

artists who provide a nostalgic link to the happier prewar days, and courageously overlooks their vocal shortcomings. The strong artistry of Anny Koneztni's Bruennhilde commands admiration, but like many others of the company, the vocal demands of the roles in which she appears are barely met. Management is inclined to follow public inclination.

Included on the roster are many of today's finest singers—Seefried, Jurinac, Gueden, Hilde Konetzni, Schoeffler, Eric Kunz, Ludwig Weber, our own George London. But along with them are many unequal to the responsibilities of a first-rank company. Likewise inferior is the conducting, save for such admirable artists as Karl Böhm and Clemens Krauss, occasional guest appearances by Furtwängler or Georg Sebastian.

As in Milan, Vienna had to rebuild its whole repertoire after the war. Most of the settings are attractive, if conservative, and the staging is usually conventional. Of special distinction are Lothar Wallerstein's "Aida" and "Turandot" productions of a few years back, inventive, yet in the grand manner. Adolf Rott's "Der Consul" and "Elektra" show brilliantly, the advantages to opera of a twentieth-century approach. In all, the level must be described as erratic, with a tepid "Entführung" one night or a dull "Trovatore" on another followed by a delightful "Zauberflöte" or a thrilling "Elektra."

For the while, Milan would seem to have unchallenged status. Given equivalent financial opportunity, the Metropolitan could probably do as well or better. Vienna's problems, as indicated, are more complex. The comparative merits of the German theatres will be discussed another time.

—PAUL JARETZKI.

## Bach Sacred & Bach Secular

PHILIP L. MILLER

SOME authorities hold that the true essence of Bach's music is to be found in his cantatas. If this is so—and there is pretty strong evidence for the defense—then very few of us really know our Bach. Never one to do things by halves, the master wrote several times around the church calendar as well as celebrating birthdays, weddings, and other occasions with music in this form. More than two hundred examples have survived—no one knows exactly how many may have been lost or reworked. A handful of these works have enjoyed some measure of popularity in church and concert performances and certain arias and chorale settings are by now nearly as familiar as Handel's "Largo." Vocal recitalists have used arias with obligato frequently enough to give their programs variety, but still the cantatas as a whole are little known. We all have acquaintances who can identify the works of Mozart by their Köchel numbers, but how many of us know more than a half-dozen of the numbered cantatas.

The occasion for this review is impressive evidence of an impending change in this situation. A glance at the Bach list in Schwann's *Long Playing Record Catalog* reveals that thirty-seven cantatas are now available, several of them recorded three times over.

Of the eleven cantatas under consideration, the two most famous appear on the two sides of one disc—

No. 4, "Christ lag in Todesbanden," and No. 140, "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," by soloists, chorus, and orchestra directed by Felix Prohaska (Bach Guild BG 511, \$5.95). No. 140 comes again coupled with No. 32, "Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen," under Hermann Scherchen (Westminster WL 5122, \$5.95). No. 32, in turn, reaches its second recording mated with No. 57, "Selig ist der Mann," conducted this time by Rolf Reinhardt (Vox PL 7340, \$5.95). We may now choose between three recordings of the first two works. In the case of No. 4 I would favor the latest release in preference to the rather businesslike Shaw performance and the somewhat weakly recorded one by Lehmann. No. 140 is a case of chorus against soloists, for if the former is better balanced in the Bach Guild recording, the work of Magda Laszlo and Alfred Poell is outstanding in the Westminster. Perhaps if this soprano's voice had in it less of sheerly lyrical appeal, if her style were less musicianly and beautifully matched with that of Mr. Poell, the work of Agnes Geibel and Bruno Müller in Vox's No. 32 would seem more satisfactory. The hard fact is, however, that the latter soprano's voice lacks vibrancy, and the general impression of Reinhardt's performance is on the dull side. No. 57 seems to call forth greater enthusiasm, but this is hardly one of the better cantata recordings.

The two celebrated bass solo cantatas, No. 56, "Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen," and No. 82, "Ich habe genug," are coupled in performances by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau with Karl Ristenpart at the podium (Decca DL 9595, \$5.85). This is the third "Kreuzstab" on LP and the second "Ich habe genug," though the latter is also still available on importation in Hans Hotter's English Columbia recording. Fischer-Dieskau is a real find, for all his limitations. The voice is rich, smooth, and appealing, the style warm, musical, and clean-cut, but his range is short. He likes neither high notes nor low, in the present recording even taking several G's up an octave. His is certainly the best No. 56, despite what sounds like not quite perfect microphone placement—the voice is a little muffled—and his No. 82 is a rival for the superb singing of



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"It's really Wesley's theme. Old Bach just put in the counterpoint and variations."

Hans Hotter. No. 84, "Ich bin vergnügt," in spite of some peculiar labeling, is another solo cantata, this time for soprano, and it is offered by Miss Laszlo in a coupling with No. 106, "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit" (or "Actus tragicus") by the Viennese forces of Hermann Scherchen (Westminster WL 5125, \$5.95). Miss Laszlo's lovely open tone again exerts its appeal, though she is guilty of some scooping, and here I am more conscious of her not too conversational diction. The "Actus tragicus" has been with us before, but Scherchen's is the preferable reading. The unusual orchestration of flutes and gambas has been adhered to. The feature of the disc is the notable performance of the alto-bass dialogue, in which Hilde Rüssel-Majdan very beautifully intones the chorale melody while the dignified Mr. Poell comments upon its text. If the basso finds the tessitura a little high, this is a minor blemish on a beautifully conceived performance. And if in both these cantatas the rhythms are occasionally poked out, this could be the result of not quite enough rehearsal.

Coming now to the secular cantatas, conductor Helmut Koch presents No. 201, "Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan," and No. 205, "Der Zufriedengestellte Aeolus" (Bach Guild BG 514 and BG 515, \$5.95 each). The performers quite rightly present these little dramas in all seriousness. The humor, after all, derives largely from the use of Bach's serious musical style all in the spirit of fun. Indeed, so completely identical were his sacred and secular thinking that he often reused the material of his worldly arias to fit spiritual subjects. Occasionally in these performances we have to take the will for the deed in more elaborate arias, and those wonderful high trumpets may be a trial if one's turntable is not perfectly even or if the disc is a bit warped. The recording has the not unusual fault of too-dominating soloists, but the orchestral sound is good.

Finally, the Wedding Cantata, No. 210, "O holder Tag," is sung by Miss Laszlo under Scherchen's direction (Westminster WL 5138, \$5.95). As always there is so much to admire in this soprano's work that one accepts the imperfections—this time more pronounced than in the other performances considered. The vocal line does not lie easily for her, and too much of the time she is above her best range. What this does to her diction need only be hinted at. There are, however, such compensations as the peaceful aria "Ruhet hie," and the charming "Schweig, ihr Flöten," in which she tells the flute to be silent, only to have her melody imitated by the playful instrument.

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## "Pelleas" & "Idomeneo"

NOT within the memory of man has the phonograph offered, simultaneously, two complete versions of "Pelleas et Melisande," and we thank the stars—both human and astrological—in ascendance at the nascence of the new version from London (London SL, \$23.80) that its virtues—and a few limitations—are so clearly defined relative to the earlier issue (RCA Victor LCT 6103, \$17.16) presided over by Roger Desormière. It makes analysis a good deal simpler, evaluation much less a matter of opinion.

To begin with the most palpable facts: the RCA "Pelleas" is expressed in three records, the London in four, a factor of some economic consequence. The RCA "Pelleas" offers, in Irène Joachim, a Melisande of extreme sensitivity and choice delivery of the French text, whereas London's Suzanne Danco is a very good singer who does not always let one know what she is singing about. Altogether, I would say, the RCA emphasis is much more on a spoken-sung projection of the text and music as a play to be followed; the London is predominantly a musical experience from first to last, in which the text is an incident.

Having said as much as there is to be said on behalf of the older and extremely sensitive communication of Desormière, Joachim, Etcheverry, Cabanel, etc., it can only be added that the London-Ansermet directed version has it over the other like a Graflex speed shot over a Brady glass plate portrait, in clarity, fulness,



—Carell.

Suzanne Danco—"a very good singer."

richness of detail, and wholesale likeness to the original. I can well imagine a Melisandist preferring the aura and intimacy of the Desormière-directed version to the much more luminous, exposed, and palpable sound of the Ansermet, but he would be thrice fool to say that any like amount of Debussy's invention can be heard in the former as in the latter. At the same time, I would like to have the record read that Desormière's effort is no less affecting than it was, that it is merely a victim of technological progress.

While recording the substantial virtues of Ansermet's work, its constant exploration of the Debussy texture and its evocation of its sound in a natural, pure, and sympathetic way, I cannot muster more than containable enthusiasm for the individuals involved. Danco is too much vocalist, not enough actress, the Pélleas (Pierre Mollet) rather more operatic than I would prefer. Heinz Rehfuss is an excellent Golaud when he is not lax with his French enunciation. Helen Bouvier (Genevieve) and Vessières (Arkel) do what is asked of them.

The recording technic employed brings up a point of no less interest: can a work be too clearly reproduced for the best advantage of the particular kind of music involved? At the pace with which the apprehension of detail is accelerating, the recording technician may soon have to reckon not only with giving back as much of the studio sound as he humanly can—which has certainly been accomplished within a whisper of perfection here—but determining how the performing area should be draped and "tuned," so to speak, to the advantage of Debussy, let us say, rather than Bizet. To paraphrase an old one, it may be said that the musician labors from sun to sun, but the technician's work is never done.

Quite a different story is the "Idomeneo" from Glyndebourne (LHMV 1021, \$5.95), the late Fritz Busch's final operatic effort for the phonograph, and in most musical respects worthy of his name. However, there are some other ways in which it isn't—notably in respect to condensation and editing, in the heedless joining together of sections and arias separated by many pages in the score. Those with a feeling for key relationships will really suffer.

In a sequence that begins with the overture and comes to an end on page 152 of the Peters score, there is many a gem, but they are strung together as no necklace ever should be—with



—Fayer.

Sena Jurinac—"a fine Donna Anna."

pearls and rubies, a quartz or two and a few pieces of paste spacing diamonds. By far the choicest matter is Sena Jurinac's lovely singing of the opening recitative and aria ("Padre! germani"), the later "Seil Padre per dei," and the climaxing "Zeffretti lusingheri," which is as beautiful Mozart singing as the present generation knows, and a clear substantiation of all impressions gathered at Glyndebourne last summer.

Nobody else sings as nearly well, and only Richard Lewis (Ideomantes) sings as much, always intelligently but with a strained vocal manner. Otherwise the solo performers are the American soprano Dorothy MacNeil and Alexander Young, who are heard mostly in ensembles, and creditably enough. The longest consecutive stretch of the score is in act III.

What is heard is, on the whole, better sung than the Haydn Society's complete "Idomeneo," reproduced with the clarity, fulness, and balance typical of a Glyndebourne venture. But the gaps are so long and so numerous that nothing like a total picture of Mozart's creation can be ascertained from it. It remains a pastiche with violent changes of mood, jumps from E flat to D major, or E major to F minor indulged without shame. For those who desire a detailed list of excerpts after the overture and opening aria we offer the following (based on the Peters score): No. 6 (page 39), No. 11 (page 70), part of 12 (page 76), the march (page 89), No. 14 (page 90), No. 15 (page 101), No. 16 (page 114), No. 18 (page 123), No. 20 (page 144) ending on 152. Total, about fifty-six minutes of music.

—IRVING KOLODIN.