

Reviews of the Month

Chopin by Novães

CHOPIN: *Twenty-Four Preludes*. Guiomar Novães, piano. VOX LP 6170, \$4.85.

CHOPIN: *Sonata in B flat minor*: "Fantasie," opus 49. Guiomar Novães, piano. VOX LP 6230, \$4.85.

One of the few contemporary artists who, for this taste, can do practically no wrong is the splendid Brazilian pianist Guiomar Novães. An irregular visitor to this part of the hemisphere, she has, nevertheless, been of un-failing interest since she made a greatly admired debut in her teens thirty years ago. In a time of sensationalism and display, Mme. Novães has steadfastly remained one of those pianists to whom the classification of the instrument as "percussive" is a challenge rather than an invitation.

Perhaps because her public has not been built by frequent nationwide tours and orchestral appearances, Mme. Novães has been neglected by the large companies for whom she has recorded in the past, limited to small pieces and genre composers of her native land. That, one may now hope, is a thing of the past for in this pair of debut records for Vox she has taken a foremost place among recording pianists, which should be bolstered as quickly as her other Schumann, Beethoven, and Mozart specialties can be prepared.

My preference is the cycle of preludes, not only for the welcome pleasure of hearing them in a sequence broken only once, but even more for the care, taste, and pianistic magic of Mme. Novães's performance. At whatever level of sound, the piano always sings in that rich, well-articulated resonance which is her particular pianistic voice. Each of the twenty-four is given in its predestined character, with a degree of finesse and lyric feeling which are intimately related to these intimate pieces. In this respect they are more consistently satisfying than the showier performances of Rubinstein—and much better reproduced.

There is a dramatic accent in the B flat minor sonata which Mme. Novães does not always underscore as it might be but within the framework of her conception it is as homogeneous and beautifully expressed as the preludes. Particularly the brooding inflection of the "Marche Funèbre" is something to refresh ears long sated with the common four-square treatment. The "Fantasie" may not have

the sweep of the old Cortot but it has more point and delicacy than the new Sandor, which is its present-day competitor. The quality of this recording stirs bright hopes for future collaborations of Novães and Vox (the Schumann "Carnival" please?).

De Luca at Seventy-Four

MOZART: "Non piu andrai" etc. Giuseppe de Luca, baritone, with piano accompaniment. (Continental LP 102, \$4.85.)

Short of being able to hear the rich art and golden voice of Giuseppe de Luca as it exists on numberless Victor records made in his prime, there is some interest in hearing the still rich art but far from golden voice in this collection made within the last few years. It is, of course, astonishing that a singer past seventy can still articulate his ideas with the strength and clarity heard from De Luca in "Non piu andrai" or "Se vuol Bal-lare" from Mozart's "Figaro" or "Quand'ero Paggio" from Verdi's "Falstaff" but the tone is woody and without vibrance. At that, with the defective technique with which these items have been made the piano does not sound much better than it might on De Luca's early electric discs. Also included are excerpts from "Pique Dame," Giordano's "Siberia," "Adriana Lecouvreur," and the "Champagne" air from "Don Giovanni." As a limited kind of tribute to a grand

singer this disc has its interest but it would be too bad if the idea was spread about that this is any real indication of how De Luca actually sounded.

"Pathétique," on Two

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Symphony No. 6* ("Pathétique"). Herbert von Karajan conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. (Columbia LP 4299, \$4.85.) Charles Munch conducting the Orchestre de la Société du Conservatoire de Paris. With: "Romeo and Juliette" overture-fantasy conducted by Eduard van Beinum, played by the London Philharmonic. (London LLP 166-7, \$11.90.)

The great issue whether Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" can endure by itself or as half-slave to the "Romeo and Juliette" overture has now been joined. When the smoke screen of charges and countercharges has settled, one question, I think, will be pre-eminent. Who does the better "Pathétique": Von Karajan or Munch? I think it is demonstrable by ear and eye (the score would come into this) that the Viennese has a more fluid feeling for the score, a greater sense of how it should be articulated, than the Alsatian now become Bostonian. I privately incline to the feeling that both are needlessly hysterical, and Toscanini (RCA LP 1036, \$5.45) needlessly austere, leaving the Furtwängler of ready recollection as the best in modern time.

So far as the matter of London's bold unconventionality is concerned, it all comes down to its unwillingness—let us not say inability—to put



Guiomar Novães—"pianistic magic."

—Bruno.



Eduard van Beinum—"charges and countercharges."

twenty-seven minutes of music on a single LP side. While the total of the "Pathétique" is estimated in the score as forty-eight minutes, Munch does it in forty-six, Von Karajan in forty-five. The last two movements present no problem, for Von Karajan covers them in eighteen minutes, Munch in twenty. However, London prefers to blend movements two and three on a side (seventeen minutes), with the nineteen-minute first movement and the eleven-minute finale on single sides.

I will grant the London discs a measure of superiority to the Columbia, in tonal richness, instrumental detail, and articulation, but nothing like the 33-per-cent edge suggested in the spacing of the material—assuming that this technical consideration was dominant. My suspicion is that London will soon issue a general-purpose version of its "Pathétique" on a single twelve-inch LP, leaving to the perfectionists this duple product. The Van Beinum "Romeo and Juliette" is fresh proof of the change he wrought in the London Philharmonic Orchestra, but it doesn't impress me as a performance comparable to either Toscanini's or Beecham's. Since neither Munch's "Pathétique" nor Van Beinum's "Romeo and Juliette" is the premier treatment of the work involved, the attractiveness of the joint issue would seem self-evident.

"Schicchi" & "Tabarro"

Puccini: "Gianni Schicchi." Giuseppe Taddei (Schicchi), with Grete Rapisardi (Lauretta), Giuseppe Savio (Rinuccio), and others, with Orchestra of Radio Italiana directed by Alfredo Simonetto. (Cetra-Soria LP 50,028, \$5.95.)

"Il Tabarro." Antenore Reali (Michele), Clara Petrella (Giorgetta),

Glauco Scarlini (Luigi), and Giuseppe Nessi (Tinca), with Radio Italiana Orchestra conducted by Giuseppe Baroni. (Cetra-Soria LP 50,029, \$5.95.)

There is promise and performance here, but not in the expectable order. The promise is afforded by the relatively popular "Gianni Schicchi" with its familiar story, two agreeable airs, and generally lively atmosphere. The performance is provided by the grimmer, lesser-known "Tabarro," which, in this version at least, is much the better of the short works which Puccini meant to be performed on a single evening ("Suor Angelica" is the other).

Some of this may have to do with pure phonographic values. The bustle and excitement of "Schicchi," which is eye-engaging when the dozen or more characters are milling around the stage waiting for the venerable Florentine to die, eager to share in his will, and willing to have the rogue Gianni Schicchi dictate another when the original is unfavorable, emerge from the disc as chaotic and strident, with a single notable performance: Taddei's Schicchi. He is almost visible, and compellingly audible, evoking a characterization worth a place beside his memorable Falstaff of a few months back. The rest of the cast is mediocre, however, with particular ear strain from Savio, a throaty, charmless Rinuccio, and Rapisardi, a quavery Lauretta. More of the orchestral score comes through than is heard in the opera house but Simonetto lacks the authority and drive to carry through at those moments where clarity hangs in the balance. Good recording, second-rate performance.

"Tabarro," however, is a revelation. Reali is a forceful Michele, Petrella an excellent Giorgetta, and Scarlini a real tenor in the role of

Luigi. At the outset the suggestions of "Butterfly" and "Bohème" are almost painful, but as Puccini plunges deeper into the special situation of the bargeman, the errant wife, and the passionate deck-hand, it takes on a color and fervor akin to "Tosca," but not at all a mere echo. Among them, the principal singers create an atmosphere of dramatic suspense much more evocative and listenable than the hectic overemphasis in "Schicchi." Most of this must be credited to Baroni's understanding direction but more than a little is inherent in the work itself. Perhaps familiarity with "Schicchi" breeds disdain, if not contempt. For the moment, however, "Tabarro" will suffice. Fine clear recording, with a break in the appropriate place between scenes. The complete text (English and Italian) is a bonus from Cetra-Soria and a welcome dividend with either work.

Jeux de Bizet

BIZET: "Jeux d'Enfants." Vitya Vronsky and Victor Babin, duo-pianists. (Columbia LP 2701, \$3.85.)

Considering the lengths to which duo-pianists have gone in recent years to find material to keep them busy—anything from Mozart's "Figaro" overture to the "Largo al factotum" from "Il Barbiere"—it is about time that they have reverted to the authentic literature of the instrument, as Vronsky and Babin have done here. (The "Slavonic Dances" of Dvorak could be next.) Those whose appetite has been aroused by the excerpts arranged by Dorati for a De Basil Ballet, and recorded in part on RCA Victor Set 721, will find the full serving not less tasty and proportionately more satisfying. Some persons of long memory can close their eyes at one point and still see Irina Baronova as a "Spinning Top" of the ballet.

What is particularly delightful about this set of pieces is not alone their engaging rhythmic charm or melodic freshness but even more what they tell us about Bizet, who is known, apparently, by but one atypical work—"Carmen." The "real" Bizet, as manifest in these fanciful brevities or the delightful "Symphony in C" was strongly attuned to Schumann (the "Carnaval" especially) and might have founded a whole French school so influenced had he not died at thirty-seven. Whether Vronsky and Babin play the music at one piano, four-hands, as the composer intended, or as a piano duet, is hardly important. They play the music, with full sympathy, warm understanding, and characteristic tone. Fine reproduction, too.

Recordings Reports: Classical LP's and Albums

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WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Bach: Seven Sonatas. Fernand Caratge, flute, and Marcelle Charbonnier, harpsichord. VOX PL 6160, \$11.90.	Though Caratge is an unfamiliar name, he seems a thoroughly qualified inheritor of the great French tradition of his instrument. The deftness and subtlety of the music are extraordinary, of a delicacy and sophistication rarely excelled by Bach. There can be nothing but praise for the recording.
Beethoven: Leonore No. 3, and Ravel: "Daphnis et Chloe" suite No. 2. Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Orchestra. RCA Victor LP 1043, \$5.45.	Both performances have been reviewed previously, in conventional and 45-rpm versions. The coupling on LP has only one justification: that Toscanini is a unity greater than the widely dissimilar works he performs. At that, an adoration of the conductor is the impelling reason for buying this disc, for neither performance is quite what the work merits.
Beethoven: Mass in C, opus 86. Rudolf Moralt conducting the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, with chorus and soloists. VOX PL 6300, \$5.95.	A "little" Mass, by the measure of the "Missa Solemnis," this score has many splendid things in it. As a phonographic first-time it is a precious addition to the Beethoven literature though Moralt is here more a dutiful than a penetrating conductor. Excellent work by the solo quartet (Gisela Rathauscher, Elfriede Hofstaetter, Alfred Planyavsky, and Walter Berry) and bright, well-balanced reproduction of the whole sound. The choral masses are especially impressive.
Brahms: Concerto in D. Yehudi Menuhin, violin, and Lucerne Festival Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. RCA Victor album 1361, \$7.25. WDM 1361, \$5.51.	Highly creditable work for Menuhin, who has not made as fine a recording as this in many months. However, Furtwängler's direction is exaggerated in emphasis, perilously close to the ponderous in a work which can ill-afford overstress. Not as good sound as the recent Renard-Munch on London or as interesting performance as the Szigeti-Ormandy. For the Menuhin public, if for anyone.
Brahms: Quartet in G minor. Rudolf Serkin, piano, with members of the Busch Quartet. Columbia LP 4296, \$4.85.	Expert, closely integrated playing of a work which no longer sounds as meaningful as it once did to me. Perhaps it is for reasons above and below. Serkin is splendid throughout though the gypsy finale could be more incisive as in the old Rubinstein. Excellent balance.
Brahms: Quintet in F minor. Clara Haskil, piano, with Winterthur String Quartet. Concert Hall. LP CHC 16, \$4.85.	Not as satisfactory as previous issues from Winterthur in the Swiss Alps, partially because the bigness of style asks a pianist commanding more sonority than Haskil and also because the surface crackles more than current practices make necessary. Rather matter-of-fact performance in all, without real illumination of the music.
Franck: Symphonic Variations. Robert Casadesus, piano, with the Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by George Weldon. D'Indy: Symphony on a Mountain Air. Casadesus, piano, with Munch conducting the Philharmonic-Symphony. Columbia LP 4298, \$4.85.	A brilliant accomplishment for both Columbia and Casadesus—two works not previously available on LP, of like enough genre to please all but the irreconcilables. For a novelty, the bright, shimmering sound of the American recording is even better than the disc-mate from England. Wonderfully fresh and vibrant treatment of the D'Indy by Munch, in a more vigorous style than the generally admirable Monteux-San Francisco. The Franck is a little stodgy in sound, especially the dull-toned piano, but it is a better performance than any since the still supreme Gieseking.
Franz: "Im Herbst," "Im Frühling," etc. Carol Brice, contralto, with Jonathan Brice, piano. Columbia LP 2108, \$3.85.	If this ten-inch LP were all Franz—a welcome if wishful thought—the arbitrary sequence might be defensible; but the progression from Beethoven's "In tomba oscura" to a Falla "Seguidilla" by way of a Franz group is more like Town Hall than the phonograph should be. The Brice voice is more imposing than ever, though she seems to be encouraging stridence at the top to fatten the lower range—which doesn't need it. The overside, in English, offers a variable sequence of "They All Dance the Samba," Carpenter's "The Day Is No More," three spirituals, and Foster's "Ah! May the Red Rose." Fine reproduction.
Rachmaninoff: Prelude in G minor, etc. Concerto LP, \$4.85.	Another appropriation from the player-piano literature, which sounds more like a libel on Rachmaninoff than anything describable as a likeness of his art. Included as well are various items of Tchaikovsky ("Troika"), Chopin ("Maiden's Wish"), and Schubert ("Das Wandern"). On the other side are performances by Hofmann, Grieg, Lhevinne, and George Copeland—the latter presumably playing Debussy's "L'Après midi." The processing is poor with overcut grooves and rather noisy surfaces.
Rossini: "Barber of Seville" Overture, etc. Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor LP 1044, \$5.45.	The familiar and dazzling series of Rossini overtures—"Gazza Ladra," "La Cenerentola," and "Il Signor Bruschino" in addition to the "Barber"—successfully converted to continuous form, two to a side. The sound is a shade off in dazzle from the original but impressive enough in any case.
Strauss: "Burleske." G. Muench, piano, with Alfons Dressel conducting the Munich Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra. VOX LP 6110, \$5.95.	A properly spirited, idiomatic playing of this delightful work, a grateful relief for those who have either been enduring the brittle version of Arrau or doing without. Expert collaboration by conductor Dressel and bright recording with accentuated highs. Something more challenging than the Liszt E flat concerto <i>again</i> , would have been desirable on the overside. Hans Rosbaud stirs up a tempest with his orchestra and the pianist, identified simply as R. Schmid, is an accomplished artist. The playing, as a whole, may be described as able and undistinguished.
Tchaikovsky: "Swan Lake" excerpts. Andre Kostelanetz and his orchestra. Columbia LP 4308, \$4.85.	More of this jeweled score than has ever been available on records previously, played in conscientious but rather earthbound style by Kostelanetz. He does not have the rhythmic finesse of Golschmann, for example, who might be tapped by RCA for a rival enterprise. It is, however, a pleasure to have so much of the score so well executed orchestrally. The recording is excellent in solo details, and in mass below a forte; when loud, it is also shrill.

—IRVING KOLODIN.