

# Recordings in Review

## Mendelssohn's "48"

MENDELSSOHN: "*Songs Without Words*," Opus 19, 30, 38, 53, 62, 67, 85, and 102. *Ginette Doyen, piano.* (Westminster WLS 5192, 5246, and 5279, \$5.95 each.)

THIS being, phonographically speaking, the Age of Documentation, it is hardly surprising that Westminster has given Mme. Doyen *cachet* to record all the Mendelssohn "*Songs Without Words*," every blessed one of the forty-eight of them (also some that are not so blessed). Who, other than a student, would want to sit down and listen to nine or ten in a sequence, I cannot begin to imagine. That is, other than a reviewer engaged in evaluating them.

What one discovers soon enough is that when one confronts a well-known one unexpectedly during a sequence, it is more than merely sighting a familiar face in a crowd. It confirms one in the belief that these pieces have been rather thoroughly combed over by twelve decades of virtuosos, the preferable ones among them not neglected. Thus, after listening to eight or nine in order on disc No. 2 and coming upon the G major of Opus 62 (No. 1), it is easy to recognize why it has been singled out for attention under the title of "May Breeze."

Mme. Doyen has much of the finesse and moderation to make a successful Mendelssohn player, the kind of clinging sound that is wanted, and a welcome aversion to effect for effects' sake. The unsigned annotations are suitable as far as they go, but they deprive us of some desirable documentation, including the years in which the eight volumes of six works appeared. Suitable sound, meaning that it is live without being too massive for the material.

## The Scope of Von Karajan

DEBUSSY: "*La Mer*." *Herbert von Karajan conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra*; RAVEL: "*Rapsodie Espagnole*." *The same.* (Angel 35081, \$5.95.)

SIBELIUS: *Symphony No. 4*; "*Tapiola*." *As above.* (Angel 35082, \$5.95.)

SOONER or later, Herbert von Karajan will come to America as director of one of our major symphony orchestras, whereupon will follow the general discovery that he is one of

the major *chefs d'orchestre* of the day. If that discovery must wait upon the enterprise and initiative of orchestral managements, there is no reason why the mere phonophile should deny himself the available pleasures in the meantime.

These two discs are among the most remarkable so far offered to us by Angel, whose offerings to date show a more than cursory attention to the talents, among many others, of Von Karajan and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Among these, Von Karajan's performances have been spectacular rather than consistent, and the ones noted above conform to precedent by being consistently spectacular.

Nothing in Von Karajan's previous catalogue suggests a profound sympathy for Sibelius, but the symphony in question has rarely been better played, or with a larger sense of design or a more assured sense of orchestral contrast. Whether his fundamental sympathy is with the musical

essence or its technical exposition is hard to say, but the totality is dynamic, concise, and powerfully integrated. The same is true of "*Tapiola*." In each the acuteness of sound is well ahead of most things previously accomplished by Angel.

In the works of Debussy and Ravel the question of emphasis is easier to isolate. These are wholly virtuoso expositions of orchestral control, carefully charted to elicit explicit reactions from the listening faculties. They prove beyond doubt that Von Karajan knows what he is up to, even when what he is up to is not quite what Debussy and Ravel sought to convey. Superb sound.

## Rossini Redivivus

ROSSINI: "*William Tell*" and "*Semiramide*" *Overtures.* *Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony.* (RCA Victor LRM 7054, \$2.99.)

IF THERE is anything that will take the "Hi-Yo" silver out of this music and restore its original golden glow, this is it. "It" is a performance

## Debussy on Tape

DEBUSSY: *Quartet in G minor*; HAYDN: *Andante, Allegretto from D minor Quartet (Opus 76, No. 2).* *Fine Arts Quartet.* LISZT: "*Mephisto Waltz*"; RAVEL: "*Alborada del Gracioso*"; GRANADOS: "*Lady and the Nightingale*." *Robert McDowell, piano.* (Webcor Tape 2923-1, \$12.)

NEITHER stout Cortez nor brave Balboa, or both, surveying the Pacific for the first time, could have felt more adventurous than this listener in engaging the mysteries of pre-recorded tape. How difficult or simple is the operation? Well, I managed to unpack the mechanism, instal the tape, and channel it into a regular audio set-up merely by reading the instruction book, and I am limited, otherwise, to the kind of electrical science required for changing a fuse.

What I heard was a practically first-class performance of the Debussy Quartet by the Fine Arts players, gratefully absent of anything like surface sound, but embodying instead a rather noticeable clacking of the spinning reels, with a substantial realism at much lower levels than anything from a disc, and a brilliant fullness in cli-

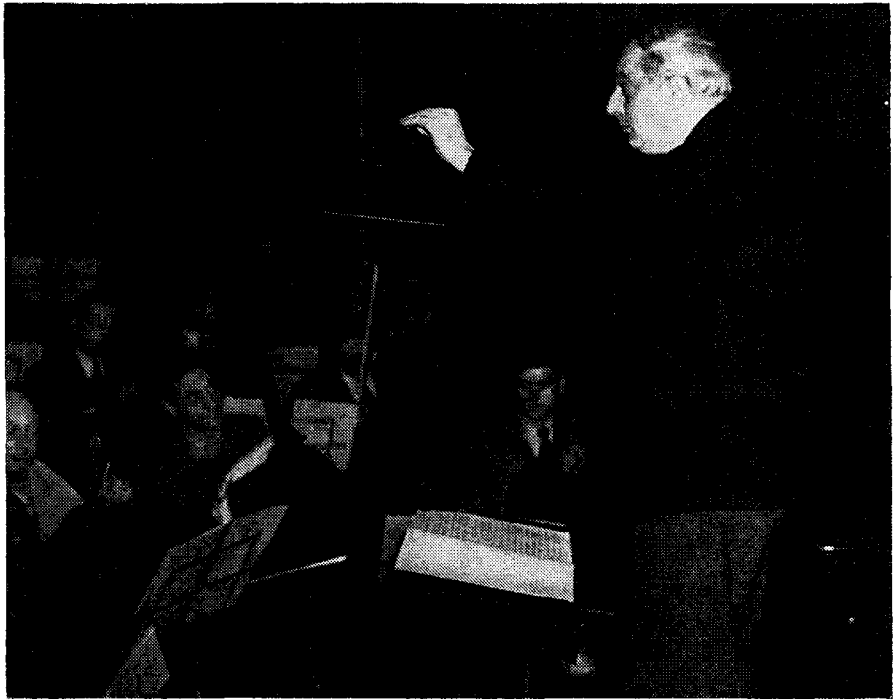
maxes without any suggestion of overloading. On the other hand, intonation was not 100 per cent dependable, especially when Debussy's writing was sustained and chromatic. This I attribute to some passing *malaise* subject to easy correction. Certainly it is well ahead of the LP process at a similar state of unfamiliarity.

However, if Webcor is to make some lasting impression on the music minded it will have to work out some better scheme in repertory than it now espouses. As projected, the tape is divided into two tracks, setting up considerations akin to the A and B faces of a disc. On this one, it is all string quartet going out, all piano coming back. My guess is that a sounder procedure would be to have the quartet both coming and going, two movements each way. Thus, the customer would be buying Debussy and nothing but Debussy, rather than the miscellany here afforded. As it stands, the total music is well under two LP's, at a dollar more in cost.

McDowell's piano playing is altogether competent, though lacking the personal traits that make for artistic distinction.

dating from January 1953, recorded in Carnegie Hall, with the best of RCA Victor's techniques as of then, and triumphantly carrying the listener from pastoral to storm to hunting scene with a rhythmic ferocity in the finale that drums its way not merely into the ears but into the bones. As in the instance of the "New World" Symphony noted here recently [SR, April 24], the tight discipline and singularly emphatic way of playing which the NBC Symphony demonstrated in its collaborations with Toscanini create an amazing aura of actuality. Add to this a beautifully balanced sound, and you have a record to cherish.

I cannot say as much for the "Semiramide," which, though remarkably executed, lunges a little too much into salient phrases to satisfy the graces of the music, and rather overpowers some of its strokes of fantasy. Earlier recording by a couple of years, and not as good as now possible.



Clemens Krauss "dispensing the true gospel" in Vienna.

## More "Carmina" by Orff

ORFF: "Catulli Carmina." Heinrich Hollreiser conducting the Wiener Kammerchor, various instrumentalists, with Elisabeth Roon, soprano, and Hans Löffler, tenor. (Vox PL 8640, \$5.95.)

THIS is the third work of Orff I have heard (the others were the previously recorded "Carmina Burana" and the live "Antigone" in Munich last summer). I cite the current one as disappointing if only because it restates so many of the rhythmic and coloristic ingenuities of the others without substantial variation. Thus what had seemed to suggest an Orff style tends to amount, rather, to mannerisms worked over and repeated.

Nevertheless, if enthusiasm is in abeyance, respect remains constant. Everett Helm's comprehensive annotation informs us that "Catulli Carmina" (the name derives from the setting of texts of the Roman poet Catullus) was first written in 1930, wholly rewritten in 1943. In its present form it stands between "Carmina Burana" of 1936 and the "Triumph of Aphrodite" (1953) as the middle piece of his "Trittico." It embodies a vast command of rhythmic detail and choral artifices, sudden sallies of solo voices and contrasts of percussion.

One aspect of this recording suggests that Orff may be the man to convert Latin from a dead language to a living one. That is the blank spaces in the translation of the original text, omitted—so the explanation

reads—"For obvious reasons." The "obvious reasons," if one can decipher a word here and there of the Latin, is that the adoration of the poet's love is a little more fleshly than the postal laws permit. However, the musical expression is sufficiently cerebral not to inflame anyone's libido.

Objectively considered, the performance is impressively emphatic, distinct, and well-organized. Conductor Hollreiser appears to be completely in command of this problem, and his personnel thoroughly responsive. If there is more in the score than he conveys, what he does convey can well be absorbed as a precedent to anything further. The reproduction is beautifully distinct and consistently well-balanced.

## The Strausses' Krauss

RICHARD STRAUSS: "Aus Italien." Clemens Krauss conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. (London LL 969, \$5.95.)

JOHANN STRAUSS: "Bei uns z'Haus," etc. The same. (London LL 970, \$5.95.)

THE sudden death of Clemens Krauss (during May, while serving as guest conductor in Mexico City) wrote an abrupt finis to a career which seemed to be still on its upward rise. The recent notable series of recordings which covered virtually the whole orchestral literature of Richard Strauss gave him a unique status as an interpreter of that com-

poser's works, and he seemed primed to go on dispensing the true gospel for years to come.

In the instance of "Aus Italien," which has not had a properly qualified recording before to my knowledge, the preachment is even more impressive than the practice. The work of the twenty-two-year-old Strauss, though full of good ideas, is also full of repetitive impulses. However, Krauss can make Strauss sound—and what sound!—especially when he gets a proper assist from the composer in the riotous finale based on Denza's "Funiculi-Fancula." The richness and brilliance of the reproduction make one impatient to hear the "Salome" with Christl Goltz which Krauss made last winter (regretfully, it proves to be his Straussian testament).

Much as he will be missed as an interpreter of the man he knew so well personally, Krauss will be as much missed as an interpreter of the Strausses (Johann, Jr. and Sr., Josef, etc.) whom he knew only from tradition and by instinct. In the present Third New Year's Concert he begins, appropriately enough, with the classic of classics, the "Beautiful Blue Danube," progressing with the same composer's "Bei uns z'Haus" and "Annen Polka" to his father's "Radetzky March" by way of Josef Strauss's "Auf Ferienreisen," "Sphärenklänge," and "Plappermälchen." There have been more spirited "Blue Danubes," but the "Sphärenklänge" is superbly delivered and particularly well reproduced.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

# Recordings Reports I: Orchestral LP's

WORK. PERFORMER. DATA	REPORT
Beethoven: Violin Concerto. Yehudi Menuhin, violin, with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. RCA Victor LHMV 1061. \$5.95.	A new collaboration by these performers, and perhaps a shade more animated than the previous one, but still too measured and grandiose in attitude for my taste. Menuhin, however, is in top violinistic form, and Furtwängler does his work with majestic poise. Excellent sound. Menuhin plays the Kreisler cadenza.
Brahms: Violin Concerto. Julian Olevsky, violin, with Howard Mitchell conducting the National Symphony. Westminster WL 5273. \$5.95.	Olevsky's record debut acquaints us with an instrumentalist of fluency and taste, with a fine but rather small tone. The effect of his effort is rather offset by Mitchell's disposition to sluggish tempi in movements 1 and 2. Westminster's recording standard is not upheld here, with a rather soggy bass amid generally unresonant conditions.
Brahms: Symphony No. 4. Leonard Bernstein conducting the Stadium Symphony Orchestra. Decca DL 9717. \$5.85.	A new Brahms Fourth is hardly what the market needs, and Bernstein's painstaking but rather disjointed performance does not provide contrary persuasion. More mellowness in the feeling, more breadth in the statement than he provides are prerequisites for successful recording of such a work. The sound (Carnegie Hall) is voluminous, but not rich enough in texture.
Britten: "Simple Symphony." M-G-M String Orchestra, Izler Solomon conducting. M-G-M E 3074. \$4.85.	Britten's engaging piece, written when he was twenty, provides congenial material for Solomon to work with, and it is performed with spirit by the men at his disposal. With it is John Ireland's "Concertino Pastorale," a more fanciful walk-in-the-garden piece, beautifully set for strings. Both are reproduced fully and clearly, though the mike is a little close.
Dvorak: Symphony No. 4. Cincinnati Symphony, Thor Johnson conducting. Remington R 199-168. \$2.99.	At the price, this is a sound performance, better than acceptably reproduced. By more exacting standards, it does substantially less for the music than the versions of Walter, Szell, or Kubelik.
Khachaturian: "Masquerade" Suite. Richard Blareau conducting the Orchestra of the Concerts du Conservatoire. London LD 9100. \$2.95.	Every company must have a "program," of course, but must it include another flogging of this dead warhorse? Blareau's refinement adds a dimension to the performance, but the values in the work resist more than superficial amenities. Excellent sound, for those to whom that is important.
Lalo: "Roi d'Ys" Overture, "Namouna" (Suite No. 1), and "Norwegian Rhapsody." Jean Fournet with the Lamoureux Orchestra. Epic LC 3049. \$5.95.	A vigorous performance of the "Norwegian Rhapsody" is the particular virtue of this disc, a rather routine one of the "Roi d'Ys" Overture its cardinal deficiency. On the whole, the repertory is fairly represented, in recording of brightness and clang.
Liszt: "Orpheus," "Mazeppa," "Battle of the Huns," and "Les Préludes." Dean Dixon conducting. Westminster WL 5269. \$5.95.	Dixon demonstrates a rather sensational affinity for the romanticism of Liszt in this generous dispensation, especially in the "Battle of the Huns" and "Mazeppa." The orchestra described as the Philharmonic Symphony of London is largely the Royal Philharmonic, and it responds alertly to Dixon's energetic direction. Powerful, well-centered sound.
Mozart: Concerti Nos. 23 and 24 (in A, K.488, and C minor, K.491). Clifford Curzon, piano, with Josef Krips conducting the London Symphony. London LL 918. \$5.95.	Curzon's inclination to self-effacement works to a disadvantage here, since Krips does not provide the force of personality to give the performances drive and an affirmative spirit. All the impulses are good, and musicianship abounds, but it all tends to be sedate rather than reposeful, and acquiescent rather than inquisitive. Excellent recording in each.
Rachmaninoff: Concerto No. 2. Geza Anda, piano, with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Alceo Galliera. Angel 35093. \$5.95.	This is musicianly, warm-hearted performance, with Anda confirmed as a pianist of style and purpose. What is wanting is the big power for the climaxes, which, after all, few interpreters since Rachmaninoff have mustered. Fine rounded sound, especially of the piano. As bonus, Anda provides well-fingered versions of two Rachmaninoff Preludes—the lyric G major faring somewhat better than the pulsating G minor.
Schubert: Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5. Dean Dixon conducting. Westminster WL 5274. \$5.95.	Westminster makes this a Dixon month with his more than creditable presentation of these works along with the Liszt noted above. However, between "creditabile" and "distinguished" there is a sizable chasm, not filled by Dixon's somewhat halting organization of effects in the faster movements. No. 5, for example, is well below the Beecham level. The recording is good, but not quite as successful as in the Liszt.
Strauss: "Till Eulenspiegel" and "Rosenkavalier" Waltzes. Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Columbia AL 46. \$2.85.	The attraction here is the super-de-luxe, underslung, overdrive performance of the "Rosenkavalier" Waltzes, in which the individual virtuosi of the virtuoso orchestra outdo themselves in doing Ormandy's bidding. Sometimes it is more in a "Kiss Me Again" spirit than it is in the Viennese, but the end product is decidedly jolly. Excellent sound in this and also in "Till," which is well and efficiently played, but without any special savor.
Tchaikovsky: "Capriccio Italien." Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Columbia ML 4856. \$5.95.	By comparison with the foregoing this is a rather glaring instance of playing to the microphone, for purposes of inflaming the hi-fi temperature. Strings are overprojected, the orchestra as a whole too brilliantly "voiced" for best service to the music. Accompanying elements are a like-minded performance of Rimsky's "Capriccio Espagnol," a grotesquely swelled "Flight of the Bumble Bee," and a lightfooted "Dance of the Tumblers" ("Snegourotschka").
Tchaikovsky: "Capriccio Italien"; Liszt: "Les Préludes." Alceo Galliera conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra. Angel 35047. \$5.95.	Galliera's direction is nonsensational but musically proportioned; and there is potent attraction in the agile, propulsive playing of the Philharmonia Orchestra, which need not be shamed by any other contemporary group. However, "Les Préludes" lacks the subtle distinctions of Monteux; and Beecham's "Capriccio Italien," if not so rich in sound, is richer in spirit.

—IRVING KOLODIN.