

Giesecking on Mozart

By ABRAM CHASINS

MOZART'S creativeness touched virtually every species of music, and left none without some supreme examples of his art. Yet, in the sum of a productive life, there is usually one thing above all others which has been most clearly seen, most deeply felt. What was the thing for Mozart? Confronted with the genius who embraced all musical media, one hesitates. The operas? The symphonies? Concertos? Chamber music?

If the Desert Island game were played by a reasonably informed group, it would most likely yield a majority vote for the operas, with a **fair chance** that each of the other categories would enlist its own enthusiasts.

Of one thing we can be certain; few would choose the works for piano solo. If the game were continued to a consideration of only the piano solos, it would most probably disclose **little variety** in the specific choice of some dozen works out of the sixty-three as truly representative of the Mozart magic. These, naturally, are the most played and best-known compositions, for masterpieces are the public's business. All else are professional matters.

From a musicological viewpoint alone there is high merit and justification in Angel Records' Limited Edition of Mozart's complete works for solo piano, recorded by Walter Giesecking (Angel 35-11K, \$75). Tributes are indeed in order to those responsible for the luxuriously beautiful case, individually engraved jackets for the eleven discs, and exquisitely printed and illustrated booklet. Such meticulous and rare craftsmanship is a delight to the eye.

The music's the thing, however, and so I went on to find what rewards awaited the ear. One starts with an understanding that Mozart's masterpieces of piano writing are principally confided to his concertos and chamber music with both string and wind instruments. The exceptions are here represented by the Fantasy, K.475; the B minor Adagio; A minor Rondo, K.511; C minor Fantasy, K.396;

Little Gigue, K.574; the Mannheim sonatas, K.309 and 311; the A minor, K.310; B flat, K.333, C minor K.457. and the public's favorite in A, K.331. with its famed theme-and-variations opening and "Turkish March" finale.

The larger part of the album has educational rather than esthetic interest, for it consists of improvisations by the child prodigy which were later notated, other interesting but innocent compositions such as the sonata, K.545, inscribed by Mozart as "little clavier sonata for beginners," and some pot-boilers with which Mozart paid off publishing debts. Most of these works, to put it frankly, were written with three of Mozart's fingers while the rest of him was occupied with inspirations of overwhelming power and perfection. So much for the music.

In the sum of Giesecking's pianistic life, what has been the thing for him? Impressionism. He alone has ruled that domain with an incomparable mastery. One hoped that the matchless knowledge, interpretative subtlety, and emotional inspiration which he lavished upon the music of Debussy and Ravel would now be bestowed upon Mozart. One expected that the same artistic responsibility would be directed in the same measure of devotion to the woefully and widely

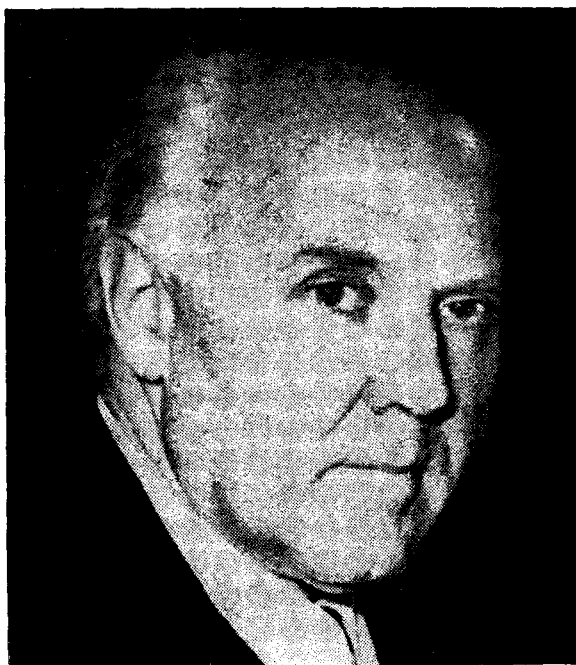
misunderstood genius of geniuses. Approaching as we are the two-century mark of Mozart's birth, it is indeed high time for a definitive recording of the consummate composer-pianist's keyboard solo works.

One is therefore doubly pained and reluctant to find that Giesecking, apart from a few exceptional moments, has lent his great gifts and his great prestige to further the fictional nineteenth-century tradition of Mozart as a miniaturist. Someone once made the illuminating comment, "People will not believe that Mozart can be so powerful because he is so beautiful." It is even harder to believe that in the hands of a Giesecking Mozart could emerge devoid of both power and beauty.

I listened to record after record, baffled and confounded that such an artist, like so many lesser colleagues, could have been so misled. Where in these performances is the Giesecking vitality, variety of touch, and singing tone? No one expected even him to convert the hackworks into great works, and it is perhaps too much to ask an interpreter to bring a spirit of sanctification to weak themes and routine structures. Nevertheless, there is no finer test of an artist's sympathy and skill than the ability to bring luminosity to pale material, to discover, intensify, and to extend meanings. And no artist has met this test more convincingly than Giesecking. But not here.

The miniature frame persists, even through the powerfully inspired works of Mozart at his most Beethovenish, as in the fantasy, K.475. The playing here is as angular and static as it is wonderfully rounded and forward-moving in Giesecking's Debussy and Ravel. The notes themselves are all there, clear and dry, but they take us nowhere except right back to the mute symbols on the page. Metrical quantities are also all there, but the rhythm lacks tension in big moments and flexibility in simple song. The suppression of Mozart's intensity, color, brilliance, and wit perpetuates an all-too-common stylistic error which the most superficial curiosity would destroy instantly. Even a casual observation of available manuscripts, tables of ornaments, and letters by Mozart and his contemporaries would help an artist to render an overdue service to authenticity.

In one letter alone, Mozart enlightens us by reporting to his father a performance of one of his symphonies: "It went
(Continued on page 47)



"Impressionism is the thing for Giesecking."

Three-Penny Symphonies

By FRED GRUNFELD

AS RECORD prices tumble, industry magnates foresee LPs on every turntable and an infinite baffle in every garage. Already the high cost of listening has dropped so low that a six-disc package containing all six Tchaikovsky symphonies, complete and unabridged, costs only \$10.98. That's not much more than one symphony used to cost in days when albums were not only more expensive but also heavier to carry.

The symphony set is the first such venture on the Camden label, RCA Victor's youngest and most bargain-minded offspring. Camden is essentially a reprint operation. Deleted Red Seal issues are reconditioned for their growing catalogue; the Tchaikovsky recordings, considered top-drawer in years gone by, were still active 78 contenders in 1948. In most cases the conductors and orchestras have made more recent recordings, all a gleam with fidelity, which bring much stiffer (though not firmer) prices.

One would never guess this from looking at the labels. What euphemisms have we here? The "Cromwell" Symphony Orchestra; the "Warwick" Symphony; the "Sussex"? Only the nomenclature of Viennese pick-up groups is more bewildering. And while the orchestras have been renamed like so many 7th Avenue hotels, the conductors aren't identified at all. Presumably this expedient protects all concerned from loss of standard-price prestige and sales appeal.

Actually these disguises can be penetrated without much trouble by anyone owning an old catalogue. The truth will out anyway: a bit of digging reveals that the "Sussex," playing Tchaikovsky's First, is in reality the Indianapolis Symphony, under Fabien Seitzky; the "Cromwell," in the "Little Russian" is the Cincinnati Symphony, led by Eugene Goossens; the so-called "Globe," performing the "Polish," is in fact Hans Kindler's National Symphony; and the "Centennial," playing the Fourth, is better known as the Boston Symphony (which won't have a centennial until 1981), and led by Serge Koussevitsky.

It might be more exciting to play this game *à bouche fermée*, as the singers say: the Fifth and Sixth are conducted by the same man, celebrated for white hair, genial features,

and tonal extravagances. He is a champion of modern music and has appeared in a Disney film. His initials are L. S. In the Fifth he conducts an orchestra called the "Warwick." That also happens to be the name of a prominent hotel in a place referred to often as the City of Brotherly Love. In the "Pathétique" he leads an orchestra dubbed the "Star." Normally

it plays in an amphitheatre at a certain West Coast location famous for its film- and star-making activities. But no more—these hints will have to suffice.

THEY make a motley collection, yet the total effect is rather more varied and refreshing than if a single conductor's viewpoint had prevailed for all six. Seitzky's is a straightforward, square-cut reading; Goossens's is remarkably loose-jointed and relaxed; Kindler's remains slow-footed and pedantic; Koussevitsky's strives for intense dramatic climaxes; and conductor S. achieves a splendid rhetoric—
(Continued on page 49)



Photo: Baron, London

CALLAS

portrays

PIUCINI HEROINES

Eleven Great Arias from

WILSON LEIGHTON WILSON LEIGHTON
LA BOHEMIENNE
WILSON LEIGHTON WILSON LEIGHTON
LA BOHEMIENNE

Philharmonia Orchestra Conductor: Tullio Serafin

One 12" record.....Angel 35195

Maria Meneghini Callas is back at La Scala and her Chicago Opera season is now musical history. Claudia Cassidy of the *Chicago Tribune* said she had the public "bewitched". *Newsweek* wrote that "she is almost a legend in her own lifetime." *Time* reported that she "electrified the crowd" and "recalled Chicago's greatest operatic days with Mary Garden and Galli-Curci." Irving Sablosky, *Chicago Daily News* stated that "it is beside the point to say she is a soprano. SHE IS CALLAS."

CALLAS CAN BE HEARD ON ANGEL RECORDS IN

NORMA • CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA • TOSCA • I PURITANI • LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR



Electric & Musical Industries (U.S.) Ltd., Dario Soria, Pres., 38 W. 48 St., N. Y. 36