

Recordings in Review

Bountiful Ravel

RAVEL: "Valse nobles et sentimentales"; "Le Tombeau de Couperin." Ernest Ansermet conducting l'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. (London LL 795, \$5.95.)

WERE there any doubts that the redoubtable technicians of London were capable of keeping their FFRR banner flying at the head of the hi-fi parade, this disc should dispel them. For it is a veritable cascade of sound that Ansermet has touched off in his ennobling treatment of the "Valse nobles," and it comes to the ear with every stray bit of spray in its appointed place. One thinks almost automatically of images having to do with water, for London's technique here seems to have washed away part of the haze between the listener and even the best recorded sound, adding clarity and brilliance without sacrificing the mellowness which one associates with FFRR.

To be sure, this is a work that lends itself well to the present purposes, having a wonderfully rich and ingenious texture, a plenitude of detail both high and low, and a tightly organized middle range binding them together. What is of the first importance, however, is that Ansermet has not forgotten to make music of all the details, in a sequence that is as satisfying to the mind as it is stimulating to the ear. As for the orchestra, its qualities have never been shown to better advantage than in "Le Tombeau de Couperin." The oboe, flute, and clarinets in the "Forlane" have a crispness and precision we have been accustomed to associating only with the Philadelphia of present-day orchestras, or the Boston of Koussevitzky days among bygone ones.

To be sure, much depends on what a conductor wants his men to make of such a piece of music; and Ansermet has a more refined, probing sense

of this suite than any interpreter known to me. Reiner's version is skillful enough, but the imagery and fantasy of Ansermet's accomplishment are not in it. For that matter, there are not many records in which they are.

Epical Uninsky

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Concerto in B flat minor.* Alexander Uninsky, piano, with the Hague Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Willem Van Otterloo. (Epic LC 3010, \$5.95.)

TO JUDGE from its success with this and other works of Tchaikovsky (see page 62), the Philips engineers responsible for the brightly buoyant, uncommonly resonant sound should stay in Holland and make the whole Tchaikovsky literature before going on to other things. (Assuming, of course, that it is inevitable that another catalogue of "standards" is inescapable.) Just what procedures are involved I have not yet been able to analyze, and Columbia (which is processing them) is not volunteering any information—save of the advertising variety. Whether "radial," "elliptical," or just pear-shaped, these are tones worth hearing.

For one thing, the recording was made either in the Concertgebouw or in a comparable building in the Hague, and from the time of Mengelberg's famous "hall" recordings of the Thirties that area has been a boon to the recording engineers. London's style of recording the Concertgebouw Orchestra there with Van Beinum (and others) tended toward other objectives than the massive effects of these new productions. My best description of the sound would be to liken it to a blow-up of a picture taken at a distance. The total sound is decidedly pleasant—in the *tutti*s too, loud as they are—but details preserve their place, with natural *crescendi* rather than the monitored kind too common on records. Whatever it is that Philips has added to the lore of sound reproduction, it is worth the attention of other makers.

It is good to see a pianist of Uninsky's undoubted capabilities receiving an opportunity of this sort, and doing so much with it. He has power in abundance, an interesting style, phrases musically, and altogether points the beauty of the work without vulgarizing its exhibitionistic aspect. Van Otterloo contributes vig-

orous leadership to the fast movements and a nice sense of mood to the Andantino. Mention should be made of the elaborate annotations (with musical quotations) by Klaus George Roy. How useful this is to the average record buyer I have no way of knowing, but the job has been well done.

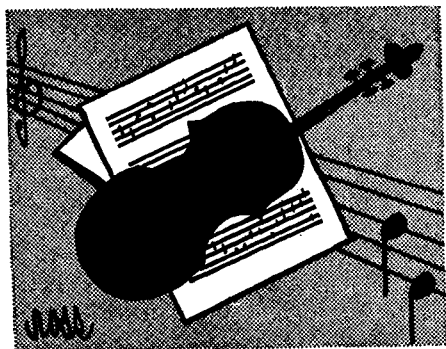
Parallel Fifths

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony No. 5.* Eugen Jochum conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. (Epic LC 3002, \$5.95.) *The same, plus "Egmont," "Coriolanus," and "Leonore No. 3" Overtures.* Antal Dorati conducting the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. (Mercury MG 50017, \$5.95.)

THE SPIRIT of free enterprise has never been more freely exercised than in these examples of pointless duplication of the repertory. Jochum and Dorati are each respectable members of the musical bench in their own ways, but it is hardly credible that either would have been called upon to give us an "opinion" in pre-tape, pre-LP days on the terrest masterpiece in the literature. However, both Mercury and Columbia, on behalf of its new Epic label, are engaged in creating a "catalogue," which means another round of Brahms Firsts and Tchaikovsky "Pathétiques" and Dvorak "New Worlds," as well as Beethoven Fifths.

Because Mercury has attracted attention with its high-fidelity procedures, Dorati is more or less obliged to produce "arousing" effects in a work which is much too austere and dramatic in its own way to need such embellishment. In consequence, the first movement becomes a kind of concerto for kettle drum, and the double basses in the Scherzo are more conspicuous for what they are doing than how it is being done. Perhaps there is a school of Beethoven enthusiasts to which such treatment of the symphony and the three great overtures (on side two) will appeal, but I do not happen to be an alumnus of it.

The approach of the Philips engineers who recorded the Jochum performance is somewhat similar, save that here it is the whole orchestra that is oversized and distended. There are some works in which such magnification can be tolerated if not encouraged (see above) but the Beethoven No. 5 is not one of them. Also it is hardly sound commercial procedure to ask "import" prices for a rather coarse, overemphasized performance by Jochum spaced over two sides when RCA offers (for less) its Toscanini version in a coupling with the Symphony No. 8 and Mercury at





David Lloyd—"a natural choice."

least provides full economic measure in its offering.

New England Cookery

BRITTEN: "Serenade," *Opus 31*; "Folk Songs of the British Isles." David Lloyd, tenor, Marguerite Willauer, soprano, and James Stagliano, horn, with Richard Burgin conducting a string orchestra. (Boston Records B-205, \$5.95.)

AS MOST musical people are aware, Richard Burgin is a longtime adornment of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Fewer, of course, could identify James Stagliano as a recent addition to its French horn section. But in addition to pursuing that career, Stagliano is also the producer of Boston Records, which comes of age here with a finely prepared, soundly engineered version of the Britten "Serenade."

Ever since Lloyd performed this work in New York last winter with the touring Boyd Neel Orchestra he has seemed a natural choice for its first LP version (the celebrated 78-rpm on London by Peter Pears has not been available for some time). It is a stroke of good fortune that he has made it in the company of such an excellent hornist as Stagliano and such a sympathetic conductor as Burgin. In addition to performing beautifully, Stagliano had a hand in supervising the sound. As a species of regional cooking, it shows what can be done with limited resources if discrimination is in good supply.

I am not equally enthusiastic about all the sections of the work, but much of it strikes me as belonging to the most beautiful music Britten has written. That applies especially to the

opening "Pastoral" (by Charles Cotton) and the "Nocturne" (based on Tennyson's "The splendor falls on castle walls"). Lloyd is a particularly understanding interpreter of the Keats sonnet ("O soft embalmer of the still midnight").

Lloyd's excellence in the second-side selection of folk-song settings is unfortunately marred by the participation of Marguerite Willauer, soprano, who is hardly in his class as a singer. She has a pretty enough voice and sings intelligently, but suitable control is lacking, especially in the matter of intonation. However, this untoward happening is reserved for the latter part of the disc, and one can enjoy Lloyd's artful singing of "The Sally Gardens," "Little Sir William," "The Tree Grows So High," and "The Ash Grove" before it occurs. Wolfgang Schanzer is the helpful pianist.

Full-Length "Portraits"

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: "Five Tudor Portraits." Nell Rankin, mezzo-soprano, and Robert B. Anderson, bass-baritone, with William Steinberg conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and the Mendelssohn Choir. (Capitol P-8218, \$4.98.)

THOUGH this work dates from the Norwich Festival of 1936, it has scant history of public performance and no recording that I can trace prior to this. The reason is evident enough; it is a work of formidable proportions to rehearse and to present in concert, considering the chorus required to deliver the rhythmically intricate, far from easily singable setting of the John Skelton texts, and the soloists closely integrated with them.

However, the work will repay the close attention required to come abreast of it. Skelton, as English majors should know (I found it out from the commentary on the record jacket) was England's first Poet Laureate (1460-1529), a master at inventing intricate rhyme schemes, linguistically tricky patterns that have a music all their own. Nevertheless, Vaughan Williams has managed to find for "The Tunning of Elinor Rummung," "Pretty Bess," "Epitaph on John Jayberd of Diss," "Jane Scroop," and "Jolly Jutterkin" a remarkably suggestive speech. Part cantata, part tone poem, sometimes with one solo voice, then the other singing forth the words to vary the pattern, it makes an aural impression all its own.

Capitol should be congratulated on its enterprise in extracting this tape from the Pittsburgh International

Contemporary Music Festival it recorded last November for distribution to colleges, music schools, etc. I heard only one recognizable cough to identify it as an "actual performance" recording, no factor at all to weigh against the energy Steinberg contributes to the performance itself, the excellent playing of the orchestra, and the first-class work of all the vocalists—solo and choral alike. It is improbable that we would have a version of this produced for records only, and considering the quality of the clear, somewhat thin (typically Syria Mosque) sound, now unnecessary.

Scriabin's Fire and Ecstasy

SCRIABIN: "Prometheus" and "Le Poème d'Extase." Dimitri Mitropoulos, with Leonid Hambro, pianist, William Vacchiano, trumpet, and the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. (Columbia ML 4731, \$5.45.)

LET it be said for Scriabin that his role in music is, at least, unique. For it is hard to think of another composer who accomplished the prodigies of invention and eloquence that mark many of his piano works and fell so short of his own aspirations in the longer works for orchestra. Listening anew to "Prometheus" and "Le Poème d'Extase," one can only think of an inverted pyramid, delicately balanced on its point, threatening at any moment to topple over for the lack of foundation to support its own weight.

Of the two, I am more partial to "Prometheus" (known also as "The Poem of Fire"), possibly because it contains a conspicuous part for the piano, played here with artistry and understanding by Leonid Hambro. However, the composer tended to forget about it as the pyramid gathered layers. As for "The Poem of Ecstasy," it offers all the elements of music—rhythm, melodic line, harmonic color—without persuading us that it possesses the one element that gives music meaning: design.

Both performances exemplify Mitropoulos's best qualities, though a richer kind of sound than he prefers might conceivably do more for that aspect of the composer's purpose. However, there is an impressive spaciousness in the conceptions, fine detail in the organization of the performance, and an obviously unshakable faith in the worth of the music. The sound is typical of Columbia's Thirtieth Street studio, with definition more conspicuous than enveloping warmth of sound.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

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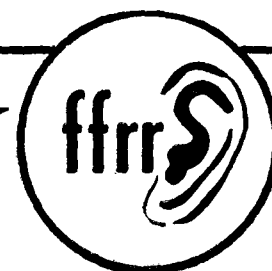
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Recordings Reports: Classical LP's

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Albéniz-Arbós: "Iberia," etc. Gaston Poulet conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. MGM E-3073, \$4.85.	A more atmospheric performance of the Arbós arrangement than the recent one of Sebastian (Urania) and certainly as notable a reproduction. The second side offers such additional matter as Turina's "Procesión del Rocío," the Intermezzo from Granados's "Goyescas," and the "Interlude" and "Danza" from Falla's "Vida Breve," all conducted with verve by Poulet, a conductor whose talents should be cultivated by the record makers.
Beethoven: Concerto No. 3. Jose Iturbi, piano, also conducting the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor LM 1759, \$5.72.	Rather fussy, overflourishy performance by Iturbi as pianist, and not sufficiently incisive work by Iturbi as conductor. Iturbi overstresses trills, inflates dynamics, and otherwise plays the work for pianistic rather than musical values. The second movement has excellent orchestral detail and the finale approaches the kind of vitality that would be welcome throughout. Dullish piano sound.
Castelnuovo-Tedesco: Concerto. Andrés Segovia, guitar, with Alec Sherman conducting the New London Orchestra. Columbia ML 4732, \$5.45.	A work of 1939 almost predestined for phonographic use, considering the enhanced sonority for the solo instrument that amplification provides. Light, fanciful writing, and beautifully performed. The second side offers two studies by Villa-Lobos, and works of Turina, Torroba, and Ponce arranged by the performer. An excellent disc in every way.
Chopin: Sonata in B minor (Opus 58), etc. Dinu Lipatti, piano. Columbia ML 4721, \$5.45.	The bottom of the Lipatti barrel, as far as Columbia is concerned, and a reissue of a version of the sonata that sounds poorer now than it did on 78 rpm. However, several of the shorter pieces are stunningly played, especially the Barcarolle (Opus 60) and the D flat Nocturne of Opus 27, in which this artist's singular feeling for tone and nuance is unmistakably evident.
Falla: Complete Piano Works. Jose Echaniz, piano. Westminster WL 5218, \$5.95.	However inclusive this description seems, the ten pieces are short enough to leave room on the second side for half a dozen arrangements of portions of Falla's ballet scores. Echaniz's lively feeling for the style, and the melodic flavor of the "Aragonesa," "Cubana," and "Andaluza," are the elements of a diverting record, with the "Fantasia Beatica" momentarily providing interest of a more absorbing sort. Good, clear piano sound.
Franck: Quintet in F minor. Victor Aller, piano, with the Hollywood String Quartet. Capitol P-8220, \$4.98.	Sympathetic interpretation, assuming one can abide the repetitious trend of Franck's thought or his reminiscence of ideas embodied in the symphony, violin and piano sonata, etc. The string tone is more wiry than I prefer, but the balance of piano with the quartet is a model for this sort of thing.
Khachaturian: "Gayne" and "Masquerade" Suites. Fabien Sevitzyk conducting the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. Capitol P-8223, \$4.98.	A new sequence arranged by Sevitzyk from the two "Gayne" Suites, designed, if I interpret the jacket annotation correctly, to make the interest more consistent rather than being concentrated on the "Sabre Dance." However, that is bound to come sooner or later, and the usual shambles ensues. Excellent orchestral color throughout, in a close-up style.
Mussorgsky: "Pictures at an Exhibition." Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Columbia ML 4700, \$5.45.	Columbia's 700th twelve-inch LP is a rouser, to be sure, with the "Pictures" paired with Stravinsky's "L'Oiseau de Feu." The intent, clearly, is to outsound previous versions of both, but I find more musical substance in the Kubelik-Chicago (Mercury), less conscious effort to dazzle. The Stravinsky comes closer to achieving its purpose, though as a conception Ansermet's (London) is more to my taste.
Rachmaninoff: Concerto No. 2. Edith Farnadi, piano, with Hermann Scherchen conducting. Westminster WL 5193, \$5.95.	Were there no enduring evidence of how the composer wanted his music performed, there might be a justification for Scherchen's excessively slow opening tempo, the tendency to ritard the ritards. Some of it even makes a kind of massively sentimental effect, merely proving what a durable work Rachmaninoff created. Farnadi does her work splendidly, and the recording adds luster to Westminster's reputation for making music, rather than sound, the focus of its endeavor.
Schumann: Concerto in A minor. Wilhelm Kempff, piano, with Josef Krips conducting. London LL 781, \$5.95.	There is nothing here to shake one's devotion to the freshness and spirit of the Lipatti version (Columbia), but it is certainly a fuller-length likeness, so to speak, of the thing Schumann created. (It should be remembered that the Lipatti disc offers the Greig Concerto as a substantial second side bonus.) Kempff is in every way authoritative, but the mood is definitely retrospective—which the music scarcely is.
Schumann: "Carnival at Vienna." Robert Weisz, piano. London LL 798, \$5.95.	Weisz is a talented member of the younger piano-playing set, and much of what he does here is worthy of encouragement. It is not, however, one of Schumann's strongest works, requiring a kind of variety in tone and accent that Weisz does not provide. In consequence, the listener's attention is not retained. The Brahms Waltz (Opus 39) are well-played on side two.
Schumann: Concerto in A minor. Joseph Schuster, cello, with Franz Waxman conducting. Capitol P-8232, \$4.98.	A skilful performance by Schuster here is inhibited by a kind of dead, studio-sounding reproduction which is hardly what is expected by today's standards of sound. The lack of resonance is especially noticeable in the ensemble passages. The second side offers the Bruch "Kol Nidrei" and a transcription by Henri Casadesus of a concerto in C minor attributed to Johann Christian Bach. All the accompaniments are credited to the Los Angeles Orchestral Society.
Tchaikovsky: "Romeo and Juliet" Overture; "1812" Overture; "Capriccio Italien." Paul Van Kempen conducting the Concertgebouw Orchestra. LC 3008, \$5.95.	Whether or not you believe there is such a thing as "radial sound" (see page 58) you have to recognize in this, and the other discs included in this first release on the Epic label, something newly, vitally contributive to the unfolding science of sound reproduction. I know that Van Kempen isn't as good a conductor as these records make him sound, which means that some new engineering magic has been employed to toy with our senses. What you hear, in the end, is not a particularly elevated or subtle or perhaps even honest way of playing Tchaikovsky, but an amazing sense of actuality. Extremely proficient performance, with remarkable detail.
Wagner: "Tannhäuser" and "Flying Dutchman" Overtures, "Ride of the Valkyries." Hans Knappertsbusch conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. London LL 800, \$5.95.	Broadly spacious performances, but with ample dramatic impact where desirable. Superb execution by the Vienna players, especially in the "Venusberg" music from "Tannhäuser" (the Paris form of the overture is utilized) where the solo strings are all they should be. Knappertsbusch cannot match the special exhilaration that Toscanini generates in Wagner (who can?) but this is, by any reasonable standard, exceptional interpretative art.

—IRVING KOLODIN.