

# Recordings in Review

## Legend Into Life

SCHUMANN: *Concerto in A minor*. Dinu Lipatti, piano, with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Herbert von Karajan. (Columbia LP 2195, \$4.) The same. Rosl Schmid, piano, with the Bamberg Symphony directed by Joseph Keilberth. (Mercury LP 15020, \$3.85.)

IT IS hard to believe that the expert, sensitive player of this volatile performance with Karajan is already dead, that we shall never hear Dinu Lipatti in this country. By its evidence—as confirmation of intimations from other things issued on 78 rpm—it is clear that this Rumanian was a musician of rare insight as well as a virtuoso of unusual powers. That is merely adding a belated “Amen” to the fervent expressions of regret that filled the musical press when he died last year on the threshold of a brilliant career.

To judge from his playing here, Lipatti was one of those welcome performers whose inclinations run parallel to one's expectations of a given work based on a distillation of innumerable performances by players of all sorts. Thus it is expressive, but not overplayed, Schumann; brightly powerful, but not insistently exhibitionistic; animated, but not pell-mell. If anything, it is one of the most dynamic playings of this score I can recall, without being in the least tough-minded. Von Karajan is an adroit col-

laborator, and the reproduction is thoroughly satisfactory.

There was a moment or two (prior to the arrival of the Lipatti) when the Rosl Schmid-Keilberth version seemed the answer to some desires not fulfilled by either the Rubinstein or Serkin performances. However, it survives the now devastating comparison with credit for sound musicianly impulses and as a recording rather more listenable than most items of Bavarian origin issued here by Mercury.

## Richards I and II

WAGNER: “*Siegfried's Rhine Journey*”; also STRAUSS: “*Don Juan*.” Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC symphony Orchestra. (RCA Victor LP 1157, \$5.72.)

THOUGH denigration of Wagner, glorification of Verdi seems fashionable just now, we note no such partisanship in one whose history has paralleled theirs for seven decades. As intense as is Toscanini's service to Verdi (see page 48) by current phonographic note, so it is to Wagner in this tempestuous, broadly accentuated, and wholly typical treatment of some great pages from “*Götterdämmerung*.” Carnegie Hall seems to be the place of this occurrence, with results complimentary to all.

Carnegie Hall was, for certain, the scene of the “*Don Juan*” recording on a certain day last January after a painful knee injury had immobilized the Maestro for some weeks. Something slighter was suggested as an “ice-breaker,” but Toscanini would have none of it. “Let us find out now,” he is quoted as saying. He found out then, and we find out now: such reserves of power! One of the great performances this work has had on records (Mengelberg's comes to mind as a possible parallel), better reproduced than any previous one.

## A Rosa Is a Rosa Is a Rosa

PUCCINI: “*Vissi d'arte*,” etc. Rosa Ponselle, with orchestra. (Addison Foster LP 1201, \$5.95.)

WHILE waiting for the hoped-for examples of the Ponselle voice rendered with the justice of present-day recording methods, we accept with gratitude and recommend with enthusiasm this disc of ten revivals of the



Rossini—“something nearing grandeur.”

glory that was Rosa and the grandeur that was Ponselle. So far as we can determine, they are culled from the old Columbia Graphophone catalogue and are at least thirty years old. However, one item at least—“*Elsa's Traum*” from “*Lohengrin*”—is either the loudest acoustic record ever made or one of the most successful uses of the echo chamber that has come our way.

In almost every instance, the interest is in the pristine glory of the vocal sound itself, curving, floating, soaring on the supports of a wondrous technique. Her “*Vissi d'arte*” is not a triumph of characterization nor is her “*Si, mi chiamo Mimi*,” but these and “*In quelle trine morbide*” (“*Manon Lescaut*”), “*Voi lo sapete*” (“*Cavalleria*”), “*Un bel di*,” and “*D'amor sull'ali rosee*” (“*Trovatore*”) are amazing vignettes of pure vocal capacity, without registers or “ranges,” moving along a scale smoothly equalized from top to bottom, with equal facility in legato or fioratura. The adaptations have been skilfully done, with a kindly attention to noise control.

## Off-Stage Rossini

ROSSINI: “*Stabat Mater*.” Jonathan Sternberg conducting the Vienna State Opera Orchestra, with the Akademiechor and Anton Dermota, Paul Schoeffler, Ilona Steingruber, and Dagmar Herrmann. (Oceanic LP 24, \$5.95.)

VIRTUALLY everyone is familiar with the stirring “*Cujus animan*” from this work, if only from the antique record in which Caruso's voice gave brass to wax and a thirty-watt output to a mere acoustic horn. Now, in this day of “full length” and “complete,” it comes to the attention as a



—Culver.

Rosa Ponselle—“pure vocal capacity.”

totality of remarkable power, lyric beauty, and something nearing grandeur.

Sternberg can be commended for more than enterprise in seeing this work through to a recording. He has absorbed a good deal of its special atmosphere and inculcated it into singers for whom, one suspects, it posed more than slight difficulties. Easily the most adaptable of them is Dermota, who sings with his familiar cultivation of style, and also with a kind of outspoken fervor more common in Italy than Austria. Schoeffler in his usual artistic self, but the ladies leave something to be desired in suavity and vocal control. Tonally the recording is excellent, with plentiful range for chorus and orchestra.

### *Virtue Unrewarded*

MOZART: *Concerto in D minor* (K. 466). Rudolf Serkin, piano, with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy. (Columbia LP 4424, \$5.45.)

ALMOST as a matter of principle I hesitate to speak ill of a recording of a Mozart piano concerto—especially from a major company—on the theory that there is almost a public good to be served by encouraging as many as possible from every source. However, I question if the way to do them is with a virtuoso pianist, virtuoso orchestra, and virtuoso conductor. So much virtue should yield virtuous results, but the whole is something less than the sum of the parts. There is in this work an undercurrent of thought and expressiveness which rarely comes to the surface of this undeniably expert, but curiously businesslike, performance. It goes, it moves, it has

pace and continuity, but it doesn't, to my ear, ever get down to the basic Mozartian facts of the case. The pattern of virtue includes recording supervision wholly attentive to first principles of balance and clarity.

### *Debussy Plus Stokowski*

DEBUSSY: "Nocturnes," "L'Après-midi d'un faune," and "Clair de Lune." Leopold Stokowski and a symphony orchestra with Robert Shaw Chorale. (RCA Victor LP 1154, \$5.72.)

AS IN certain other recent issues, Stokowski has here come full circle in his attitude toward some works with which he has long been identified, arriving at long last at the starting point from which his reputation derived. It is quite conceivable that Ansermet or Munch would organize these sounds in quite a different way, but Stokowski's formula has much musical virtue to commend it as well as an infinite amount of pure aural suasion.

Note, for example, the wonderfully controlled crescendo in "Fêtes," or the distant off-mike effects in "Sirènes" which make the latter sound something like the piece Debussy had in mind, as it rarely does in the concert hall, where the chorus is either too close or too far away. Here it is faded in and out with taste, as though it were one more choir in the orchestra. Soundless LP surfaces are a distinct asset to the pluperfect sound.

These remarks, it must be added, are decidedly one-sided. On side two Stokowski engages "L'Après-midi" and "Clair de lune" in tortuously exaggerated instances of personal predilection ruling the composer's indications; *beaucoup du beau ton*, but flagrantly individual tempi and phrasing.

### *Isolde! Isolde!*

WAGNER: "Isolde's Narrative" and "Love Duet" ("Tristan," Act II). Kirsten Flagstad, Set Svanholm, Constance Shacklock, and Elizabeth Höngen, with the Philharmonic Orchestra directed by Karl Böhm and Issay Dobrowen. (RCA Victor LP 1151, \$5.72.)

THE ENTITY called posterity is certain to take a dim view of the perceptions governing record making, c. 1951, to judge from the limited utilization of Kirsten Flagstad's voice in a time of full-length "Tristans" and extended "Ring" excerpts from Bayreuth. We, of course, know all the competitive factors involved; they are

### *Masked "Masked Ball"*

VERDI: "Un Ballo in Maschera." (Classic Editions LP 5001, \$17.85.)

SRL RECORDINGS, upon investigation of the purported participation in this recording of Maria Caniglia, Galliano Masini, Cloe Elmo, etc., together with the "Opera-Roma" orchestra and chorus, is in a position to state categorically that none of this personnel is involved. It is, in fact, a pirated reproduction of a Metropolitan Opera broadcast, in which the relevant personnel were Daniza Ilitsch, Jan Pearce, Leonard Warren, and Margaret Harshaw, with Giuseppe Antonicelli conducting. Date: November 22, 1947.

Many patent facts point to the Metropolitan as the point of origin—acoustical background, audience applause, spacing of the action, etc.; plus the unmistakable vocal qualities of Pearce, Warren, Harshaw, etc. Further consultation with Met officials isolated minor participants as well, thus pointing to the specific date.

Twenty years of record reviewing has given us a wide acquaintance with the improbable, the impossible, even the incredible; but not previously with anything so insulting to critical acumen. We can't begin to count the number of lawsuits in the offing, but the writing fraternity ought to join in one for gross contempt of the critical court.

—I.K.

certainly going to seem inconsequential ten or twenty years hence.

These excerpts have no notable unity—two conductors, two Brangänes—save the perpetual splendor of Flagstad's voice and her ever-increasing emotional identification with Wagner's music. The predominant emphasis is still on vocal splendor rather than emotional identification, but they come increasingly into balance as time passes. These recordings suggest the thrust and amplitude of her voice more than any previous ones, but neither Höngen and Dobrowen, in the "Narrative and Curse," or Svanholm, Shacklock, and Böhm, in the "Love Duet," are what she should have in associated singers and conductors. However, the pealing rich tones and implacable musicianship are almost tangibly there. —IRVING KOLODIN.



Rudolf Serkin—"curiously businesslike."

# Recordings Reports: Classical LP's and Albums

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WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Bach: Sonata in G minor. Ossy Renardy, violin. London LP 423, \$4.95.	Suavely stylish violin playing, but a little glossy and under-accentuated for this kind of writing. Either Alexander Schneider or Georges Enesco offers more satisfaction to the mind, if not so much sheen to the ear. Good sound.
Bach: Concerto in D minor. Robert, Gaby, and Jean Casadesus, with N. Y. Philharmonic conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos. Columbia LP 2196, \$4.	All-around sensitive work by the related soloists and well-correlated orchestral playing under the direction of Mitropoulos. Nice open resonant sound, excellent balance among the several elements of the ensemble. On the overside Casadesus <i>père</i> plays the E major French suite (No. 6) neatly, deftly, and a little mechanically.
Bach: Suites in D and D minor. Lillian Fuchs, viola. Decca LP 9544, \$5.85.	Magnificent is hardly too strong a word for the instrumental mastery and musical intelligence provided by Miss Fuchs for these works (Nos. 6 and 2 of the unaccompanied series usually played by cellists). The big tone she produces and its keen microphoning give more than an illusion of cello sound, while retailing the flexibility of the viola.
Beethoven: Trio in B flat, Opus 11. Reginald Kell, Lillian Fuchs, and M. Horszowski. Decca LP 9543, \$5.85.	Continuation of a project designed to provide performances by Reginald Kell of all the worthwhile works in the clarinet literature. His art is in fine estate here and in the overside Mozart trio (E flat, K.498) in which cellist Frank Miller takes the place of violist Fuchs. Admirable reproduction.
Borodin: "Polovetian Dances." RIAS Orchestra directed by Ferenc Fricsay. Decca LP 9546, \$5.85.	Unexpectedly excellent sound and finely stylistic conducting by Fricsay. Lacking, however, is the chorus provided in the Stokowski version. Overside are the four "Slavonic Dances" from the Dvorak Opus 46 turned off in rather rushed manner by the Munich Philharmonic under the direction of Fritz Rieger. Clear recording, a little thin in its partiality to the high register.
Brahms: "Variations on a theme by Haydn." Ferdinand Leitner conducting the Württemberg State Orchestra. Decca LP 9542, \$5.85.	Straightforward, well-considered direction by Leitner, a little warmer than the more virtuoso version by Ormandy and the Philadelphians. The "second" side may well be commended for itself, for it offers a well-phrased, strongly reproduced version of Franck's "Variations Symphoniques," played by Geza Anda, piano soloist, and the Concertgebouw Orchestra conducted by Eduard van Beinum. In any case, a thoughtful coupling of two outstanding works in the variations genre.
Brahms: Symphony No. 1. Joseph Keilberth and the Berlin Philharmonic. Capitol LP 8153, \$4.98.	Number four in the list of versions of this work on LP, and not substantially more satisfying than those by Rodzinski, Stokowski (Hollywood Bowl Symphony), and H. Arthur Brown. Not all the evidences of dubbing from 78 rpms have been removed from the final tape (a bad break or two in particular). Workaday conducting, good but not compelling sound.
Chausson: "Poème." Zino Francescatti, violin, with Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy. Columbia LP 2194, \$4.	A great deal of expert effort in the Chausson, which has everything but the intangible called "atmosphere." I have never heard it sound so rich on records, for which the great orchestra and its luscious woodwinds may be complimented; but it doesn't melt or magnetize. In the "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso" of Saint-Saëns, in which the only problems are executive ones, craft reigns supreme.
Haydn: Symphony No. 45 ("Farewell"). Alois Melichar conducting the Munich Philharmonic. Mercury LP 15028, \$4.85.	One of the greatest of the "early" Haydn symphonies, this version manifests some rather deliberate tempi by Melichar, which would be a lesser blemish were the recording better. Coarse highs and rough bass are no less the traits of this reproduction than others from the same source by Mercury.
Ippolitow-Ivanow: "Caucasian Sketches." Roger Désormière conducting the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. London LP 440, \$5.95.	Add the Russians to those whose works are attuned to the taste and temperament of Désormière, with unquestionable benefit to the listener. He colors each of these <i>morceaux</i> delightfully, and the engineers have given him super-special cooperation. The overside suite from Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" is no less expert, though I stand firmly behind a preference for the richer, more supple treatment by Constant Lambert.
Mozart: Concerto in E flat (K.447). Mason Jones, French horn, with the National Gallery Orchestra conducted by Richard Bales. WCFM LP 8, \$5.95.	Plentiful facility by Jones, well known for his work with the Philadelphia Orchestra, but the instrument is not too well treated by the microphone set-up. As in other discs by this ensemble, the string tone tends to be coarse. On the second side Barbara Troxell sings the motet "Exsultate, Jubilate" and "Ruhe sanft" from Mozart's early, incomplete opera "Zaide." She begins the aria delightfully, with clear, fresh sound, but the florid middle section is less successful. The pattern tends to repeat itself in the more challenging "Exsultate Jubilate," of which the Elisabeth Schwarzkopf version (on English Columbia) remains the phonographic standard.
Mozart: Concerto in D (K.451). Artur Balsam, piano, with Winterthur Orchestra conducted by Victor Desarzens. Concert Hall LP 1405, \$5.95.	Sophisticated finger work by the resourceful Balsam in a work phonographically unfavored. It is not a score which wears its charms ostentatiously, but it insinuates. The total sound seems a bit distant from the ear, but it is consistently pleasant. Good orchestral work too. The "Je suis Lindor" variations (K.354), graceful music, gracefully played, fill side two.
Schumann: "Davidsbündler" Dances. Ray Lev, piano. Concert Hall LP 1104, \$5.95.	Admirably studied performance by Lev, full of sensitive detail and thoughtful shading. Also well-recorded. However, the brief "Arabeske" shows this pianist in a more familiar vein of rough and ragged edges.
Schumann: "Im Wunderschönen Monat Mai," etc. Richard Tauber, with Percy Kahn piano. Decca LP 9547, \$5.85.	An extremely miscellaneous Tauber collection, backing the four famous excerpts from "Dichterliebe" (also "Nussbaum," "Heidenröslein," and "Die Lorelei") with sentimentalized versions of "Lotosblume," the Strauss "Ständchen," Grieg's "Eros." As long recollections will recall, the second group is further embarrassed by an unwanted "salon" orchestra. However, few will want to be without the superbly sung Schumann and Schubert. Sound is about as good as the best of the previous Tauber reissues.
Tchaikovsky: "Casse-Noisette" (Suites 1 and 2). Anatole Fistoulari conducting the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. London LP 441, \$5.95.	Chipper, well-prepared playing which doesn't quite match the dash and elegance of the Stokowski version. However, the usual eight excerpts are swelled by the addition of seven items, including the "Waltz of the Snowflakes," "Pas de deux" from the last act, "Spanish Dance," etc. (There is no actual "Suite No. 2": Fiedler made a similar selection of excerpts for his issue of a "Suite No. 2" a few years back.) Splendid recording throughout, with a notably wide dynamic range.

—IRVING KOLODIN.