

Recordings in Review

The Tenth of Shostakovich

SHOSTAKOVITCH: *Symphony No. 10*. Dimitri Mitropoulos conducting the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. (Columbia ML-4959, \$5.95.) Eugene Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra. (Concert Hall Society 1313, \$5.95.)

TIME races. It is but a few years since Shostakovich was in New York for a well-remembered propaganda bee, and I presented him with a then-new LP of his first symphony, an early entry in the Columbia catalogue. He turned the unfamiliar object around in his hands, unable to puzzle out by what devilry Americans had compressed his work onto a single disc. And now we have his tenth symphony in a similar form from his native country, to go with one played for the microphone by Mitropoulos in the aftermath of its recent U.S. premiere in New York.

Whichever version is preferred (and there are advantages and disadvantages to each), it is a sizeable piece of music with which one is confronted. And I am not speaking only, or exclusively, of length. It has form, proportion, balance, and a convincing management of the symphonic process . . . whether or not it is necessary for persuasiveness that such a score embody the recurrent themes with which Shostakovich is working here.

The one element I find lacking, and without which such a lengthy work must have lapses and longuers, is a *modus vivendi* . . . that is to say, a compelling esthetic reason that gives it scope and momentum. Shostakovich has declared that it is a plea for all people to unite in a search for peace, to further "our" (Russia's) aspirations for friendly relations with other nations by recognizing the rights of peoples to their own national individualities. This is all, of course, right as rain; but is it the kind that falls gently from heaven on the just and the unjust alike, or is it something else?

The musical exemplification of this viewpoint is rather more questionable, though sometimes the music snarls angrily as in rebuff of "aggression," say, and there is a horn call which embodies a noble impulse, and the finale is eminently pan-slavic. If the day of rejoicing has really come, the evidence is that it has a decidedly Russian accent. In any case, the pro-

gram could well have been tailored to the music, rather than *vice versa*.

Mitropoulos has so much the advantage in mechanical facilities—one of the best products, this, of Columbia's 30th Street studios—to go with a penetrating command of the score that the Mravinsky is deprived of real competitive status. Nevertheless, it is easy to detect in the latter a looser, more easygoing statement of the content, less "streamlined" let us say, which can be consulted for additional illumination on the darker corners of the creation. Moreover, the finale is decidedly more vulgar as Mitropoulos conducts it. But the extremely advantageous reproduction of the Philharmonic—especially in the extremes of register with which this work abounds—makes the merely acceptable quality of the Russian product unacceptable.

Schubert from the Source

SCHUBERT: *Octet, opus 166. The Vienna Octet*. (London LL-1049, \$5.95.)

IT MAY not be good news for those who have invested in other versions of this work that this is by more than a little the best of them. There was, after all, ample reason for imagining it would be. A fine version by much the same players in 1946 was one of the earliest indications that a nucleus of fine Viennese musicians had survived the war, and would rise to make the Vienna Philharmonic one of the world's great orchestras again. Then there was their later 78-rpm version that even improved on that standard.

Now, with all the advantages of present day technical procedures, and the benefit of continuity, Willy Boskovsky and associates have achieved a result that can have rarely been equalled in the concert hall. Not is only every man master of his instrument—the names of Günther Breitenbach (viola), Nikolaus Hübner (cello), Alfred Boskovsky (clarinet), Josef Vebla (horn), and Rudolf Hanzl (bassoon) are known to all who have followed recent chamber-music issues—but they have a community of musical culture which does not flourish elsewhere.

Something of the same sort may be found in the version of a few years back by the Vienna Konzerthaus Octet, but this is a rather more refined product, musically, and mechanically superior to its Westminster

predecessor. Whether it wins any *Grand Prix du Disques* or not is doubtful; but it shines like a beacon of good taste and musical quality in a confusion of lightning flashes and thunderous effects purveyed in the name of high fidelity.

Non-"Curtained" Gilels

BEETHOVEN: *Concerto No. 3. Emil Gilels, piano, with the Conservatoire Orchestra conducted by André Cluytens*. (Angel 35131, \$5.95.)

FROM his earliest recordings of Russian origin heard in this country, it was apparent that Emil Gilels was a piano virtuoso of the first order, with fingers as disciplined as any we know of. There was some question whether a hard tone was an inevitable consequence of his pianistic style, or whether it was due to faulty recording technique. The answer, as provided by this French-made product, is that he does not get much resonance from the strings, so that if any is lost his recordings suffer considerably.

Musically, the experience is an interesting one, for it suggests that sound concepts of Beethoven have too long been established, universally, for any such estrangement as has existed between East and West in recent years to affect them materially. Yet it is fairly simple to hear how Gilels's basically admirable ideas about Beethoven are colored by a national disposition contra "sentimentality," emotional display, etc. To call it "reserved" playing expresses only a part of the restrictions the player seems to have put upon himself. Yet it has a high degree of artistic conscience within these limitations, and a deal of physical beauty. Cluytens leads his usual kind of workmanlike and thoroughly impersonal playing of the orchestral score. Good sound.

First Flight for Martzy

BRAHMS: *Concerto in D. Johanna Martzy, violin, with Paul Kletzki conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra*. (Angel 35137, \$5.95.)

IS THERE room for another Erica Morini? I doubt that even that peerless artist herself would deny so fine a violinist as Johanna Martzy the place that may rightfully come to her if this initial effort is a true index to her qualities. Now approaching thirty, Miss Martzy (Hungarian by birth) has only recently begun to attract international attention, in the aftermath of winning a prize at the Geneva competition of 1947.

VIVA VOCE

Ferrier, Hayes, Dermota



Martyz—"she says something with her tone."

Miss Martyz's present qualities begin with a tone that has both suavity and personality; continue with rhythmic instincts of an arresting order; and culminate in a sense of melodic phraseology that might be envied by some of her better known contemporaries. It is routine to say that she has a formidable technique, for the Brahms concerto is a searching test of any violinistic machinery, and hers passes it in high and without stress.

What is most important, of course, is that she says something with her tone, rhythmic instincts, and technique, something that makes Brahms a fresh and rewarding experience all over again. It is not high-pressure playing, nor is it in any regard "dramatic," but it is fine-grained, thoroughgoing, and expressive. Paul Kletzki's handling of the orchestral score is one of his most creditable efforts for the phonograph, and the sound is warmly suited to the musical values involved.



Hayes—"much of his prime abilities."

FRRIENDS and admirers of the late Kathleen Ferrier will be delighted to know that there is an unexpected treat in store for them on London LS-1032, \$4.95 . . . nothing less than thirty-odd minutes of singing not previously issued. Termed a "broadcast recital," it offers a dozen songs from a BBC occasion of June 5, 1952. Even more fortunately, only one of them—Britten's arrangement of "O Waly Waly"—has previously been offered in another collection (LS-538).

The date preceded Miss Ferrier's lamented death by only a year or so, and she had, of course, been suffering from her ailment for some time previously. There is, however, no evidence of it in the sound of these songs, which give us the essence of her personality in its most attractive vein, as a singer of the simple songs of her own people, such as the enchanting "Kitty, My Love," arranged by Hughes, "Come You Not from Newcastle," and the best kind of English art-song writing: "Silent Noon," a Vaughan Williams masterpiece, Warlock's "Sleep," etc. Miss Ferrier was superb in the Mahler cycles, in some Brahms, the "Alto Rhapsody," etc. But that was an acquired skill which others have equaled, or in some instances bettered. Here she is singing from the heart, with no intervening technical barriers to overcome. Frederick Stone is the able pianist, and the recording is quite studioish in technical quality, very direct in emotional appeal.

Even more, in a similar vein, can be said about the best parts of the two Lps entitled "The Art of Roland Hayes" (Vanguard VRS-448-9), in which he traces "six centuries of song" from Machaut of the thirteenth century to Villa-Lobos of the present one. That best part would, inevitably, have to be the generous sampling of spiritual material, work-songs, etc. of his own people (spread in a can-nily commercial, if not wholly consumer-happy, arrangement over both discs). There have, of course, been other fine singers of his race, but he was the first, the original; and the emotions that produced "Were You There," "He Never Said a Mumblin' Word," "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel," and, of course, the classic "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" are very close to him. After all, there are not many mothers of those who followed him who said, as his did: "Son, the white folks don't want to listen to our songs." In spite

of which, he made them listen to anything he chose to sing.

Merely listening to the intensity of "Xango" (an African chant arranged by Villa-Lobos), followed by the charm of "Lil Girl," gives one a notion of the range this artist commands. Peculiarly, too, though such a song as "Roun' About the Mountain" works in the same register and at about the same degree of force as some of the art songs, it is sung much more freely, with less of the tension and sometimes disturbing deviations from pitch which afflict the Italian "Alma del Core." It is, to be sure, amazing that a man in his sixties should command so much of his prime abilities as Hayes does, with the results what they are—often astonishing, sometimes considerably less, but always an experience.

In the eighteenth-century literature—Schubert's "*Jungling an der Quelle*," "*Musensohn*," and "*Liebe hat Gelogen*," Berlioz's "Absence" (one of his best efforts), a "Song of Solomon," by Moussorgsky, and Debussy's "*Le Faune*"—the intention has to be sometimes taken for the accomplishment, but the mood is always present, the words meticulously organized, even if the tones are not squarely on pitch. It is also a pleasure to hear the consistently fine pianistic work of Reginald Boardman, his long-time associate. The technical work is first class, though it seems to me that the singer has occasionally been given an assist in microphone placement.

It may be an injustice to juxtapose a great artist, such as Hayes, with one who is merely a very good singer, such as Anton Dermota, but the record-release list is no respecter of persons. His "*Schöne Müllerin*" has much beautiful singing in it, and his lyric voice is well suited to Schubert, though its upper range is not what it was before he suffered the malaise that prevented his Metropolitan appearance a few years ago. However, whatever the beauty of the sound, one can always listen to it quite calmly, for he rarely goes beyond a polite expression of emotion. The shades and intensities of Schubert are paralleled in a careful, scholastic way, but he rarely wrings real music from his voice. Hilde Dermota plays the appropriate kind of accompaniments for his conception of the cycle, though her fingers are a little put upon for the scamper and swing of the piano part of "*Ungeduld*," for example. Excellent clarity and balance in the recording.

—IRVING KOLODIN.