

a group of musicians known, if at all, only to their fellow Viennese. (Only Veleba, the hornist, is a member of the Vienna Philharmonic.) For it proves unmistakably that the air of Vienna is alive again with the kind of musicians which has always flourished there, and that the secrets of magnificent ensemble playing are, once again, safe in their keeping.

Considering that there have been, in the durable history of the phonograph, just two representative versions of the octet—one with the Lener Quartet as base, the other with the Schneiderhahn—it is a remarkable piece of boldness, as also of generosity, for the Decca people to take this initiative. They have been rewarded, in the first instance, by a performance of the highest quality: subtle, comprehending, and always musicianly. I have no doubt that the secondary rewards will follow as the word of this wonderwork spreads, and the faithful assemble their dollars for the purchase. Any added remarks would only deal with the irresistible qualities of the recording, of the meaty horn and the reedy clarinet.

### *But Is It Tchaikovsky?*

**TCHAIKOVSKY:** *Symphony No. 6 ("Pathétique").* Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. (RCA Victor album V 27, \$11; 45 rpm set, WDM 1281, \$5.25.)

Are you suffering from excesses of the Tchaikovsky? Do you see spots before your eyes every time the "Pathétique" is mentioned? Perhaps what you require is a strong dose of *Elixir d'Arturo* as a musical substitute for sulphur and molasses, a change of oil, or other common restoratives. I can guarantee that the immediate results will be gratifying; but I doubt that the cure will be permanent.

For after a pair of listenings to this performance—the first without score (for size, so to speak), the second with a correlation of what is heard with what is written—I am full of admiration, wonder even, for the pains Toscanini has taken to make the men of the orchestra play what is precisely on the paper before them and thoroughly skeptical of the results. It is art true enough, but is it Tchaikovsky?

It seems to me the example in *ex-celsis* of the application of the Toscanini method where it is less than a solution of the problem involved. Even the obviously impossible feat of making a string section swell from *pppp* to *pp* and back down to *pppp* (an aberration in which Tchaikovsky indulges repeatedly in this score) is not beyond Toscanini's endeavor. Perhaps he even accomplishes it; but while that extreme unction is being applied,

I find that the music has expired. There are beautiful spots without number in the playing—the trio of the second movement, for example, the whole of the march movement (crisply, unbombastically), some of the more Wagnerian passages of the finale. But in substituting his own kind of personality for that of other conductors (and make no mistake, there is a Toscanini personality as emphatically as there is a Stokowski or a Mengelberg), he has given us much less than the whole effect of Tchaikovsky, even as those do who push his phrases all out of shape. Of all the playings, phonographic and otherwise, I have heard, I still prefer—as the most expressive and deeply felt—Furtwängler's, which RCA continues to deny us. For if there is one thing obvious above everything else in this playing, it is that Toscanini *sees* the music, but does not *feel* it at all.

As for the recording itself it has some riches that are not to be belittled (snarling brass, salty woodwinds, steely cymbals), but also a string tone that sounds as if all the instruments had been covered with woolly bags for protection—and the bags left on for the performance. In other words, 8H unresonance, reproduced with unbearable exactness. I could say a few words about the annoyance of the breaks in this work (after listening to another symphony on LP's the half hour before), the havoc it makes of Toscanini's acute pattern of dynamics, or the need to get up and turn a whole pile of records midway in the trio of the 5/4 waltz. But I will forbear.

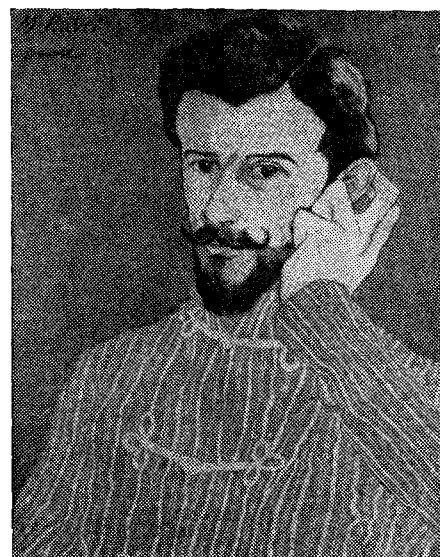
—IRVING KOLODIN.

### *Ravel, Early and Late*

**RAVEL:** "*Shéhérazade.*" *Susanne Danco, soprano, with l'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris, Ernest Ansermet conducting.* (English Decca album 100, \$5.24.)

**RAVEL:** "*Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*"; and **DEBUSSY:** "*Trois Ballades de François Villon.*" *Martial Singher, baritone, with the CBS Orchestra, Maurice Abravanel conducting.* (Columbia album 820, \$3.40.)

A musical career is bounded by the two Ravel song cycles. "*Shéhérazade*" dates from 1903, when the composer was trying, unsuccessfully it turned out, for the Prix de Rome. "*Don Quichotte*" (1932) was Ravel's last composition. Shortly afterwards, he was afflicted with that illness which—five years later—proved mortal. The earlier work scintillates with orchestral virtuosity and cultivates an exoticism which is the more effective for being so patently artificial. "*Asie*,"



—Ouvré.

Maurice Ravel—"an exoticism which is the more effective for being so patently artificial."

the first of its three songs, is the most remarkable, for this long narrative poem would seem singularly inappropriate for musical setting. But Ravel succeeds in imparting a cogent unity to the song, while at the same time exploiting to the full its kaleidoscopic changes of scene and mood. "*La Flûte Enchantée*" and "*L'Indifférent*," which follow, are shorter, less ambitious songs, each giving expression to a fleeting moment of time—the precise musical counterpart, in fact, of the coup d'oeil of impressionist painting. Susanne Danco's warm, sensuous voice is well suited to the texture of the music, and she negotiates its difficult leaps with seeming ease. Ansermet provides the knowing accompaniment one expects from this conductor, and the frr recording has its accustomed luminosity. This interpretation is preferable to that of Janine Micheau recorded in France during the war or to that of Maggie Teyte recently released in England.

"*Don Quichotte*" is a less expansive and less immediately appealing work—terse, almost elliptical, in expression and dry in tonal garb. As in much of this composer's writing, "*Don Quichotte*" reflects the influence of Spain, both in its intervals and rhythms. Singher gave the world premiere of these songs in 1934 and is named dedicatee of the second, "*Chanson Epique.*" He sings intelligently but without much charm or temperamental affinity. Moreover, the orchestral accompaniments (which are too far in the background) leave something to be desired. Were RCA Victor to issue the Bernac-Poulenc recordings of "*Don Quichotte*" and the Debussy "*Ballades de Villon*" in this country, they would score an interpretive bull's-eye.

—ROLAND GELATT.

# Recordings Reports on Classical Releases

See Page 57 for Pop Releases

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Bach: "Chaconne" (arranged by Busoni). Egon Petri, piano. Columbia album X313, \$2.55.	As one of the few pianists equally conversant with Bach and Busoni, Petri is singularly able to make music as well as pianistic display of this much-abused work. I therefore suspend my usual bias against it, and commend Petri for an educational as well as an interesting experience. The recording is substantial in sound, but without tonal brilliance.
Debussy: "Printemps." Beecham conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. RCA Victor set 1293, \$2.50.	A lesser work of Debussy, performed with fastidious care by Beecham and his remarkable orchestra. A dazzling example of much in little, and that little largely the work of the conductor. Deft, admirably clear reproduction.
Debussy: "Petite Suite." Ernest Ansermet conducting L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. English Decca album 98, \$5.25.	Some may regard this as no more substantial Debussy than the work above, but it differs to the extent of being the apotheosis of the moods and images involved: such as "En Bateau," "Cortège," "Menuet," etc. Certainly the work has never been played for the phonograph so well before, nor reproduced with such graces of color and timbre.
Dvorak: "Golden Spinning Wheel." Beecham conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. RCA Victor album 1291, \$4.85.	Not the most original Dvorak, but a score whose warm feeling and folk poetry should certainly have been familiar to us before. (There is no previous recording and I have never heard it in concert.) Even without comparative standards it is apparent the work is superbly played. Full-range recording.
Fauré: "Impromptu, No. 2." Alexander Brailowsky, piano. RCA Victor 12-0794, \$1.25.	I would expect Brailowsky to make more of Ravel's "Jeux d'eau" than he does of the Fauré, but the values are reversed. He plays the Fauré rather fancifully, the Ravel somewhat mechanically. Both are better reproduced than any previous versions.
Goldmark: "Queen of Sheba" Ballet Music. Fiedler conducting the Boston "Pops" Orchestra. RCA Victor 12-0796, \$1.25.	"Fragrant" is as good a word as any other to describe these ingenuous melodies and the colorful instrumentation of them. I would not automatically associate them with Sheba, with or without queen, though a cello solo halfway through reminds us of Goldmark's fondness for that instrument.
Grieg: "Peer Gynt" excerpts, "Norwegian Dances," etc. Morton Gould conducting the Robin Hood Dell Orchestra. Columbia album 824, \$4.95.	Nothing startling about this repertory (Gould arrangements of "To Spring," "Ich liebe dich," and "Wedding Day at Troldhaugen," as well as the other items noted), but the recording is one of Columbia's best: rich in tone, full of unexpected clarities in both highs and lows. For that matter, Gould discharges his task with much taste, excellent control of the orchestra.
Liszt: "Orpheus." Sir Thomas Beecham conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. RCA Victor set 1265, \$2.50.	More of the jubilee Beecham, here laboring with love rather than profit. The best of this is contained in "Les Préludes," where it arrived by way of Berlioz.
Mozart: "Batti, batti" ("Don Giovanni"). Licia Albanese, soprano. RCA Victor 12-0658, \$1.25.	It is apparently a current conceit of Mme. Albanese that she is an adept Mozartian, for it is only last month that we had a "Figaro" record from her. Her style is more appropriate to "Io son l'umili ancella" from Cilea's "Adriana Lecouvreur" on the reverse side. D. Marzollo is the conductor for both.
Mozart: Sonata in C, K.296. Jascha Heifetz, violin, and Emanuel Bay, piano. RCA Victor set 1290, \$2.50.	Though numbered "8" in this issue, the work is the same as the No. 24 previously recorded by Milstein and Balsam, Schneider and Kirkpatrick, as well as Goldberg and Kraus. Heifetz's agile treatment has its merits, but it is all within a narrow range of dynamics, and the piano, in particular, is held down. On the final side he plays the famous Minuet (from the D major Divertimento) in "encore" style.
Mozart: Concerto for Flute and Harp, K.299. René Le Roy, flute, Lily Laskine, harp, with Beecham conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. RCA Victor album 1292, \$4.75.	Laskine has had a previous opportunity with this work (with Moyse rather than Le Roy), but not in such a setting as provided by Beecham. If the praise for his accomplishments is fairly monotonous this month, there are few who would not trade more of the same for albums of this quality. Note especially the reproduction of the flute.
Prokofieff: "Classical" Symphony. Charles Munch conducting L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. English Decca album EDA 107, \$5.25.	Probably the best of all recordings of this work: if it has not quite the brittle gleam of the Koussevitzky, it has a more pointed wit, a wider pattern of contrasts. All four sides are used for the symphony, in distinction to some versions which offer an additional work on the last side. Beautiful sound, especially of the strings here.
Rimsky-Korsakov: "Scheherezade." Ernest Ansermet conducting L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. English Decca album 106, \$13.	Dipscomaniacs (a category of humans who suffer the compulsions of dipsomania with the afflictions of discomania) will want these discs for the potency and fullness of the orchestra's sound; but I do not find Ansermet's conception of the work in the tradition I relish. It is reserved, almost reticent, and to that extent pallid. Moreover, thirteen dollars is much for "Scheherezade," of whatever grandeur.
Schumann: Symphony No. 4 (D minor). George Szell conducting the Cleveland Orchestra. Columbia album 821, \$3.95; and ML 2040, \$3.85.	Here is a new standard for this work: energetic without being rash, sober without being stodgy. It has a degree of piquancy lacking in Goossen's otherwise excellent performance, and is certainly as well recorded. A machine which can build up the bass a bit would show it to be even superior.
Strauss: "Don Juan." Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony. RCA Victor set 1289, \$2.50.	Prodigious orchestral work is the great asset of this recording, on the order of the "Till Eulenspiegel" of verdant memory. However, I do not find it nearly the driving, impassioned thing it has been made to sound by other conductors. The Don appears to tire of his pursuits sooner than Lenau (or Strauss) intended. Forceful, sometimes sharply so, recording.

—IRVING KOLODIN.