

IMPRESSIONS

IT IS A calendar year since the first demonstration of RCA Victor's 45 rpm system prompted a discussion of its uses and potentialities in this space. The observation was then made: "In choosing to preserve the status quo of record reproduction—as represented by a record of short-playing span—RCA Victor has limited itself to the convenience of one segment of the public (the large mass market) and left the smaller, if more discriminating, public to take what consolation it can from the improved quality of the new disc. . . . When the returns are in, a year from now, we may all know a good deal more about consumer preference than we do now."

The year has passed, and with it the resistance of the last large maker in this country to the LP as a medium for extended musical works. Its priceless asset of continuity has as obviously dominated the consumer mind at large as it has the many individuals that make up that market. That is to say, though no sampling of opinion has been conducted on a nationwide basis, I have yet to encounter any buyer of extended musical works who didn't prefer the LP "idea" to any other idea yet advanced. Now that it is universally endorsed (we may expect a similar trend from HMV and English Columbia in due course) there remains merely the extension and application of it at maximum skill.

Columbia and its associated engineers (primarily Messrs. Goldmark and Bachmann) have turned a phenomenal trick in bringing to virtual perfection so revolutionary a program in the period when babes are still described in months rather than years. Now the special arts of frr have given us the best non-Columbia product yet (see page 62) in its new "Petrouchka," at the time when RCA

Victor also joins the list of LP producers. We congratulate the company of Barraud's "Nipper" on its peace-making decision and look forward with keen interest to the first products of its long playing enterprise.

All of us can think of choice items from the RCA storehouse of recorded music that would be immediately de-

sirable on long playing discs. However, it would be well, I think, to regard the situation with restraint, for some of the best of what we want may not be available for mechanical reasons. The comment on "Petrouchka" is pertinent here.

IRVING KOLODIN,
MUSIC EDITOR.

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ARTICLES

A Vote for Francis Poulenc.	ROLAND GELATT.	57
Music to My Ears.	IRVING KOLODIN	59
Leadbelly's Legacy.	FREDERIC RAMSEY, JR.	60
Christoff, Tebaldi, and Others.		66
Report on LP: Random Notes.	C. G. BURKE.	70

REVIEWS

Bizet: "Carmen" Suite (Beecham)	IRVING KOLODIN.	62
Stravinsky: "Petrouchka" (Ansermet)		
Haydn: Early Symphonies (Sternberg)		
Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 5 (Mengelberg)		
Schumann: "Fantasiestücke" (Rubinstein)		
Respighi: "Fountains of Rome" (De Sabata)		

DEPARTMENTS

RECORDINGS Reports on Classical Releases.	64
The Other Side.	THOMAS HEINITZ. 68
Some Highs and Lows.	EDWARD TATNALL CANBY. 71
Hits and Misses.	WILDER HOBSON 72
RECORDINGS Reports on Popular Releases.	73
Letters to the RECORDINGS Editor.	74

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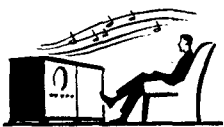
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A Vote for Francis Poulenc

ROLAND GELATT

IT IS WITH full awareness of Nature's lavishness and of the common tendency to overvalue her rich harvest that I write of Francis Poulenc. Nature's way with composers is to create them in profusion, hoping thereby that from this abundance a few great masters may emerge. Each generation can lay claim to its quota of durable composers among the parade of evanescent talents. The trick is to single them out at the time. History shows that error lies in esteeming too highly a minor composer rather than in neglecting an important one. Schumann, who wrote with equal rapture of Chopin and Niels Gade, loved not wisely but too well. It is a sobering example.

Sensible of encroaching on precarious ground, I must still express my growing conviction that the name of Francis Poulenc will appear on concert programs a century hence. Certainly, he is much in evidence these days—not only on the programs of singers and pianists but, during the next few months, on concert stages throughout the country. For Poulenc has recently arrived here for a three-month visit, during which time he will appear as soloist in his new piano concerto, supervise the American premiere of "Figure Humaine," and tour from coast to coast in a series of joint recitals with the baritone Pierre Bernac. Whether this kindling of interest will continue to burn with a steady flame remains to be seen.

In any event, I should make clear that there are two Poulencs. One is the typical French musician of the early Twenties, a member of "Les Six," composer of the facile "Mouvements Perpétuels," the violin sonata, or the "Aubade" for piano and chamber orchestra: a charming composer, adroit and entertaining, but too concerned with superficial virtuosity, too prone to concoct a spicy ragout of disparate styles. The other is the Poulenc of some 130 songs, several large-scale choral



Francis Poulenc—"no fear of being treated shabbily by posterity."

works, and the *opéra-bouffe* "Les Mamelles de Tirésias." Here is a different, infinitely more meaningful Poulenc, a master of his medium, who speaks bewitchingly in a style all his own and informs every note with a sense of inner conviction.

WITH an objectivity and candor rare among creative artists, Poulenc readily admits to this twofold aspect of his musical output. Today, he will acknowledge, his chamber music and piano compositions strike him as rather unimportant works. Why should a composer write so movingly in one medium, so trivially in another? This was my first question (more diplomatically phrased, to be sure) when I recently spoke with Poulenc—a conversation maintained with the helpful cooperation of Doda Conrad, who bridged the gap between my bad French and Poulenc's bad English. Concerning his chamber music Poulenc had a disarmingly simple reply. "I do not especially care for the sound of solo string instruments," he confessed. "For me, strings should always be spelled in the plural." As for the piano music, "It came too easily. Being a pianist,

I found myself engrossed only in exploiting the possibilities of the instrument, and the result was music of brilliance but little significance."

To set this latter self-criticism in its proper perspective, one must add that Poulenc does not equate significant music with ponderous music. To him, wit is part of the very substance of musical expression. He objects to the way French composers are often criticized for being too witty. "You will find sobriety and dolor in French music just as in German or Russian," he asserts. "But the French have a keener sense of proportion. We realize that somberness and good humor are not mutually exclusive. Our composers, too, write profound music, but when they do it is leavened with that lightness of spirit without which life would be unendurable."

Poulenc is very much a contemporary, but not an innovator. He has created no new forms, no unusual harmonic devices; his musical esthetic has about it nothing of the revolutionary. If he is not strikingly *avant-garde*, neither is he a classical or baroque composer attired in twentieth-century dress with a taste for sterile fugues peppered with dissonance. He speaks a language thoroughly his own. He can be dissonant, yet his dissonance is a means to an expressive end, never an end in itself. One could call him traditional but not reactionary, the tradition being that of Chabrier, Satie, and late Ravel.

As a composer of songs, Poulenc has no living peer. In the grand line of Schubert, Schumann, and Johannes Brahms, he has the knack of writing unforgettable, irresistible melodies—melodies which seem predestined for the words. His piano accompaniments are masterpieces in themselves, so perfectly do they complement and intensify the vocal line. As a creator of musical atmosphere he is worthy of being mentioned with Moussorgsky, the composer whose influence on Poulenc, by his own admission, has