

Beecham on Discs

DATING an impression is never an easy thing, especially when it reaches back across a quarter of a century and could have been one of several months in one of several years. Thus I cannot say rightly when I may first have heard a Beecham record. The probability tends either to 1925 or 1926, and it was most probably the "pre-electric" Overture to "The Marriage of Figaro" noted in the compilation on page 70. I owed that introduction to C. G. Burke, several years older than my late teens, already learned in a field in which I was but a novice.

I can say with certainty that the first Beecham performance that made a deep impression on me was a recording of the Beethoven Second Symphony. It made its appearance in America during the Beethoven centennial year of 1927, in a black four-pocket album which (English fashion) opened on the side and was tied around with a kind of shoelace. That was doubtless part of its charm for one too young to appreciate all its musical quality but old enough to realize that this was no common way of playing the Beethoven Second. In the course of some research a few months ago I happened on a contemporary article of Ernest Newman in which this same Beecham conception of the Second Symphony was extolled as a prime happening of London's Beethoven Centennial season. Gerald Abraham's comment (page 66) makes it quite apparent that it was an ear-opener on both sides of the Atlantic.

Some more recent research may be mentioned. The English Columbia folk apparently thought highly of the same Beethoven No. 2 and organized a ceremonial hearing of it for the press. Among those in attendance—reasonably enough—was the perpetrator of the deed himself. I can imagine the consternation that prevailed when, in reply to the glowing appreciation of his historic effort, he described the gramophone as a "delightful toy" but one which under no circumstances should be confused with real music making.

I cite this neither to confound our guest nor to gibe at his lack of foresight, but rather to illustrate a paradox. That opinion, I imagine, was one rather widespread among practising musicians of the time, if few would have expressed it in such surroundings. Beecham, however, was one of a handful—Stokowski may have been the sole competitor—who gave *only* his best to the "delightful toy," worked

with its shortcomings, sought energetically and with the whole curiosity of his mind to conquer them and improve upon the results. Who can forget the majesty and delight of his famous "Messiah," which endured as a standard for two decades because of the incomparable care and thoughtfulness that went into its creation at this same "delightful-toy" period?

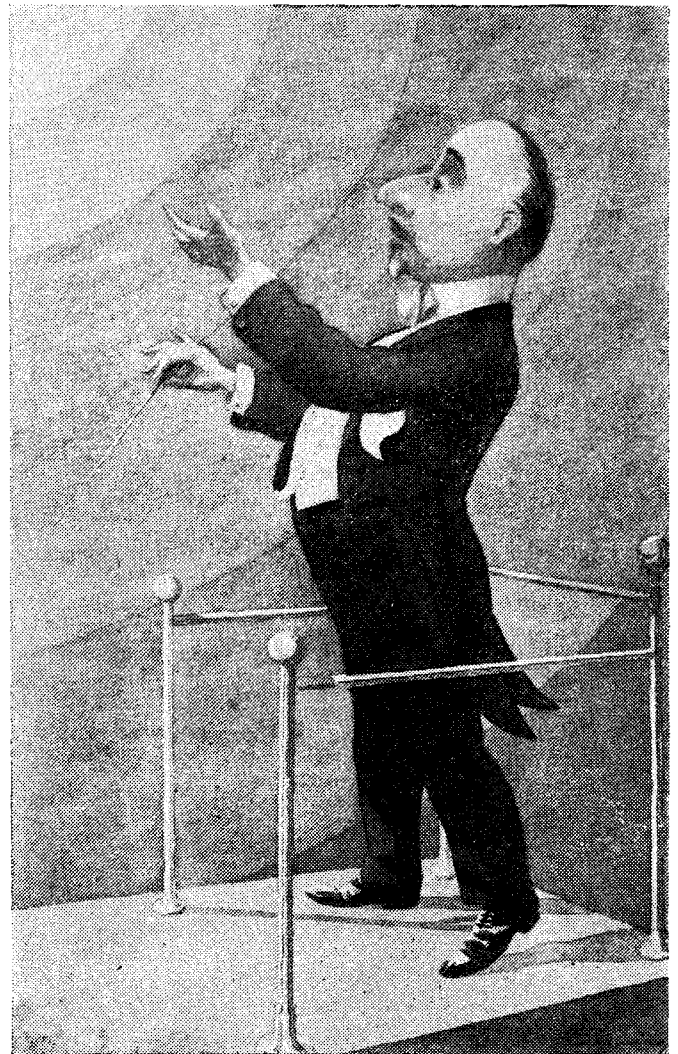
If there is one composer above all others whose works have reached a new public, come to a new popularity because of the phonograph, it is certainly Mozart. In the creation of that public and the promotion of that popularity, Beecham has unquestionably been the predominant influence. The record shows when he committed the first version of the joyous No. 34 to the public, the "Jupiter," the D major Concerto with Szigeti, the No. 29 in A major, the "Paris," and the complete "Magic Flute." The "delightful toy" was now a powerful adjunct of aural education, as significant for the dissemination of musical experience as the invention of movable type was for the comprehension of the written word.

More far-reaching in its consequences was the artistry and care he expended on such "pot boilers" as Rossini's "Scala di Sieta" Overture or Bizet's "Fair Maid of Perth," a Dvorak "Slavonic Rhapsody" or excerpts from Offenbach's "Tales of Hoffmann," to mention a few more than fifteen years old. Only those who can recall the days when these, or similar works, were considered in good hands when the hands were those of Nat Shilkret and the International Orchestra can appreciate the revolution in phonographic standards worked by Beecham.

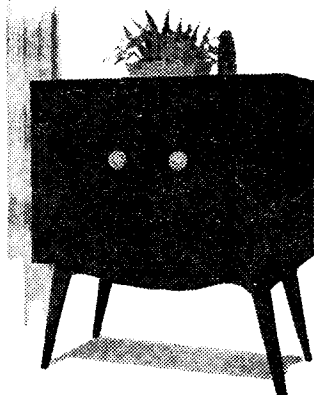
Those whose contact with his live music mak-

ing have been limited to the New York Philharmonic engagement of 1928, in which he made his American debut, or the concerts he gave as replacement for an ailing Toscanini in 1932, or at scattered intervals since then, naturally begrudge the easy recollection of innumerable programs summoned up by Cardus or Abraham. But they cannot take from us the special sensation of delight with which we have stumbled on a "Merry Wives of Windsor" recording, or a Chabrier "España" or a Handel "Pastor Fides" and—listening—marveled, "Beecham's done it again."

Unquestionably the recording art and science would have come to something like its present eminence without the intervention of a Beecham. But aside from the specific pleasures he has given us, the profound truths he has taught us, one cannot imagine its diversity and its quality, its vitality and its humanity being nearly so far advanced in this year 1950 without the leadership of the smiling knight, armored in tails, with a baton for a lance, who has pierced dragons of pomposity right and left, leaving a clear trail behind for all to follow. —THE EDITOR.



—Drawing by H. D. Worthy.



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OCTOBER 28, 1950

A Beecham Discography

Dates are those of English release unless followed by asterisk (*), indicating American release date.

Performances are by London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) unless otherwise indicated.

BBC — BBC Orchestra
BPO — Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
CSO — Columbia Symphony Orchestra
LSO — London Symphony Orchestra
NYP — New York Philharmonic Symphony
RPO — Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Atterberg

Symphony No. 6. RPO (1928)

Bach, J. S.

"Christmas Oratorio" — Sinfonia. (1948)

Bax

"The Garden of Fand." RPO (1948)

Beecham, Adrian

"Willow Song," "O Mistress Mine." Nancy Evans, alto, with Beecham, piano. (1940)

Beethoven

Symphony No. 2. RPO (1927); LPO (1937)

Symphony No. 4. (1947)*

Concerto No. 4, with Artur Schnabel, piano. RPO (1950)

Berlioz

"Carnaval Romain" Overture. (1937)

"Le Corsair" Overture. (1946)

"La Damnation de Faust"—"Dance of the Sylphs," "Hungarian March," and "Will-O-the-Wisps." (1938)

"Le Roi Lear" Overture. RPO (1950)

"Les Troyens"—"Trojan March," "Royal Hunt and Storm." (1945)

Berners

"Triumph of Neptune" Suite. (1938)

Bizet

"Fair Maid of Perth" Suite. LPO (1934); RPO (1950)*

"Carmen" Suite. LPO (1939); CSO (1950)*

"L'Arlésienne"—Prelude, Adagietto, Minuet, Minuet II, and Farandole. (1937)

Borodin

"Prince Igor"—Overture (1945); "Polovtsian" Dances, LSO (1926), LPO with Leeds Festival Chorus (1935); "Polovtsi" March, RPO (1928), LPO (1939)

Brahms

Symphony No. 2. (1936)

"Tragic" Overture. (1937)

Chabrier

"España" Rhapsody. (1940)

"Marche Joyeuse." (1946)

Debussy

"L'Après-midi d'un Faune." (1939) —

"Printemps." (1948)

Delius

"Appalachia." (1939)

"Brigg Fair." RPO (1929); RPO (1948)*

"Cradle Song," "The Nightingale," "Evening Voices," Dora Labette, soprano, and Beecham, piano. (1935)

Concerto for Piano, with Lady Betty Beecham. (1946)

Concerto for Violin, with Jean Pougnet. (1946)

"Eventyr." (1935)

"Fenimore and Gerda"—Intermezzo. (1937)

"Hassan"—Interlude, Serenade, Closing Scene. (1939)

"In a Summer Garden." (1937)

"Irmelin"—Intermezzo. (1939)

"Koanga"; "La Calinda." (1939)

"Marche Caprice." RPO (1948)

"On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring." RPO (1928); RPO (1950)*

"Over the Hills and Far Away." LPO (1937); RPO (1950)*

"Paris." (1935)

"Sea Drift." (1937)

"Song of the High Hills." (1946)

"Summer Night on the River." (1929)

"Village Romeo and Juliet" (complete opera). RPO and soloists. (1949)

"Walk to the Paradise Garden." RPO (1928). Also in the above.

Dvorak

"Golden Spinning Wheel." RPO (1949)*

"Legend" (Opus 59, No. 3). (1935)

"Slavonic" Rhapsody, No. 3. (1935)

Franck

Symphony in D minor. (1940)

Gounod

"Faust" (complete opera). BBC and soloists (in English) (1927); RPO and soloists (1949)*

Gretry

"Zémire et Azor"—Air de Ballet. (1940)

Grieg

"Peer Gynt," Suite No. 1. (1939)

Handel

Concerto Grosso No. 3 (1st & 4th mvts.). LSO (1928)

"Israel"—"Moses and the Children of Israel," "But as for His People," with Leeds Festival Chorus. (1935)

"Messiah." LSO and BBC Choir (1928); RPO and Luton Choral Society (1948)*

"Solomon"—"Arrival of the Queen of Sheba." (1933)

Handel-Beecham

"Amaryllis" Suite—Scherzo, Gavotte. (1948)

"The Faithful Shepherd" Suite. (1941)

"The Gods Go A-Begging." (1934)

"The Great Elopement." (1946)

"The Origin of Design." (1933)

Haydn

Symphonies:

No. 40 in F. RPO (1949)

No. 93 in D. (1938)

No. 97 in C. (1945)

No. 99 in E flat. (1936)

No. 102 in B flat. RPO (1950)

No. 104 in D. (1939)

Pre-Electric Records

(available as of 1925)

Titles as on labels:

"Magic Flute" Overture, 2 sides

"Prince Igor" (Dance No. 17), 2 sides

"Prince Igor" March

Symphony "Antar"—3rd Movement

Minuet de "Manon"

"Rose Cavalier" Waltz

"Pathétique" Symphony, 2nd and 3rd Movements, 2 sides

"L'Oiseau de Feu"—Suite from ballet, 2 sides

"Midsummer Night's Dream" Scherzo

"Barber of Seville" Overture

"Roman Carnival" Overture

"Damnation of Faust" March

"Marriage of Figaro" Overture

"Bartered Bride" Overture

"Symphonic Dance No. 2" (Grieg)

Minuet in "D" (Mozart)

"Marriage of Figaro"—Sara-bande; Minuet (Lulli)

"The Fair Maid of Perth" Minuet

"Petite Suite" (Debussy)

"En Bateau" Ballet