

Reviews of the Month

LP activity continues to provide the most that is stimulating in this month's record issues, with Puccini's "Turandot" successfully converted, likewise Stravinsky's "Jeu de Cartes" and a pair of welcome Haydn quartets. Note, too, the debut of Nathan Milstein on the RCA Victor label, in the Glazounow concerto, and the first Rachmilovich discs for Capitol. Opera-goers will be interested in a disc by Paul Schoeffler, the Metropolitan's new baritone.

"Turandot" Revived

PUCCINI: "Turandot." Gina Cigna, soprano, Francesco Merli, tenor, Magda Olivero, soprano, etc., with EIAR Symphony Orchestra and chorus conducted by Franco Ghione. (Cetra-Soria LP set 1206, \$17.85.)

For those who were not opera-goers at the Metropolitan in the late Twenties, when this work was current, or could not spare the \$35.70 to acquire the Parlophone pressings, in which this recording previously circulated, Cetra-Soria's three LP's will amount to a virtual introduction to Puccini's last, uncompleted opera. Technically, of course, it stands as complete because the dramatic situation was carried through (from the point in the third act at which Puccini had arrived when he died) by Franco Alfano. But as Puccini's great friend—and certainly well-wisher—Gatti-Casazza has noted, Puccini was traditionally a careful and conscientious worker who doubtless would have edited his score in the light of public performance or private rehearsal. That, of course, no one else could dare to do.

Whether one will tolerate its languors for its unquestionable stretches of magnificence will doubtless be closely related to one's affection for the lyric muse of Puccini. To be sure, "Turandot" has overtones of "Butterfly" as well as undertones of "Aida" (the central romance involves royalty of warring nations), but it is also a certainty that no composer of our day save Puccini could have written it. That such sections as "Signor ascolta," "Non piangere, Liù," "In questa Reggia," "Nessun dorma," and the "Death of Liù" have become independently celebrated is even less a key to the score than it is in "Tosca," say, for here Puccini was working in a symphonic scope decidedly more ambitious than any other score of his known to me. A Moussorgskyian chorus, a frequently Straussian orchestra are but two of many elements indicative of a new trend in Puccini's talent.

As apprehended from this recording—the only one to date—it would seem well worth an American revival, as-

suming that a soprano of Jeritza's presence and the requisite voice could be discovered. That Cigna is (or was) that soprano, I doubt. The cruelly high tessitura produces, from her, much that is exacerbating, too little that is exhilarating. The others of this cast, however, are uniformly excellent, especially Merli, in the long and difficult role of the Unknown Prince, and Olivero in the shorter but no less arduous part of Liù. Ghione's conducting has every mark of authority, and a degree of intensity in the climaxes which our local performances of Italian opera have all but lost.

The Italian recording technique of the late Thirties, relative to the choral masses, the intricate orchestration, the extremities of range in "Turandot," was not sufficiently advanced to give the LP converters an ideal product with which to work. However, they have done a splendid job within the existing limitations. The voices are sometimes more prominent than the best balance decrees, the orchestra somewhat undervalued, but there is an uncanny sense of actuality in the experience, without which a recorded "Turandot" would be dull going. Dull this one certainly is not.

Glazounow for All

GLAZOUNOW: *Symphony No. 4 in B flat, Opus 48. Jacques Rachmilovich conducting the symphony orchestra of the Academy of Santa Cecilia, Rome.* (Capitol-Telefunken LP 8027 \$3.85.)

GLAZOUNOW: *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 82. Nathan Milstein with orchestra directed by William Steinberg.* (RCA Victor album 1315, \$4.75; WDM 1315, \$3.35.)

Listening to this live, limber, and enjoyable symphony—a product of 1893, when Glazounow was but twenty-eight, and still in thrall to such of his predecessors as Borodin and Glinka—makes one wonder what it is that confers currency on music. In the case of Glazounow, it is, perhaps, easier to say what doesn't: for he was not a popular virtuoso such as Rachmaninoff, to whose muse his may be compared, or a dour, austere figure of legend, such



—Joe Covello-Black Star.

Nathan Milstein—"a pertinent, powerful, and well-phrased statement."

as Sibelius. This work may not aspire to the weight of those by the Finn, but if there were a formula for measuring the musical gold they contain, I do not doubt it would assay as high.

At heart, I believe that Glazounow was as much a composer for the theatre as Tchaikovsky (ballet) or Rimsky-Korsakoff (opera), but he has here managed to channel his impulses in the symphonic stream of Schumann and Schubert, if not Beethoven and Brahms. That is to say, a work in which melodic ideas rather than thematic germs determine the style of treatment. Since the end product is a free, rhapsodic musical expression, the niceties of procedure may be left to the musicologists. Rachmilovich has excellent manpower at his disposal (the orchestra is substantially that known also as the Augusteo) and the original recording of this spring—March 1949—has been converted into an American LP of clarity and good balance, if not notable resonance. It tracks well, with no undue surface comment.

Milstein's initial venture for Victor—he has for all of his previous career recorded for Columbia—is a considerable success, if but a qualified triumph. Relative to his own abilities, he has accomplished a pertinent, powerful, and well-phrased statement of these familiar patterns, but the previous RCA Victor issue offers all this, and Heifetz, too. Those who consider superior reproduction an irresistible lure may be unhappy without this supple, glistening performance; but there is a measure of insight and outspokenness in the Heifetz-Barbirolli which this one lacks. In addition, the eager microphone often merges soloist and orchestra in a way not desirable in this kind of special-purpose score. The 45 rpm

has much brilliance, also more shallowness of sound than the 78, further immersing the Milstein violin in the Steinberg background.

Reger, Kabalevsky, Stravinsky

REGER: "Serenade," Opus 95. Eugen Jochum conducting the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. (Capitol-Telefunken album ECL 8026, \$7.50; LP 8026, \$4.85.)

KABALEVSKY: *Symphony No. 2, Opus 19.* Jacques Rachmilovich conducting the Symphony Orchestra of the Academy of Santa Cecilia, Rome. (Capitol-Telefunken album ECL 8032, \$5; LP 8032, \$3.85.)

STRAVINSKY: "Jeu de Cartes." The composer conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. (Capitol-Telefunken album FCL 8028, \$5.75; LP 8028, \$3.85.)

The process of re-education about Max Reger which began last spring with Capitol's issue of his "Böcklin Suite" continues with the most illuminating contribution to date. If the intervening "Variations on a Theme by Mozart" were more or less of the pedantic persuasion expected of him, this "Serenade" is a score of dazzling freshness, melodic invention, and orchestral mastery. Perhaps its most likely predecessors are the Brahms "Serenades" of Opus 17, but this is not only far better music than either of those, but much more ambitious in scope and successful in execution.

If you can conceive a Dvorak with the intellectual power of a Richard Strauss, you have something of the effect this work conveys to me. It dates from 1906, when Reger was thirty-seven, and shows him a melodist akin to Strauss, Sibelius, and Elgar, among recent contemporaries, one of the dwindling company to possess that gift. Jochum's performance is a thoroughly convincing one, not only lyric where appropriate but urgent and incisive as well. The string tone is a little coarse in the LP, and there is no great tonal luxuriance at any time, but the musical experience is there for all to savor.

One disaffecting element in all these Capitol-Telefunken LP's is an apparent misapprehension of what LP is all about: for the Reger is broken in the middle of the third movement, the Kabalevsky—a busy, "dramatic," and not very absorbing piece—in the middle of the second, and the Stravinsky likewise. It is possible that this Reger was just unworkable, for the full content of two twelve-inch sides has been used. However, both the Kabalevsky and the Stravinsky are on ten-inch discs, a dubious economy when it re-

(Continued on page 55)

Images of Melancholy

DEBUSSY: "Images pour Orchestre." Ernest Ansermet conducting the Suisse Romande Orchestra. (London LLP 44, \$5.85.)

"Ibéria" is the second of Debussy's three "Images pour Orchestre." It has been recorded nine times, and rarely does a major symphony orchestra let a season go by without programming it at least once. But what of its two companion pieces? "Gigues" and "Rondes de Printemps" have languished in obscurity. To understand why, we must first take note of the refusal of Debussyites to come to terms with this composer's evolving modes of expression. By the time Debussy embarked on the "Images" many of his earlier esthetic notions had been abandoned. We find at this juncture of his creative development that muted languor has given way to crystalline forthrightness; he is now more concerned with formal patterns, with the weaving together of horizontal melodic strands; his infatuation with misty vertical chords has abated. Debussy has changed. He no more resembles the composer of "L'Après-midi d'un faune" than the Wagner of "Tristan" resembles the Wagner of "Tannhäuser." But for some reason Debussy is expected to have remained static, and this has engendered considerable confusion. Thus it is that listeners are sometimes disappointed with the "Images," finding them too brisk, too angular in contour, not the "real Debussy."

That "Ibéria" has survived this misunderstanding is due partly to the poetic literary headings which precede each movement, partly to the intensity and vitality of its invention. "Gigues"

and "Rondes de Printemps" are endowed with less programmatic significance. And they are, admittedly, compounded of a lower order of creative genius. We can say the same of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony in relation to the Ninth, yet not banish it from our concert halls.

"Gigues," the first of these "Images," is the least accessible. The English jig, usually a merry, carefree dance, is here charged by Debussy with bitter melancholy. As first enunciated by the oboe d'amore the jig resembles, in mood and timbre if not in melody, that doleful piping on the English horn which opens the last act of "Tristan." Soon this sad jig is woven into an active, pulsating fabric. In this ambivalence between melancholy melodic material and nervous, impelling rhythms lies the score's difficulty. But here is an instance where familiarity breeds respect: respect not only for the technical craftsmanship which Debussy manifests, but also for his ability to transmit the desolation of a soul without once wearing his heart on his sleeve.

"Rondes de Printemps" presents a similar contradiction. The arrival of spring is a subject which ordinarily calls for both rejoicing and refulgence. Debussy acknowledges this in his music, but cannot refrain from commenting that the inevitable outcome of spring is fall and winter. Again we remark that noble and profound melancholy, more powerful in its very reticence, which Debussy shares with his great compatriots Flaubert and Cézanne.

I shall say little about this particular recording. London is to be commended for waxing the "Images" *in toto* and for assigning it to so distinguished a conductor and orchestra. However, this LP disc cannot be called a success. As Mr. Burke points out (page 58), there is little homogeneity to the sound. Moreover, the surface noise often obliterates the delicacy of Debussy's scoring, and there is one point where a sloppy job of splicing leaves an awkward hiatus in the music's flow. We expect better of a record which bears the proud initials of ffrr, and I feel sure London will soon make improvements. In view of these deficiencies it would be unfair to dwell long on Ansermet's interpretation. Let me voice the hope, however, that London will retain in its catalogue the Munch waxing of "Ibéria." Admirable as Ansermet's reading is, I feel that Munch brings a more imaginative approach to the complex rhythms and tonal balances of this buoyant score.

—ROLAND GELATT.



—Bettmann Archive.

A presentation photo from Claude Debussy to a friend—"muted languor has given way to crystalline forthrightness."