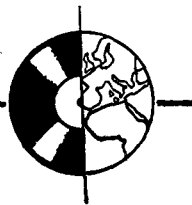


# THE OTHER SIDE

(IMPORTED RECORDINGS)



LONDON.

**C**HRISTMAS month, always the year's peak in the gramophone industry and this year promising to be the busiest within memory, has dealt us a grievous blow by taking from us, at the age of only thirty-three, the Rumanian pianist-composer Dinu Lipatti. Not that his death has come as a surprise, for his health had been a source of constant anxiety even before his name became familiar to us after the war; we knew that whenever he was billed for a concert the odds were heavily against his being sufficiently well to appear. I heard him only once, when he was the soloist at Karajan's first appearance in this country, a concert that gave us a memorable recording of the Schumann Concerto by these two artists. There are few artists on whose behalf the gramophone will be seen, in years to come, to have performed as great a service as it has done for the late Dinu Lipatti. Had nature blessed him with a stronger

constitution he would, I feel certain, have established himself as one of the greatest masters of the keyboard of all time, yet his records may still achieve what his frail body was unable to do during his short span of life.

When Lipatti was no longer able to leave his Geneva home for concert platform or recording studio, Columbia's engineers waited on him at his home instead and, when his condition seemed to improve—alas, it was only to be a temporary flicker of life—he recorded the Bach Partita No. 1, the fourteen Chopin Waltzes, and the Mozart A minor Sonata, all in the space of one day! We have yet to hear the Mozart, but six records containing the Chopin Waltzes and the Mazurka in C sharp minor, Op. 50, No. 3, were released two or three days before his death on December 3. On that very day, still unaware of the fact that he was dying, I was reviewing this set for *Critique* (a monthly record guide

which I edit) and wrote: "In a world so full of sloppy and sentimentalized Chopin playing, Lipatti's performance comes as a breath of fresh air entering into a stuffy room." My colleague Alec Robertson, well known critic and broadcaster, writes in *The Gramophone*: "I was continuously both interested and enchanted from start to finish and regard this recording as a highlight in the history of the gramophone. . . . The most hackneyed and overplayed numbers emerge freshly from the fingers of this great artist."

**I** QUOTE these remarks because I feel them to be of greater value than anything I could write now, which is bound to have an obituary flavor. I would merely add that readers of the *SRL* should sample this set as soon as they have the opportunity; such mastery of the piano as Lipatti displays, for example, in the Valse Brillante in E flat has not even been surpassed by Horowitz, and in addition to the dazzling finger-work the performance delights by the tastefully and intelligently applied rubato and its musicianly phrasing.

As 1950 draws to a close it is already obvious that it has been one of the most successful as well as momentous years in the history of the  
(Continued on page 49)

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# Recordings in Review

## Two Sorcerers

DUKAS: "L'Apprenti Sorcier." Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. (RCA Victor 45-rpm album 1416, \$3.35; 78 rpm, \$4.75.) Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. (Columbia LP 2156, \$3.85.)

ANY TIME anyone dilates on the virtues of consistency, let this example of so great a man as Toscanini's "inconsistency" be remembered. For in re-recording "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" for the first time in a decade and a half, Toscanini has agreed with those who have been contending all the time that it couldn't possibly be played at proper tempo on two sides. Thus, in place of the breathlessly headlong pace of his former two-sided version with the Philharmonic-Symphony, we have at last a three-sided version with the NBC.

All things considered, this is one of the most brilliant examples on record of the virtuosity of this orchestra in sheer ability to play fast and loud, slow and soft, on and off the beat. The ensemble is no epitome of caressing sound, but it certainly plays with magnificent unanimity. What emerges is more terrifying than amusing, but perhaps Toscanini has been going by Goethe rather than Dukas. The present length is just about ten minutes of sharp-textured 8H sound, but unique nevertheless. The additional pieces in the collection called "Toscanini Plays Light Music" are Kabal-evsky's "Colas Breugnon" Overture and Waldteufel's "Skaters" Waltz. These are both the versions previously offered . . . and very far from what

could reasonably be called "light music."

The Ormandy version is part of a well-tossed *salade française* with Debussy's "L'Après-midi d'un Faune" and the Honegger "Concertino" (see page 42). It is pretty much the same conception he squeezed onto Columbia 12584, getting the thing over with in nine minutes. For him, some further thought is evidently in order. Neither the conception nor the execution are within several abracadabras of the Toscanini wizardry.

## Words, Words

SAINT-SAËNS: "Carnival des Animaux." Jascha Zayde and Leonid Hambro, pianists, with Andre Kostelanetz conducting his orchestra and Noel Coward reciting verses by Ogden Nash. (Columbia LP 4355, \$4.85.)

PROKOFIEFF: "Peter and the Wolf." Serge Koussevitzky conducting The Boston Symphony Orchestra, with Eleanor Roosevelt as narrator. (RCA Victor LP 45, \$4.45.)

OF these two enterprises it may be said inclusively that one *perhaps* shouldn't have been made, that the other *certainly* shouldn't have been made. In putting verses by Ogden Nash in and around the Saint-Saëns "Carnival des Animaux" Columbia has been guilty perhaps of a lapse of taste; in putting the erstwhile "First Lady" before the microphone as interlocutor for Prokofieff's melodic fairy tale, RCA Victor has reminded us, unfortunately, of the exchange supposedly credited to Clemenceau on his meeting with Paderewski at Versailles. "Were you not once the world's greatest pianist?" queried the Frenchman. Paderewski replied, modestly, that some had said so. "And now you are Premier of Poland?" "Yes," admitted Paderewski. Clemenceau shook his head. "What a comedown." The comedown here is even more accentuated; for Mrs. Roosevelt's talents as a professional narrator are almost uncomfortably nil. Any country school teacher could do better. Koussevitzky's musical direction is more vivid than ever, the reproduction superb.

Turning to something a good deal less depressing gaiety is the touchstone of the Nash-Coward-Saint-Saëns "Carnival," with the old question predominant. That is, are spoken words desirable in a recording in which the

music is meant to be heard over and again? My reluctant conclusion is no. Despite the general suitability of Nash's verses (I could do with a few less contorted end-rhymes like "highness" and "lioness," "simian" and "wimian," not to mention "harmonica" and "oniger") they would read a lot better as program notes than they sound as verbal addenda to Saint-Saëns' delightful fantasy. But, then, Columbia wouldn't have the publicity value of Coward's highly artful participation as verbal M.C.

At root, however, I feel a deeper disquiet about the Nash-Coward embellishment of Saint-Saëns, since it provides a verbal distraction from the self-sufficient musical creation of the composer. The annotations omit any mention of such delightful by-play as the use of the galop from Offenbach's "Orphée aux Enfers," *adagio maestoso*, to suggest the turtle; or the take-off on Luigini's "Ballet Egyptien" for the lion; or the quotation, in the basses, from Berlioz's "Danse of the Sylphes" for elephants; and it ignores completely that what it calls "Mules" was a gibe at music critics called "Creatures with Long Ears." And the spoof about betting on the turtle loses point in rhyming "pauper" with "torpor"; didn't the tortoise actually beat the hare?

Columbia could rectify this injustice to those who would be satisfied with the superb musical performance by Kostelanetz and company by issuing it without the Coward-Nash verbalizations. That is quite possible, since the musical performance was recorded on tape before the words were added. Thus, Nash could have his cake, and we could eat S-S's music. In any case it ranks among the finest sound Columbia has made in this country. The overside of the LP offers Ravel's "La Mère l'Oye," previously issued on 78.

## Horowitz for History

SCHUMANN: "Kinderscenen." Vladimir Horowitz, piano; also CHOPIN: *Seven Mazurkas*. (RCA Victor LP 1109, \$5.45.)

AS those who remember a famous Horowitz recording of the Schumann "Arabeske" are aware there are certain works of this composer of which the peerless virtuoso has not only complete pianist domination but also complete poetic understanding. By some chemical factor unknown to me, the "Kinderscenen" proves to be such a one, and the issue is a recording that may endure for long as the best of Horowitz's art.

From the frisky "Hasche-Mann" to the beautifully imagined "Träumerei" Horowitz is at one with the fanciful



Horowitz—"complete poetic understanding."