

Recordings in Review

An die Musik

SCHUMANN: "*Frauenliebe und leben*," etc. Kirsten Flagstad, soprano, and Edwin McArthur, piano. (RCA Victor LM 1738, \$5.72.)

AS THOSE who followed the Flagstad career in all phases of its American manifestation know, the art of the concert singer was something that came to her late in life; but how strongly and completely she mastered this part of the singer's challenge the present disc attests better than anything previously offered. In addition to the Schumann cycle, the repertoire embraces Schubert, Brahms, Richard Strauss, and somewhat incongruously but with sure emotional effect, works of Oley Speaks ("Morning"), McArthur ("We Have Turned Again Home"), and Ernest Charles's exercise in renunciation, "When I Have Sung My Songs."

The beauties of execution here are numerous, with a vocal quality very little less than exceptional. But what surpasses expectation and surprises the attention are the niceties of feeling, the appreciation of the effect in a swell on a single word or a phrase curved across a bar line. The art of the lieder singer is, in large part, the art of the fine point, and Mme. Flagstad's power of utterance was, on most occasions in the past, inclined to overwhelm the requirements of most songs (save the biggest of Strauss or those of her Scandinavian composers which she understood so well). But I doubt if there is a more beautiful record in existence today of "An die Musik," her "Ganymed" is a joy, and even her singing of Speaks's "Morning" is a feat in making the most of a too obvious invention. McArthur's work is not always accurate, and too often it lacks the flexibility Mme. Flagstad's kind of singing deserves. I welcome the comments of Bernard Miles (her English friend of the Mermaid Theatre) on the record "sleeve," but they should not be offered to the exclusion of any texts at all.

Novaes in 3/4

CHOPIN: *Waltzes*. Guiomar Novaes, piano. (Vox PL 8170, \$5.95.)

THIS being a time of frenzy and sensationalism in the interpretation of music for the piano, any new Novaes record comes as a grateful interlude of regularity and order in

the interpretation of the music that appeals to her. It is our good fortune that what has appealed to her lately (in succession to the Preludes, Etudes of Opus 25, and Nocturnes) is the total series of Chopin Waltzes, including the E major, posthumous, No. 15.

There could, and should, be an essay concerned with Novaes as the outstanding example of the old-fashioned pianism as it flourished thirty years ago. (Rubinstein belongs chronologically to the epoch, but has digressed from its precepts to a broader, more florid style.) In that concept, tone, beautiful tone, took precedence over all other considerations, with consequences that are still remembered by those who had the good fortune to hear Godowsky, Rosenthal, De Pachmann, Ignaz Friedman, Gabilowitsch, or Josef Hofmann at their best.

Novaes was a decidedly junior member of the order when they flourished in the Twenties, but she has persisted to become the living example of their legendary art. Something constructive, musically, could be established by a work-by-work comparison of the same literature as recorded by Dinu Lipatti. I imagine it would come down to an equivalent of Gielgud vs. Evans as Hamlet. My inclination would be to Bernhardt—that is to say, Novaes. The piano sound is decidedly good.

Iberiana by Blumental

SOLER: *Sonatas*, etc. Felicia Blumental, piano. (London LL 769, \$5.95.)

HERE is a disc to prove that not all the best pianists are well-known, and not all the good music is familiar. Felicia Blumental might well be a *nom de disque* for Guiomar Novaes (see above), to judge from the musicianship, artifice, and control of the playing, blended with a certain kind of unostentatious expressiveness. Those who should know say that Miss Blumental, who has no describable existence aside from this recording, is from Brazil (as is Mme. Novaes).

Practically any piece of the ten on the two sides of this disc might be by Scarlatti, but none actually is. All show some trace of his influence, or at least of the influences that shaped him as well as the composers named Seixas, Cantallos, and Carvalho, whose works are bracketed with the somewhat better known Soler (better known thanks to Andrés Segovia). The patterns are continuously ingenious, with a kind of lightly learned

quality typical of Scarlatti. Included in the series is a sonata of Mateo Albeniz, an eighteenth-century precursor of the more recent Isaac and, so far as is known, no kin.

Among other virtues, this is one of the better instances of piano reproduction, with a warm resonant sound from bass to treble, an even distribution of emphasis. Recalling that so fine a South American artist as Rosita Renard stayed away from us until too late, we can only hope that Miss Blumental will not be so diffident.

The First by Orff

ORFF: "*Carmina Burana*." Eugen Jochum conducting the Bavarian Radio Orchestra and Chorus, with Elfriede Trötschel, soprano, Hans Braun, baritone, Paul Kuen, tenor, and Karl Hoppe, baritone. (Decca DL 9706, \$5.85.)

THE emergence of Orff (foreshadowed in RECORDINGS Sept. 26) is an accomplished fact in this first full, or other, length recording of a work by him. Though the period it represents (1937) is now far in his background, it at least provides a basis for evaluation as later works accumulate.

Perhaps the most startling fact about this collection of two dozen medieval folk songs (they were first given at the Frankfurt Opera in the form of a "scenic cantata") is Orff's willingness to be conventional. To be sure, it was a more popular attitude during the late Thirties in Germany than the so-called "kultur bolshevismus" which brought about Paul Hindemith's self-exile to the United States. But in a larger area of esthetics Orff shows a responsible courage in striving for a new expression in terms of old principals rather than merely digressing, come what may.

By comparison with the recent, more adventurous "Antigone," "Carmina Burana" is decidedly tame. But it shows an underlying rhythmic impulse, a facility for dealing with large-scale tonal matters, and a command of orchestral resource that deflate any tendency to snap judgments. Orff is here, and the probability is that something of him is here to stay.

In this work he is dealing with a series of medieval folk songs based on manuscripts from the fourteenth century found in a Bavarian monastery fifty years ago. (The monastery is at Benedictbeuren, hence the title.) The texts are Latin, and Orff has put together a sequence that begins and ends with one titled "Fortune, Empress of the World," celebrating the well-established fact that man is subject to all manner of unexpected hap-



—SR drawing by Norkin.

Carl Orff—"responsible courage."

penings. The texts are grouped in three parts, the first celebrating the joys of spring, the second in praise of wine, and the third proclaiming the pleasures of sensual love.

From this one can derive such philosophy as one will. Musically, it shows a strong influence from Russian sources (rhythms à la Stravinsky, Mussorgskyian choral masses, a trend towards Borodin, melodically) in a tonal web for the most part diatonic. Sections for chorus alone are interspersed with others for members of the solo quartet. Something of Mahler's example is evident in it, without direct derivation.

Conductor Jochum obviously knows what he is about, the soloists are excellent, and the clarity of the recording permits one to match the oddities of the sung Latin with the full English text gratefully included with the issue. Simply as sound, this is worth three hi-fi "Scheherezades."

Szymanowski's "Concertante"

SZYMANOWSKI: "*Symphonie Concertante*." Artur Rubinstein, piano, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Alfred Wallenstein; also **RACHMANINOFF:** "*Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*." Rubenstein, with the Philharmonia Orchestra directed by Walter Süsskind. (RCA Victor LM 1744, \$5.72.)

SZYMANOWSKI'S "*Symphonie Concertante*" is the work of current interest here, for this is the same version of the Rachmaninoff "*Rhapsody*" which was admired in its original form on 78 rpm and in earlier transfers to the slower speed (45 rpm

in any case). It remains a powerful, well-conceived arrangement of the musical thought Rachmaninoff put on paper, and a superior estimation of the spirit it contains which cannot be put on paper. I may be wrong in judging this a new cutting from the original; it sounds better, in any case, and the overcut percussion near the end (which marred the first form of it) is better managed.

The "*Symphonie Concertante*" of 1931 is a work meriting recording, and Rubinstein is obviously the man to do it. A count against it is a rather prosaic beginning, with some too overt Straussianisms (Richard kind) distracting attention from the more individual elements of Szymanowski. But the composer works himself steadily into a vein of more personalized expression, especially in the atmospheric andante and the stylized finale. Rubinstein's performance throughout is active, eager, and appropriate, with the massive tone production generally held in abeyance, and sparingly utilized at most. Wallenstein applies the orchestral touches deftly and his orchestra plays well. Some of the high frequencies are a little searing, unless compensated.

Ravel, in Part

RAVEL: "*Bolero*," "*La Valse*," "*Rapsodie Espagnole*," "*Alborado del Gracioso*," etc. René Leibowitz conducting the *Orchestre Radio-Symphonique de Paris*. (Vox PL 8150, \$5.95.)

ONE of the deceptive aspects of the tape-to-LP process is the encouragement thereby offered to those who believe that because a thing is possible it is also plausible. The stimulating possibilities of an all-Ravel disc offering the literature enumerated above are not to be denied; they have, in fact, been investigated earlier but not so extensive combinations by other conductors. The total playing time of fifty-nine minutes plus is, of itself, impressive.

The repertory is also recorded with a keen instinct for color values, but this is, as Ravelians know, only a part of the composite in his music. Leibowitz tends to overstress the bizarre and colorful aspects of these works at the expense of those elements that must be couched and cajoled, shaped and articulated with a control he does not yet command. His "*Bolero*," for example, makes much of the coarser nasal sounds in the clarinets and trumpets, trombones and (even) flutes, to stress the Hispanic elements it contains. He also takes a rather daringly slow tempo. But the treatment neglects to give

the all-important rhythmic pattern its proper place in the total scheme. To be sure, the percussion can be heard (and how!); but it has to be felt as an inescapable undercurrent if the effect is to be hypnotic instead of monotonous. In like degree, the "*Rapsodie Espagnole*" and "*La Valse*" lack subtlety and refinement. The sharpness and definition of the recording are welcome attributes, but the penetrating highs are overstressed for home consumption.

Three Times Franck

FRANCK: *Symphony in D minor*. Paul Paray and the *Detroit Symphony Orchestra*. (Mercury MG 50023, \$5.95.) André Cluytens and the *Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française*. (Angel 35029, \$5.95/\$4.95.) Vladimir Golschmann and the *St. Louis Symphony*. (Capitol P-8221, \$4.98.)

IN A FAVORITE witticism in "*The Moon and Sixpence*," Somerset Maugham remarked that he obeyed the ancient injunction to do, for the soul's good, two things each day that he disliked—by getting up and going to bed. A music critic who has been hearing the Franck symphony for twenty-five years can go that one better by spending a day listening to three new recordings of it, thus improving his soul if not his disposition.

Of these productions, two are decidedly good and one is decidedly inferior—the best, in totality, being (to my admittedly blunted taste for the work) Paul Paray's virtuoso playing of it with the *Detroit Symphony*. He manages to avoid both the rather constrained correctness of Cluytens and the heavily "misterioso" treatment of Golschmann, and evokes a conception that has its share of drama but no distorting melodrama. In addition, the bright, well-balanced sound is several shades superior to the equally well-balanced but rather dullish studio quality of the Cluytens. Both are to be preferred to the wooly, unresonant outcome of Capitol's experiment with the *St. Louis* organization.

In competition with versions by Monteux (*San Francisco*), Munch (*Paris Conservatory Orchestra*), and Ormandy (*Philadelphia*), Paray matches steadily the musical values in the best of them and commands a playing of the score only exceeded in disciplined control by the nonpareil *Philadelphians*. Certainly he has accomplished a remarkable feat of organization in a relatively short time. This is the best of its recorded demonstrations.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

Recordings Reports: Classical LP's

WORK, COMPOSER, DATA	REPORT
Bach-Walton: "The Wise Virgins." Felix Litschauer conducting. Vanguard VRS 440, \$5.95.	The admirable choice of repertory (the suite culminates, as admirers of its early forms know, with a beautiful setting of "Sheep May Safely Graze") and Litschauer's affectionate direction of it are offset by some misguided hi-fi accentuations in "Ach, wie flüchtig." Throughout the string sound is wiry, compensation or no. With it is the Scarlatti-Tommasini "Good Humoured Ladies," not quite as well played as it is under Désormière on London LL 624.
Beethoven: Minuets, Opus 139. Erich Kloss conducting the Frankenland State Orchestra. Lyrichord LI45, \$5.95.	Not the most interesting "minor" Beethoven; nor is the performance of the sort to redeem the limited appeal of the music (the opus number, being in excess of 135, belongs to those assigned by Sir George Grove). With it is a "Romance Cantabile"—ungainly term!—said to belong to Beethoven's Bonn period. It is a mild little piece, offered in a version for piano (Helmut Schultes) and small orchestra. Sub-standard performance.
Beethoven: Symphony No. 7. Paul Paray and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Mercury MG 50022, \$5.95.	One in a series of productions (see Wagner, below, also page 81) which promises to give Paray his proper prominence among conductors of the day. This is an admirably concise, large-scale treatment of the work, not as dynamic as the Toscanini, but formulated with a full utilization of the conductor's art. Clear, not very vibrant sound, especially graphic in the finale.
Chopin: Preludes, Opus 28. Friedrich Gulda, piano. London LL755, \$5.95.	Gulda's good judgment in the choice of repertory he has previously recorded is a mite astray here. It is a thoughtful enough performance, but without the unstudied sympathy which has distinguished his Mozart and much of his Beethoven. The piano, too, leaves something to be desired in its appropriateness to this kind of music.
Debussy: "Fantasie"; Poulenc: "Aubade." Fabienne Jacquinot, piano, with Anatole Fistoulari conducting. M-G-M E3069, \$4.85.	Though the "billing" is as stated here, the Poulenc, on side B, is decidedly the more engrossing of these works. Debussy's early (1889) "Fantasie" does not improve with familiarity, though this performance is superior to the previous recording. Poulenc's quondam ballet score is full of his special brand of ingenuity and musicianship, brightly re-created by Miss Jacquinot. Fistoulari, however, strikes me as a shade overenergetic in an attempt to make the work more dazzling than it inherently is. Excellent sound, in M-G-M's now gratefully consistent manner.
Gould: "Tap Dance Concerto." Danny Daniels, tap dancer, with Morton Gould conducting the Rochester "Pops" Orchestra. Columbia ML 2215, \$4.	If you can imagine the wood-block as the solo instrument in a concerto, you have some idea of the aural pleasure in this concept. Until I have heard Fred Astaire's version, I'd hesitate to weigh the merits of the Daniels treatment, though it is evident that he puts his own "stamp" on the work. The overside "Family Album" is fluent and facile, two qualities in which Gould excels. He leads his own works expertly, and the recording is all that it should be.
Kreisler: "Caprice Viennois," "Liebeslied," etc. Reginald Kell, clarinet, with T. Camarata conducting. Decca DL 4077, \$2.50.	A seemingly good idea gone astray for want of the kind of flexibility and warmth in the playing that Kreisler has taught us to expect in this music. (Is it an illusion or does Kell play double stops, by use of a dubbing technique?) What surprises most is the rather staid, pedagogic manner in two musicians usually as free and adventurous as Kell and Camarata. Good sound.
Mozart: Rondos (K. 382 and K. 386). Carl Seemann, piano, with Fritz Lehmann conducting the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra. Decca DL 4079, \$2.50.	Deft, well-turned performances, notable for a better quality of sound than has been standard for products of the Bamberg assembly line. The fresher of the works is K. 382 (in D), which is also the more familiar, thanks to Edwin Fischer. As is the irritating custom with this series, no data at all is offered on the jacket.
Schoenberg: "Verklärte Nacht"; Vaughan-Williams: "Fantasia on a Theme by Tallis." Leopold Stokowski and orchestra. RCA Victor LM 1739, \$5.72.	Stokowski and his singing strings are in superlative sonority here, producing prodigies of purple, plush passage-playing. However, the style of the Schoenberg is decidedly gaudy, and one wonders whether the lavish use of echo chambers is a service to the music. The playing of the "Fantasia" is more appropriate to the subject matter.
Schubert: Quintet in A ("Forellen"). Adrian Aeschbacher, piano, with members of the Koeckert Quartet and Franz Ortner, double-bass. Decca DL 9707, \$5.85.	Aeschbacher, of Swiss birth and Schnabelian influence, is a practised hand for this music, and the string players are all able, but the playing lacks the spirit and aliveness of the Westminster version with Badura-Skoda. Moreover, though the balance is good, the microphone is a little distant from the instruments for the best results.
Tchaikovsky: Concerto No. 1. Shura Cherkassky, piano, with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Leopold Ludwig, conductor. Decca DL 9605, \$5.85.	This is version No. 15 (as of this month's tabulation) on LP, and certainly one of the best. As is well-known, Cherkassky can play as well as he wants to, and here he wants to play very well. However, I question whether there is occasion in this music for the amount of brooding, note-by-note, rather self-consciously "serious" phrasing that Cherkassky indulges in. Remarkably fine sound, not only of the piano and the total orchestral, but also of the individual wind instruments.
Strauss: "Adele," other waltzes and various polkas. William Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Symphony. Capitol P-8222, \$5.70.	All praise to Steinberg for varying the customary round of a dozen familiar Strauss waltzes with the unfamiliar, well worth-knowing "Adele." However, he is inclined to bear down heavily on the accents (more in the half-dozen polkas than in the "Acceleration" and "Emperor" Waltz), with overbearing effect on the more than sensitive microphones. Decidedly good playing.
Wagner: Excerpts from "Tristan," "Götterdämmerung." Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra with Margaret Harshaw, soprano. Columbia ML 4742, \$5.45.	A rather confusing problem in terminology is posed here, for Miss Harshaw is heard only in the "Immolation" Scene, though one expects also that she would sing in the "Liebestod." That, however, is wholly orchestral, and a gorgeous climax to versions of the "Prelude" and second-act "Liebesnacht" which match anything the orchestra has lately recorded. Harshaw, however, is tremulous in control and not convincing in dramatic accent, the treatment of the "Immolation" hardly showing her in representative voice. It is preceded by a performance of the "Funeral March" which is rather deadlier than need be.
Wagner: "Lohengrin" Preludes (Acts I and III); "Tannhäuser" Overture and "Bacchanale." Paul Paray and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Mercury MG 50021, \$5.95.	Paray's production of the "Lohengrin" Prelude is a masterful example of shaded orchestral playing, the one long crescendo and decrescendo beautifully supervised. However, the "Meistersinger" Prelude which follows on the same disc is jaunty rather than spacious, and the overside "Tannhäuser" suffers from brass playing too much in the unvibrant French style (trombones especially) for this decidedly Germanic music. A comparison with the Knappertsbusch-Vienna Philharmonic record of last month will be instructive on this point.

—IRVING KOLODIN.