

The New Recordings

COMPOSITION, PERFORMER, ALBUM NUMBER, NUMBER OF RECORDS	ENGINEERING Recording Technique, Surface	PERFORMANCE AND CONTENT
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BRAHMS: SERENADE #1 IN D, OP. 11.
Concert Hall Society
Symphony Orch., Swoboda.
Concert Hall C4
(Limited Edition)

A very beautiful small orchestra recording, with splendid width and depth of perspective. Solo instruments clearly etched, natural (it is semi-chamber music), the whole big sounding and alive. High apparent turnover (bass range bit weak).

(See below.) A recording long awaited, by this one listener at least. The playing of individual soloists is excellent, the ensemble good. Swoboda's Brahms is intense, on the verge of overtautness; some hurrying. But far better this than a stodgy performance! Limited to subscribers.

HAYDN: SYMPHONY #94 ("SURPRISE").
Berlin Philharmonic,
Schmidt-Isserstedt.
Capitol ECL 8021 (3)
(Also on LP and 45 rpm)

Not unlike the above, a small group: clean solo lines but live enough to sound "symphonic." First violins seem a bit close to mike. Excellent highs.

A revelation in familiar Haydn in spite of merely average ensemble—a small orchestra minus usual overblown string section; interpretation minus cuteness or heavy romanticizing, an almost chamber style of playing, wholly authentic. Highly recommended.

***BACH: SUITES #1 IN C; #4 IN D.** Boston Symphony Orchestra, Koussevitzky.
RCA Victor DM, WDM 1307 (5)

Finest acoustics for the music I can remember—remarkable depth, extra-clear definition of groups of tone color, inner voices, a true "snarl" to the Bach oboes. Some unfortunate breaks between sides—in view of LP!

The recording is so wonderful, bringing out details galore usually missed altogether even in "live" hearings, that poor playing of dance mvts. is minimized. Overtures are much better—D major, a tremendous piece, is worth price of album.

* Reviewed from slow-speed version.

BRAHMS: SERENADE, OPUS 11

FOR some fifteen years I waited, with my all-time favorite single disc a Minuet and Scherzo from the Brahms First Serenade (London Symphony, Blech; RCA Victor 11458, unavailable), for a complete recording of this remarkable but neglected work. Now Concert Hall has done it and I am wonderfully rewarded. Why is this delightful bit of easy-going Brahms so seldom heard?

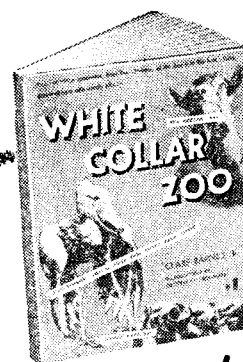
The two Serenades, Opus 11 and 16, form a pair not unlike others in the Brahms output. Opus 16, the more familiar, belongs with those more rigorous works—the First Piano Concerto, the outer symphonies—where there seems to hang a kind of judgment over the music, where Brahms, obsessed with artistic conscience, drives himself at the expense of spontaneity. The Second Serenade is tight textured, eloquent, but so thickly woven as to impede its own freedom and deny the very title Serenade.

Opus 11, the seldom heard, is another Brahms altogether, to match the Second Piano Concerto, the two

inner symphonies, the "Liebeslieder" Waltzes—music less stern, more relaxed, informal, as though conscience were for the moment put aside. It is the perfect Serenade, free, exultant, intimate in the manner of Schumann, yet a marvel of ingenious construction and intellectual thought nevertheless. Its youthful exploration of chromaticism and particularly of the augmented sixth chord is unsurpassed in the later Brahms and of the highest originality. Its conventionalities are less trite than some pretentious moments in the symphonies. The six movements are built Beethoven-like upon a unity of basic material (as was most enchantingly evident on hearing the four unfamiliar movements after years of knowing the Minuet and Scherzo); yet even so, this music dances buoyantly and sings without fetter to the end, its luminescent coloring of solo winds and strings as light as silk. And that from Brahms, the weighty!

Limited edition—will some other company kindly record it for the rest of us?

—EDWARD TATNALL CANBY.



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BOOKED for TRAVEL

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CERNOBBIO, Italy

THE international set, should you be looking for it, takes refuge this time of the year at a resort known as Villa d'Este, on the shores of Lake Como. The Villa d'Este is a hotel with a bizarre past and an elegant present. The internationalists whom it invites to swim in Como's clear waters, to play golf on its eighteen-hole golf course, to play tennis on its clay courts, to sip cocktails on its lake-shore terrace, to eat by the light of its Northern Italian moon are mostly Americans, Europe's dollar aristocrats. Almost one-third of the guests this year have been from the States. The rest come from England, Egypt, and the assorted countries of Europe.

Enough Continentals and enough Americans of Continental caste come to Como to lend to the afternoon cocktail hour the sharp atmosphere of flirtation, intrigue, and chic on the grand scale. Here is Aly Khan's former American girl friend, who is forgetting him with an Egyptian, with whom she turns up periodically at Europe's best hotels. A few tables away a six-foot, five-inch Dane in a white linen suit is dabbling in foreign exchange over tea and pastry. An American lady in a pink dress speaks alternately in French and Italian, re-

turning every now and then to read snatches from a serial story in the new *Cosmopolitan*, which she holds on her lap. A pair of American businessmen, traveling on an Olson Tour, bend over the bar, looking incredulously at a bottle of John Jamieson. The inevitable *femme fatale* sweeps in on the arm of an ascot-ed Englishman who smokes a Turkish cigarette from a long holder. She wears a printed sports dress of many colors which dips low in front in salute to the male population. On the subject of her, the gentlemen of the many nations are united. She puffs great clouds of smoke from a holder half a foot long, sips gin and orange juice, talks American in carefully nurtured British syllables. There are those at the hotel who insist her speech slips now and then into plain New York. Two Egyptians and an Englishman are trying to raise a pair of seats for the Toscanini concert in Milan. Over by the edge of the lake a rotund, florid-faced gentleman from New Mexico sits in his shirt sleeves, his cowboy Stetson on his lap. It's hot, and he is hanging his feet over the railing to cool.

There is a marble statue in the hotel depicting a man bent over, holding his side. The wags have it that the statue represents a departing

guest who has just paid his bill. Actually, by American luxury-hotel standards, the rates are not particularly high. A two-room suite with glass-enclosed bath which, wall to wall, could probably accommodate a convention of the Rotary International, costs \$14 a day per person with food. Add to that the customary obligatory European charge for service and tax, which comes to about an extra 20 per cent. The average pension rate, room and bath with meals, runs between 5,000 and 6,000 lira a day. The lira has been averaging about 615 to the dollar.

ASIDE from the lush life around the hotel there are excursions by speedboat to many of the romantic villas and tiny villages that line the lake. Greta Garbo, who was here ten days ago, was particularly entranced by the sentimental legend of the Villa Pliniana. In a not-too-brief encounter some years ago a beautiful and prominent woman of high Milan society left her husband and went to live with another man at Villa Pliniana. The lovers closeted themselves inside, and didn't appear again for seven years.

The town of Como, which is ten minutes from Villa d'Este by land or lake, is also the silk center of Italy. Two factory-stores sell to tourists—Moretti for piece goods, and Ravasi for ties, scarves, and robes. Foulard ties of printed silk cost about \$1.65, ties of woven silk, \$2. Como's active silk industry has made a silk center of Milan, Italy's largest industrial city, an hour's ride down the *autostrade*, through the lanes of billboards and mulberry trees.

Villa d'Este can trace activity on its site all the way back to 1442, when the grounds were occupied by a convent. The Villa, which was built many years later, was the home during the early nineteenth century of General Pino, an Italian fighting in the forces of Napoleon. Pino's last campaigns took him to Spain, where he successfully stormed a series of medieval castles. When he returned to his home on the shores of Como Pino discovered that his wife had built for him, as a homecoming present, a replica of his conquered castles in Spain. He was so elated that he invited the entire cadet corps of a Milan military school down for the day, and had them put on a mock attack on the castle walls. The ruins of Countess Pino's homecoming gift to the general still stand on the heights above the hotel.

Shortly afterwards Villa d'Este was purchased by Carolina Amelia Elisabeth of Brunswick-Wolfenbut, otherwise known as the Princess of Wales.



—Italian National Tourist Office.

On the shores of Lake Como—"a bizarre past and an elegant present."