

SR/ RECORDINGS SECTION

DECEMBER 31, 1955

CONTENTS

YEAR OF THE HARVEST <i>By Irving Kolodin</i> 35	TRENDS IN COMPONENTS <i>By Victor Brociner</i> 52
TCHAIKOVSKY'S PIANISTIC WARHORSE <i>By Abram Chasins</i> 38	THE FUTURE OF PRE-RECORDED TAPE <i>By C. W. Smiley</i> 54
ARTHUR HONEGGER, 1892-1955 <i>By Everett Helm</i> 39	THIS MONTH'S MOZART—V <i>By the Editor</i> 56
THE OTHER SIDE <i>By Thomas Heinitz</i> 40	THE AMEN CORNER <i>By Wilder Hobson</i> 57
RECORDINGS IN REVIEW <i>By the Editor</i> 42	"ARIADNE" AND "TURANDOT" <i>By Herbert Weinstock</i> 58
HIGH FIDELITY REDEFINED <i>By William S. Bachman</i> 50	LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR 59

YEAR OF THE HARVEST / By IRVING KOLODIN

WHATEVER else may be said about 1955, now coming to a close, it has certainly provided the largest influx of important new musical talent from Europe in any single year since the end of the war. It was, in fact, an influx that began in late 1954 when Maria Callas came back to her native country to sing in Chicago, followed (more or less chronologically) by Herbert von Karajan as director of the Berlin Philharmonic, Renata Tebaldi at the Metropolitan last spring, then Karajan with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Emil Gilels, Geza Anda, Joerg Demus, David Oistrakh, and Ivry Gitlis.

No doubt the first reaction will be to say that Anda was no Gilels, and Gitlis was even further away from being an Oistrakh. The circumstance that suggests the mention of them in the same sentence is, of course, that all came with some degree of phonographic *reclamé*. None was in the category of completely unknown artist that, say, Pietro Scarpini was when he arrived to perform with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra last sea-

son. There were, in each instance, expectations based on some recorded evidence, fulfilled or unfulfilled by the actuality of the concert hall or opera stage.

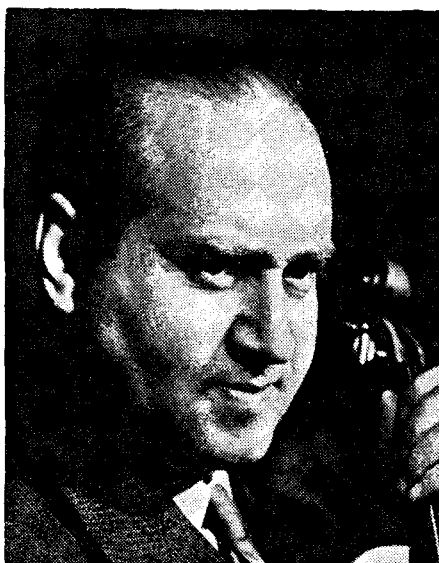
On the whole, the "year of the harvest" has produced much more wheat than chaff. It may be worthwhile to evaluate the yield and see what, if any, conclusions can be drawn from the form chart plotted by the recordings, and the performance on the championship course. After all, there is hardly such a thing as an unknown "important" artist in the world today. It is unthinkable, for example, that any scouts, however talented, could scour the French provinces and come up with a Lily Pons, as the Zanettellos did twenty-five years ago. Somebody with a microphone and a tape recorder would have been there first, and spread the results on a record before the mechanism of organizing an American career could be accomplished. So it is probable that this kind of situation will be repeating itself for a long time to come.

Perhaps the first rule of thumb to be discerned is that the older the art-

ist, the more closely the in-person performance has approached the recorded one. This brings us back to a first premise of judgment where public performance of music is concerned: namely, what a performer can do in a studio is no dependable measure of what he can do in public. (Those who have pursued the humbling experience of hearing Town Hall debuts for a substantial period of years accept this as a truth as definite as the address of the hall.) Apparently that axiom has to be revised to read: what a performer can do in a *recording* studio is, equally, no dependable measure of what he can do in public.

THE factor of age—in these days of mechanical marvels—enters in two equations: the amount of repetition and solidification that has gone into the artist's concept of what he is doing, plus (and what a mighty plus it is!) the confidence that comes from





—Derek Allen.

Oistrakh—"has, certainly, arrived."



—Sedg LeBlang.

Tebaldi—"truly beautiful voice."



Anda—"100 per cent artist."

being able to deliver, in public performance, 90 per cent, say, of total capacity. Edward Johnson, when general manager of the Metropolitan, used to say on the occasion of a debut "Well, he" (or she) "came through about 75 per cent." That was for those who made a reasonably solid success. One hundred per cent was unheard of, 90 per cent a rarity, 80 per cent the maximum expectable. Obviously, then, what matters is: How big the resource involved, what portion of 100 per cent can be sacrificed and a decent impression still conveyed.

The tricky thing is, of course, that the 100 per cent that exists on records may in some instances, actually be 125 per cent of what the performer really is at the time of the recording vis-a-vis public capacity. This is not to say that falsifications are regularly practised. It is, rather, that it is the recording director's task to get the best results possible from the artist and the means involved. How many times he stops, how many "takes" are utilized, how they are chopped up and edited afterwards to preserve the best of each segment, is not unethical—it is merely a technique to an end, as the making of a film from isolated "bits" is a technique to an end. It is historic fact, of course, that many a reputation beglamored by that film technique has been cut down to size on the Broadway stage or in London's West End.

However, it may be said that the end of the film actor's purpose is to make films, whereas the end of the record performer's purpose is to make his name known in the concert hall or opera theatre. Thus, the film is an entity in itself, whereas the record is but an intermediate step to the point of true celebrity. What happens when the record is master, and the performer servant? Then you have what happened to Ferruccio Tagliavini, when his voice was blown up on records to Caruso-like proportions and he came apart at the vocal seams trying to sound like his recordings.

As documentation of the age factor, it may be noted that Karajan has had a critical and public acceptance in the concert hall akin to the esteem he has enjoyed with the record buying public, likewise Oistrakh. Both have delivered the rare 90 per cent under stress and strain, Karajan, with repetition, probably 100 per cent in the Bartok "Concerto for Orchestra," Oistrakh likewise in some recent orchestral appearances following his "92.5" debut. Gilels has been virtually the same artist in the concert hall that he has been on records, again attesting to age and experience. His records, in a candid analysis, have shown much more than ordinary pi-

anistic facility and a little lack of rounded musical culture. Reduced to essentials, his recitals and orchestral appearances have summed up to the same: he is a "comer," whereas Karajan and Oistrakh have, certainly, arrived.

Staying with the instrumentalists for a moment: Anda, Demus, and Gitlis—to mention those of most recent attention—have all fallen short of such expectations as were variously held for them. Had Gilels not been cleared for American importation, Anda might have loomed larger for two reasons: he would have been a "new" artist of some stature (lowered, unfortunately, by contrast with the older, more experienced Gilels), and he would not have had to combat—in New York, at least—the psychological hazard of matching [with the same orchestra, no less] the achievements of a man already his pianistic master. He was, so to speak, a 100 per cent artist who could only muster something more than 60 per cent for these complex reasons.

DEMUS and Gitlis (though I do not personally recall any recordings of the latter) were in the category of the 125 per cent on records who could deliver less than an unsatisfactory half in public. That is to say, they are men of unquestionable, if unseasoned, talent whose record sessions had been organized into results beyond their present public capacity. (I spotted Demus's recordings Svengali smoking a "Players" during the intermission in the lobby of Town Hall, but there was nothing he could do then to salvage the situation as it stood.) As for Gitlis, he is certainly a talent, and he may come back to prove it another day.

With the vocalists, other sorts of considerations intrude. A clever engineer can aggrandize volume (*viz.* Tagliavini in his American phase) and he can possibly contribute to brilliance by providing multiple "takes" from which the best accounts of a tricky passage can be montaged. But he can hardly alter timbre, or fake artistry where it does not exist, or substitute taste for the lack of it, or put a voice on pitch which is not on pitch habitually. Equally, he cannot convey the physical effect of the singer on stage, or tell us how we are going to react, chemically, to the element known as personality. Nor can the record tell us how the singer will react to the rigors of public performance, and the rewards in applause thereof.

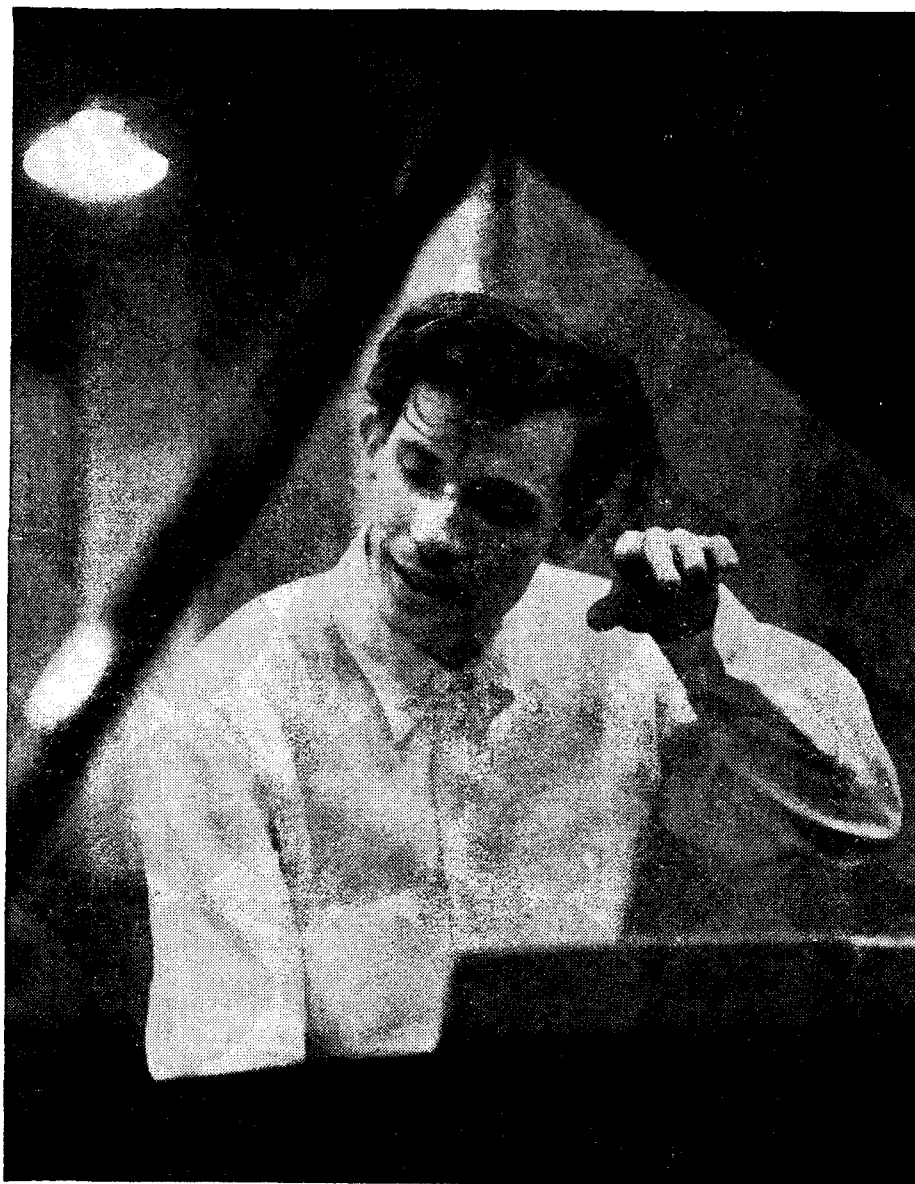
Those who have finally seen Callas after hearing a round dozen or more recorded operas in which she has a primary part confess no disappointment: indeed, the "plus" factor here

is a dramatic capacity (as in "Norma") which furthers the expectation aroused by the mere sound as recorded. Tebaldi, as yet, is not yet quite the stable quantity in the theatre that she is on records. Again it would seem a question of experience and seasoning. However, we have had enough experience with the two performers to arrive at a durable conclusion: Callas is a first-rate operatic personality despite the lack of a truly beautiful voice, and Tebaldi is a woman possessed of the truly beautiful voice who has every promise of becoming a first-rate operatic personality. As for Fischer-Dieskau, he is engaged in that most frustrating of musical occupation, being essentially a *Lieder* singer. That is, the problem of attaining artistic maturity before the vocal skills begin to decline. Let us hope that he matches the literature's great demands before losing the sheen of his notable if limited voice.

THE basic fact is that the values of the record and the values of actuality are closely interrelated but by no means interchangeable. Those who are exclusively record listeners can retire to the vinylite tower and bid the world of reality pass them by, secure in a domain where everybody is perfect (thanks to the flexibility of magnetic tape) and "nerves" are a medical not a musical consideration. But if he is, as most are, a person shuttling back and forth from records to reality, he must recognize that the image, however faithful, is still an image.

Szymon Goldberg, the excellent interpreter of Mozart and other violin music, shed a revealing light on the whole problem when, at a chance encounter, I mentioned with pleasure some recent record of his I had heard. "Yes," he said "on records it is possible quite regularly to approximate 98 per cent of perfection. But you never get 102 per cent." What he was saying, in effect, was that the studio provided all the opportunities for accuracy, but not the stimulation that may, on a happy occasion, prompt a performer to outdo even his own best expectations.

What it comes down to is this: there are dangers and risks in public performance that the recording studio does not pose. For the seasoned artist they act as a stimulus; for the unseasoned artist they are a deterrent. It thus is a responsibility of those who are in the talent-producing business to make a realistic reckoning of risks, and resist the temptation to over-expose a performer on the strength merely of some able recordings. The machine is a marvelous thing, but it still is not man.



"We know of no pianist anything like him of any age."


Paul Hume—The Washington Post

"In no way inferior to such artists as Landowska or Serkin."

Musical Courier

"One of the most auspicious debuts in some time."

John Briggs—New York Times

Cause of these rave reviews is young (22 year-old) Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, who makes his record debut with a brilliant performance of Bach's "Goldberg Variation." This phenomenal talent has recently signed a long term contract to record exclusively for **COLUMBIA**  **RECORDS**

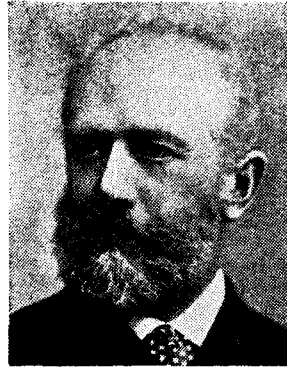
Ask your dealer for ML 5060.

© "Columbia" ® T. M.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TCHAIKOVSKY'S PIANISTIC WARHORSE

By ABRAM CHASINS



PERHAPS the most emotional aspect of criticism is the fear of emotion. The failure to weigh human values and human responses has produced some of the most short-sighted criticism in the whole passionate history of music. Academicism does itself no good to seize upon works which have become popular through their emotional appeal and scorn them categorically as tinsel.

In my student days I met my share of those practitioners of music who periodically take temperatures in compositional affinities to find symptoms of Tchaikovsky fever. I was well on my way to becoming a guilt-ridden hypochondriac when I came upon Beethoven's words written on his Mass in D. "Written from the heart; may it go to the heart." As I read it a melody suddenly ran through my head: it was the second subject of the final movement of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony. Then and there I resolved to rediscover Tchaikovsky for myself, to get away from those who generalize their antipathies into Esthetic Truth, and to cease being the kind of idiot who pokes holes in a man's work without the smallest ability to differentiate between justly popular music and sham.

Since then I've met battalions of music-lovers who confess a love for Tchaikovsky's greatest works with the abject humility and helplessness with which they would confess to alcoholism. Is it because he wrote some pretty inferior music? So did others. We don't judge Beethoven by his Romance in G. Is it our taut twentieth-century's rejection of the intuitive for the intellectual? It can't be, for the public adores Tchaikovsky's masterpieces and artists love to play them. No. People have been taught to regard their communion with Tchaikovsky as musical immaturity. They have been sold a false criterion: it arises in blind hostility to some simple emotion; it rejects the expressive content in a work of art, and betrays an insecure musical culture.

Certainly we all have the right to love or hate anything we choose, but it is irresponsible to appraise any-

thing as great because we love it or to call it bad because we hate it. The value of a work of art lies in many matters on many levels, none of them isolated from each other. A flaw in much that passes for criticism is to pounce upon one quality and to ignore all others. No profound insight is required to discover Tchaikovsky's lapses. No more insight than it takes to discover the lapses of those arbiters of musical fashion who show themselves incapable of recognizing good music from bad. When we are scolded for reacting favorably to a work or for not reacting to another which orthodoxy insists ought to inspire us because it is marvelously made, we can legitimately maintain that it is quite useless for us to know how we ought to react when we don't.

We must be careful, however, to acknowledge our responses as subjective feelings and not ask that they be given the weight of objective facts. We must also not claim to be music-lovers unless we try constantly to extend the range of our tastes and in every direction, and are prepared to

find those tastes varying in degrees of enthusiasm from time to time. In turn we may ask others not to tell us that a quality which moves us is a defect, for that is as far from the truth as the Philistine convictions that a fugue is an intellectual exercise or that chamber music is "thin."

Tchaikovsky had the divine fire, and nothing short of ignorance can question the compositional mastery of his human documents. In his last three symphonies, the overtures "Romeo and Juliet" and "Francesca da Rimini," "Nutcracker Suite," Third String Quartet and many other works, his dramatic and touching spirit speaks to humanity of elemental matters. Their frailties are as nothing compared to their emotional force, their melodic power, and originality.

In the light of such intense and lovable aspects of Tchaikovsky's art, pedantry descends to an unrealistic level when it repudiates them. It denies one of art's primary missions: to reveal the inner life of the emotions. That, incidentally, is one way in which the ascetic schools of contemporary music estrange themselves more and more from concert-goers, the concert-goers for whom romanticism still glows with a lovely light wherever it appears: in Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, or Prokofiev.

Tchaikovsky's piano masterpiece is the Concerto in B flat minor. It is not necessary to contend that it is a flawless work, nor would I claim that it represents my idea of the perfect concerto plan. But it does represent Tchaikovsky's ideas and that seems somehow quite sufficient. On occasion
(Continued on page 45)



"And for our anniversary he gave me a diamond needle!"