

Recordings in Review

Oistrakh in the U.S.

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Concerto*, opus 99. David Oistrakh, violin, with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, Dimitri Mitropoulos conducting. Columbus ML-5077, \$3.98.

PROKOFIEV: *Sonata* opus 80, LECLAIR: *Sonata* No. 3 in D, and LOCATELLI-YSAÏE: *Sonata* in F minor. David Oistrakh, violin, with Vladimir Yampolsky, piano. RCA Victor LM 1988, \$3.98.

CHAUSSON: *Poème*, SAINT-SAËNS: *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*, Oistrakh, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Charles Munch. RCA Victor LM 1988, \$3.98.

WHAT WOULD we not give to have a thorough documentation of the way Jascha Heifetz sounded when he made his American debut verging on forty years ago? The music-lovers of 1995 need have no similar unsatisfied curiosity about David Oistrakh, for foresight has flourished on every hand, not only in the matter listed above, but in several not yet released performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra directed by Ormandy (one a Vivaldi *duo concertante* with Isaac Stern). Those who have now heard most of the favored repertoire from him "live" will readily attest that the likeness in every instance is striking.

Of the two discs with orchestra, the Shostakovich is clearly of greater credit to all concerned. It is absorbing to note how in successive stages of acquaintance—first from the score, then from a rehearsal and performances, including the broadcast, to the recorded finality—it has grown in stature, substance, and musical interest. It is hard to recall any recent concerto (since, perhaps, Prokofiev's last) which has attacked the problem of orchestral coordination with so much seriousness and success. A good stretch of attentive listening is in order, for the values of this music are by no means on the surface. Even the two fast movements, which seem jaunty and easily absorbed at first hearing, have intricacies of statement, of slight variations in seeming repetitions of the same matter that increase the interest with acquaintance.

For all its present value, however, I am not inclined to think that this recording will endure as the unimprovable, ideal statement of the music. It may take a good while before any other virtuoso plays it as well as Oistrakh—he took good care to take the

score back with him, and no photographic copies of it were permitted—but I suspect that, in another six months, he will have every detail of it nailed tightly down. Here and there one senses that the composer's true purpose is still a little obscured. Mitropoulos does a superb work of exposition in his area, though that, too, will be further clarified as time goes on. Columbia's recording (a Carnegie Hall product) is top drawer.

Of the two RCA discs, my preference is for the recital one with Yampolsky, not only because it offers two full sides of Oistrakh (half of the orchestral one is devoted to excerpts from Berlioz's "Romeo and Juliet"), but also because the repertoire is more suitable to him. Something of the excitement in his playing of the Prokofiev is lacking without the visual element, but the Leclair is a masterly instance of stylistic projection, with every nuance and phrase-end in beautiful array, the Locatelli hardly less good.

The disc with Munch does not add much to what is already known of Oistrakh as an interpreter, rather confirming that his best effects stem from the head rather than the heart. That is to say, there are lesser violinists who have played the "Poème" with greater sensitivity and expressiveness. The "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso" is magnificent fiddling, but lacking, by much, Heifetz's buoyancy and "sing" in the same music. The standard of reproduction in both (as in the disc with piano) is very high.

Furtwängler's "Ninth"

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony* No. 9. Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting the Orchestra and Chorus of the Bayreuth Festival (1951) with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Elisabeth Höngen, Hans Hopf, and Otto Edelmann. HMV ALP 1286-7.

ALTHOUGH this pair of discs is not currently on sale in this country, it seems worthwhile to direct attention to them as an important addition to the Furtwängler literature, a subject of more than casual interest to a considerable number of record-buyers. Rumors continue to circulate that there is, in existence, a studio performance by him of the Ninth, but the issue of this borrowing from a tape of five years ago would seem to indicate otherwise.

It is, admittedly, a flawed likeness of the original—the first movement, in particular, suffers from engineering

timidity in the face of climaxes—but the bigness and fervor of the total conception gradually becomes apparent. For those who consider the touchstone of quality in a performance of the Ninth Symphony to be a convincing statement of the slow movement, Furtwängler's clearly qualifies. It has repose without sluggishness, eloquence without insistence, a tightly-woven web of orchestral sonority.

For that matter, the finale has rarely been given with so close an approximation of the overwhelming effect conveyed by Toscanini. The oversized orchestra and chorus customarily available in Bayreuth also have their part in the totality. Of quartets involved in current recordings of this work, none equals the quality of Schwarzkopf and Edelmann in their parts, though both Hopf and Höngen leave something to be desired. Till someone produces a better statement of Furtwängler's views on the Ninth, this will stand as one of the larger memories he has left us.

Beethoven by Lateiner

BEETHOVEN: *Sonatas* opus 53 and 31, No. 2. Jacob Lateiner, pianist. Westminster WN 18086, \$4.98.

IT IS GOOD to see Jacob Lateiner, whose career in the postwar period promised so much for the future, back at his instrument again after a three-year period of military service. It is good, too, to see that his enthusiasm for his instrument is unimpaired, his standards of repertoire and his artistic integrity as high as ever in these versions of the "Waldstein" and "Tempest" sonatas.

However, intentions are not necessarily accomplishment, and it strikes me that Lateiner has a little inclination, in both works—but especially in the "Waldstein"—to take them by storm, rather than keeping his physical impulses in close check. Impetus



Glenn Gould—"a kind of darting finesse."



Lhotka—"in the realm of sagas."

and contrast are desirable, of course, but not at the cost of accuracy, continuity or, merely, good piano sound.

In this respect, he is more successful with the lyric matter of both works than with the dramatic. His unquestionable sensitivity and musical feeling communicate much in them, always with a sense of line and proportion sometimes distorted in the faster sections. I wish, too, he or his engineers had been more conscious of the effect of the pedal, particularly in the "recitative" sections of the Op. 31, No. 3. It occasionally makes for an unpleasant blur. Otherwise, the quality of sound is admirable for clarity and resonance.

Introducing Glenn Gould

BACH: "Aria and Twenty-Nine Variations (Goldberg). Glenn Gould, piano. Columbia ML 5060, \$3.98.

PRACTICALLY by every post, it seems to me, I have been receiving advices from Columbia on the merits of young Glenn Gould, whose first disc this is. This has been varied by telephone calls at regular intervals from interested others asking if I had heard Mr. Gould and what I thought of him. If there is anything calculated to get a reviewer's back up, this is it; and if there's anything that could possibly put it down again, it is Gould's Bach.

For here, unquestionably, is Something: a young pianist who can take such a seemingly mechanical sequence as the Bach elaborations on a Sarabande from the Anna Magdalena *Clavierbuch* and make an absorbing, wholly interesting experience of it. A native of Toronto, Gould not only has all the finger discipline that can be taught, but also the kind of darting nescence that cannot. In other words, long with learning the mechanics of is instrument thoroughly, Gould has

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More from Yugoslavia

BARANOVICH: "The Gingerbread Heart," Ballet Suite, Kreshimir Baranovich conducting the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra.

LHOTKA: "The Devil in the Village," Ballet Suite, Fran Lhotka conducting the Orchestra of the National Opera House, Zagreb. (London ffr, LL 1235), \$3.98.

SLAVENSKI: "Sinfonia Orienta," Zhika Zdravkovich conducting the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra with Chorus and soloists. (London ffr, LL 1216), \$3.98.

THESE ARE THE BEST samples of contemporary Yugoslav music now available on records. None of the compositions is of a recent brewing: Baranovich's "Ballet Suite" made its debut in Zagreb over thirty years ago, while Slavenski's "Sinfonia Orienta" and Lhotka's "Ballet Suite" were premiered twenty years ago. However, during all these years all three have been in concert repertory in Yugoslavia, and since the last war have been sent abroad.

Like their northern big brothers, the Yugoslavs (Southern Slavs) have an abundance of folklore, rich in color and individuality and, judging by these examples, their composers draw with much skill on their native wealth. Both ballets are written according to the same scheme—like a moving picture camera the music moves from close-ups of the main characters of the story to the background, to the crowd, the people. This technique bears an affinity to that of Stravinsky's "Petrushka," only the Yugoslav product is on a much smaller scale.

Fran Lhotka, Baranovich's junior by some thirteen years, was born on Christmas Day in 1883 in Mlada Vozhice (now Czechoslovakia) and studied in Prague under Dvorak. After one year (1908-1909) of teaching in Ekaterinoslav (Russia) he settled in Zagreb where he is still active as the rector of the Musical Academy of the city. The list of his compositions—mostly works for the theatre—gives the impression of a composer whose fantasy dwells in the realm of sagas. It is as easy as in Baranovich's score to point to the various influences in Lhotka's ballet; here, to a theme reminiscent of Mussorgsky, there, to a descriptive device à la Prokofiev or Stravinsky. It would be surprising and almost "unslavic" if Lhotka had escaped such consequences of the "modern" treatment of ballet music. But his score is abundant with so many charming episodes that the originality

of his thought comes through. His technical skill, conciseness, ingenuity, and the precision of his craftsmanship tend more toward the French masters, say Maurice Ravel, than the Russians. And when this music becomes an integral part of a ballet dressed up in exotic national colors then, I imagine, the whole must be delightful.

Josip Slavenski's "Sinfonia Orienta" is an entirely different matter. The composer, who died on December 1, 1955, at the age of fifty-nine, began his life as a baker, and although he claimed to have been a self-taught musician he did study in Budapest, Prague, and Paris. The most prolific among the contemporary Yugoslav composers, he left a large volume of compositions for orchestra, chamber music, piano, voice, and chorus as well as scores for the stage and motion pictures. Some of his works, I understand, have been performed by Kleiber, Mitropoulos, Koussevitzky, and Fitelberg, to name a few among the leading conductors of our time, and his quartets have been praised by Olin Downes and by Alfred Einstein. His "Sinfonia Orienta," although written twenty years ago, has never been presented in this country. It is an ambitious work: it is supposed to illustrate the history of Man's efforts to express religious belief through music. Dedicated to Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, this cantata is divided into seven parts: Pagans (Prehistoric music), Hebrews ("Musica coloristica"), Buddhists ("Musica architectonica"), Christians ("Musica melodica"), Moslems ("Musica articulatae"), Free Thought ("Musica polifonica"), and Hymn of Toil ("Musica harmoniae").

If Slavenski does not quite rise to the occasion, this may be ascribed to his failure to bring his message to an appropriate climax, rather than to any lack of skill in handling his chosen material, for the second and third movements are extremely interesting and vital and give ample proof of his craftsmanship in polyphonic writing and a genuine dramatic presentation of the subject. Whether intentionally or not, the fourth movement (Christians) is the most colorless, and the sixth (Free Thought), which you would expect to be bold and revolutionary, is so pastoral and ambiguous that it falls apart. But since this composition purports to be not merely a historical survey, but an exposition of the evolution of Man's religious belief finally crowned in our time with the Hymn of Toil, it falls short of its mark.

—VICTOR SEROFF.