavalier Suite." While these show an undoubted advance in recording technique over some we have had from the USA during the last few years, there is

still, on our best instruments, a noticeable gap between these and the better European recordings. I imagine that contract commitments will make it impossible for the Philadelphians to make records over here; it would have been most interesting to hear what British studios could have done with such an orchestra. In the case, too, of the splendid performance of Brahms's D minor Concerto by Serkin and the Pittsburgh Orchestra, I fear that the rather hard and shallow tone of the recording will prevent it from achieving the popularity merited by the playing.

There are two symphonies that deserve mention, Schubert's "Little" C major, No. 6, which has been charmingly recorded by Decca, and Dvorak's No. 4 in G, which HMV is offering this month. Josef Krips is at his best in the Viennese idiom and he has secured playing of delightful and delicate quality from the London Symphony Orchestra. Dvorak, too, has been entrusted to a fellow countryman of the composer, Rafael Kubelik, who has recently made Britain his domicile. His performance, with the Philharmonia, has great distinction; it is passionate and lyrical in turn and I particularly liked his handling of the Adagio, which is taken a trifle more slowly than by most other conductors. On the debit side it must be said that the orchestral playing is at times somewhat rough, and the strings of the Philharmonia do not produce as lovely a sound as their Czech colleagues. The recording is very full-bodied, though apt to become a little coarse in the loudest passages.

PROKOFIEFF'S full-length ballet "Cinderella" has been packing the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, ever since its first performance last autumn. Now the ROH Orchestra, under Warwick Braithwaite, has given us the first recorded excerpts from this outstanding success, on three Columbia discs. Though the music obviously must lose a good deal out of context, it is still immensely skilful and highly entertaining—full of characteristic touches. This is ballet writing in the grand tradition, and it is well served by a competent performance and excellent recording.

Victor de Sabata conducting the Augusteo Orchestra in the "William Tell" Overture sounds, on paper at least, a sure winner. In fact it has

turned out to be, with the exception of some lovely cello playing, a crude performance, poorly recorded.

Berlioz's "Roméo et Juliette" excerpts by Toscanini and the NBC Orchestra have at last been released. Our delight at the glorious performance has been tempered by sadness over the absence of the "Queen Mab Scherzo" (was it not promised for the near future when the set was issued in the U. S. about eighteen months ago?) and by regret at the harsh quality of the sound in the "Ball Scene." It may be said without fear of exaggeration that, for a large number of gramophiles in this country, Studio 8-H has acted as a kind of "iron curtain" between them and any real appreciation of this greatest of conductors. For the last ten years, with the exception of three broadcasts relayed by the BBC from Italy (via bad land-lines) we have had to rely solely on these NBC recordings. Naturally there has been much improvement of late, and some of the "Roméo" music sounds lovely. Yet, surely, is it too much to hope that records will yet be made by Toscanini which will give us something of the glorious tone quality he secures from his players, even in a fortissimo passage?

Another orchestral disc meriting space in this report contains the Overture to Cherubini's opera "Les Deux Journées" ("The Water Carrier"). This infrequently heard piece, which could be taken for some minor Beethoven, is played by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra which has, within the last two or three seasons, risen from the depths to become one of our best provincial orchestras. The man responsible for this transformation is Rudolf Schwarz, an Austrian musician, whose enterprise and intelligent, progressive leadership have deservedly won much praise. This should be the first of an interesting series of HMV records by this orchestra.

The vocal field is headed by four sides from Kipnis's "Boris Godunov" set, which—in spite of the inevitable comparisons with Chaliapin's great records—have made a deep impression. The excerpts so far available comprise the "Monologue," the Boris-Shuisky Duet, and the "Clock Scene," all from Act II. Like *Oliver Twist*, we are asking for more. Of the home product, easily the best is Mozart's youthful Motet "Exsultate Jubilate," K.165. While most people will no doubt acquire it for the sake of the famous "Alleluia," the real centerpiece of this composition is the heavenly aria "Tu virginum corona" which occupies just over half of the four sides of Columbia's recording. The singer is Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, perhaps the most sensitive and gifted soprano Europe has produced during the

past decade; hers is a performance that delights the ear and touches the heart. The Philharmonia Orchestra under Walter Süsskind supports her well after a slightly shaky start, but the recording is not quite up to the best standard, at any rate on the last side which contains the "Alleluia."

There has been the usual wide selection of operatic excerpts, including the debuts of Zinka Milanov (very impressive), Raoul Jobin (anything but impressive), and Joel Berglund (a welcome addition to the fast-shrinking ranks of the Wagnerians). In addition we have had "Elisabeth's Prayer" from "Tannhäuser" sung by Flagstad, whose voice is too mature and weighty for this part; two Massenet arias, sung rather indifferently by Tagliavini; a record by Giuseppe di Stefano, which shows him a far more attractive tenor than his illustrious compatriot (arias from "Traviata," Act II, and "Manon," Act III); the lovely air "Frühlingsdüfte" from "Idomeneo" by Mozart, exquisitely sung by Erna Berger with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Krips, and finally something right off the beaten track, the charming cavatina "In questo semplice modesto asilo" from the obscure Donizetti opera "Betly," sung with her usual charm by Margherita Carosio.

Four more vocal records conclude this survey; three of them feature German songs and the remaining one contains "Le Soir" and "Les Berceaux" by Fauré, beautifully sung by Pierre Bernac, supported as always by Francis Poulenc. HMV's recording adds to the excellence of this disc. Of four Schubert songs, the most satisfying one turned out to be the comparatively little known "Seligkeit," deliciously sung by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, who gives us "Die Forelle" on the reverse. Irmgard Seefried does not sound completely at ease in "Das Heidenröslein," but she sings the lullaby "Schlafe, schlafe" with a touching simplicity. Columbia's recording is adequate in both cases. A few months ago I mentioned a highly promising baritone, Frederick Fuller, in connection with some Villa-Lobos songs. He now proves his versatility by recording Wolf's setting of Goethe's witty "Epiphanias" backed by two songs from the "Spanish Song-Book": "Auf dem grünen Balkon" and "Ach, des Knaben Augen." It is not often that we find an English singer who manages to master such difficult German songs as completely as this fine artist. He is well accompanied by Daniel Kelly, and HMV—apart from placing him a little too close to the microphone—has served him well in the matter of recording.

—THOMAS HEINITZ.



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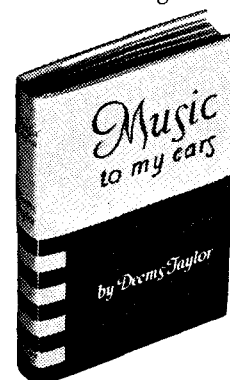
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Some Highs and Lows

IN RE LOW FIDELITY

IT SEEMS a lot of engineers don't like the new slow records much. On the fanciest professional equipment they find numerous faults (though few are of a sort not to be remedied in the continuing shake-down period). There may be distortion in the high range, or tracking is poor; there are overloaded spots, and crackles and hisses, poor transients, and so on. The music, thanks to all this, is not to be enjoyed.

On the other hand, countless people with playing equipment ranging from indifferent to outlandish are obviously enjoying the new records with hardly a qualm. The difference in attitude (as I run into it every day) is striking. Who is to judge the real values in this three-speed era, the engineer or the music lover? If musical enjoyment is the purpose of record playing, then it is too bad that those who are in the best position to get the most music from the new discs are the very ones who obviously are getting the least musical pleasure and the most pain! Something's fishy.

Let me hastily say that this is no philosophical bid for the horse-and-buggy phonograph. High fidelity is here to stay and this is a strictly practical discussion, in terms of presently observable attitudes. High quality reproduction, technical difficulties aside, is obviously preferable to inadequate reproduction. But even if we grant that the headaches we must go through to achieve perfection are simply not worth it for a lot of us—there still remains a confusion. I think it stems from an obstinate (if unconscious) assumption by the engineering mind—that musical pleasure is and ought to be a direct function of the quality of reproduction, that "low" fidelity automatically means low musical satisfaction.

Few would put it just that way, but many technicians simply cannot

accept emotionally the idea that poor reproduction can ever be satisfying. For many engineers, home phonograph equipment is so much junk—and this in the face of the obvious enjoyment of recorded music in the home by a good many millions of us.

The plain fact is that listening to music is no mechanical transference of sound but an act of imagination, aided by sounds picked up via the ear's mechanism. Sometimes those sounds are no more than the instigators of mental activity. The mind thrives through imagination. Given half a chance, it delights in supplying all that is lacking in the literal messages of the senses. Given the barest of tonal hints, we may yet experience the most intense musical enjoyment. Unscientific as it may seem, this is the way the mind works and that is the way we listen. And more still, we can remove as well as create. We have in us an astonishingly efficient mental filter that removes from the conscious a host of irrelevant sounds while passing all that is musical essence. These abilities are abetted by still a third, purely physical and hence understandable in engineering terms: the ear, via its own inherent distortion, can actually hear bass tones not physically present in reproduced sound by synthesizing them from their overtones. (Otherwise no table model phonograph could bring us more than the upper half of a musical harmony!)

This can be non-musically illustrated in the telephone—the high-toned sibilants, missing in the phoned speech, are supplied with ease by the mind; the bass tones, also entirely absent, we derive and actually hear (as in a man's voice) via their harmonics; and the assorted background wheezes and clicks we remove via the mental filter, thus making whole speech out of a truncation fantastically inadequate by any literal standard. So too with music and with the highly pleasurable effect of much reproduction of the sort that is the engineer's horror!

The disparity in viewpoints can, I think, be reconciled. Take it as a matter of plain work. An active mind rejoices in work; it is the nature of the mind, like the body, to work hard and to benefit from hard work. But work burns energy. Mental effort must be fueled. The recreating and filtering we do so easily takes a high toll of straight mental energy and quickly tires us.

Let's think of high quality repro-

duction, then, as a legitimate and highly desirable mental luxury, as the streamlined automobile is a physical one. It's easier to ride than to walk and more efficient. Anything the engineers can do to contribute to the greater luxury of our musical life is decidedly all right with us. But let no one assume that we can't walk if we want to. Nor that we won't on a million occasions continue to use our muscles, mental and physical, as God intended. Low fidelity, too, is here to stay, and that is a straight engineering fact.

—EDWARD TATNALL CANBY.

"Facade" to What?

WALTON-SITWELL: "Façade." Edith Sitwell, narrator, with orchestra conducted by Frederick Prausnitz. (Columbia album 829, \$2.95; ML 2047, \$3.85.)

I don't know the reasons that impelled Edith Sitwell to call her twenty-odd verses written in 1921 "Façade," but it seems to me a title singularly appropriate for something so external and one-dimensional. The usual sources define a "façade" as the exterior or front of a building, something having "architectural pretensions." I don't know that Miss Sitwell's verses are architectural, but that they have pretensions I will certainly agree.

This may be a ponderously proper view to take of anything so obviously compounded of high spirits and jollity as "Façade"; but when Columbia adds to its learned preface by Sir Osbert Sitwell a disquisition by its vice president in charge of Masterworks, Artists, and Repertoire to the effect that "the riches of 'Façade' are particularly attractive for their elusiveness," I can only say: "Who, indeed, is being ponderous?" I am prepared to deal with an ordinary amount of elusiveness, but you will be a millionaire if you can master the riches of this elusiveness.

Miss Sitwell, with her chocolate tones and dark brown manner, seems to me less a poetess than a hoax. With the qualities of the Walton music—the "Hornpipe," "Polka," "Fandango," "Yodeling Song," "Fox Trot," "Waltz," etc.—many of us are familiar from previous recordings. Others, who hear them for the first time from these records, are sure to share in that pleasure, which would have been greater, I think, had the distracting syllables of the Sitwell's syllabants been subtracted. The musical performance is superior, the reproduction extremely good.

—I. K.

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