

# Recordings Reports: Operatic LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Beethoven: "Ah 'Perfido': Weber: "Ozean, du Ungeheuer" ("Oberon"); Strauss: "Ah Du wolltest mich nicht den Mund küssen lassen, Jokanaan" ("Salome"). Inge Borkh, soprano, with Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Josef Krips. London LL 1536, \$3.98.	The Borkh voice sounds best in the "Salome" excerpt, less so in the Weber and least in the Beethoven concert aria (which, qualifies, otherwise, as "operatic"). It withstands the punishing tessitura and heavy orchestral competition with remarkable strength, if not the dramatic communication achieved by Welitsch or Goltz. For that matter, Krips is a moderate where Strauss's instrumentation is concerned, a kindness to the singer if not the music. The uneven vocalism of the Beethoven and Weber scenes defeats the composer's purpose in each instance.
Mozart: "Se vuol ballare," "Non piu andrai," "Tutto e disposto" ("Figaro"), etc. Verdi: "Or siam soli," "Il Santo nome," and "Non imprecare" ("Forza del destino"). Cesare Siepi, bass, with Renata Tebaldi, soprano, and Mario del Monaco, tenor. London LL 1514, \$3.98.	A sonorous collection of specialties from complete operas in which Siepi is prominent, with the whole of side two given over to the "Forza" material, in which Tebaldi also has a sizeable and satisfying part. Siepi's transformation from a somewhat stolid Padre Guardiano in "Forza" to the vital Figaro of these excerpts is a tribute to the art of the late Erich Kleiber, who conducted. Others involved are Josef Krips and Hilde Gueden, soprano, in "Don Giovanni" excerpts, Alberto Erede and Francesco Molinari-Pradelli. Uniformly good sound.
Pergolesi: "La Serva Padrona." Giuditta Mazzoleni, Marcello Cortis, and the Württemberg State Orchestra conducted by Ferdinand Leitner. Deutsche Grammophon ARC 3039, \$5.98.	Despite the unlikely point of origin, there is a good deal of authentic Italian "settecento" spirit in this performance (one of Deutsche Grammophon's Archive series), thanks to the sophisticated buffo singing of Cortis and the responsive effort of Mazzoleni. As good vocally as the previous issue on Angel, and carefully drawn to scale with the use of a small instrumental ensemble, cembalo and violoncello continuo. A puzzling omission, however, is the last ensemble in the Ricordi edition of the score.
Puccini: "Mi chiamano Mimi" and "Addio" ("Bohème"); Boito: "L'Altra notte" ("Mefistofele"); Verdi: "Salce salce," "Ave Maria" ("Otello"), and "Ernani, involami" ("Ernani"); Mascagni: "Voi lo sapete" ("Cavalleria"); and Catalani: "Ebben? Ne andro lontana" ("La Wally"). Victoria de los Angeles, soprano, with orchestra of the Rome Opera conducted by Giuseppe Morelli. RCA Victor LM 1920, \$3.98.	While Tebaldi, Callas, and Milanov (see page 56) have been absorbing the attention of the New York, and American public this winter, Los Angeles has reminded us, via such recordings as this, that she is a vocalist to rank with the best. In purity of sound and ease of manipulation she provides some Rethbergish reminders of other days in the "Otello" excerpts and the superb "Mefistofele" effort. Indeed, the high standard lapses only in the "Cavalleria" aria, which is rather demure for its content and "Nacqui all'affanno e al pianto" from Rossini's "Cenerentola," which lacks sufficient vocal power at the bottom of the voice. All the recording is good to hear, and new-name Morelli measures well to his responsibilities.
Rossini: "Barbiere di Siviglia" and five other overtures. Ferenc Fricsay conducting the Berlin Philharmonic and RIAS Symphony Orchestras. Decca DL 9902, \$3.98.	Fricsay spares nothing in energy in these performers but all the crispness and precision at his command cannot give the flavor of the instrumentation, the really riotous contrasts Rossini achieved in such works as the "Semiramide" and "Scala di Seta" overtures, the fantasy of "Il Signor Bruschino," "Italiana in Algeri," or "Gazza ladra." The terms of reference here are to Toscanini, Beecham or Serafin; in others, Fricsay's efforts are reasonably good. Big sound, not always well defined.
Smetana: "Prodaná Nevěsta." Dimitri Gebré conducting members of the Slovenian National Opera, Belgrade. Epic SC 6020, \$7.96.	A good-humored but vocally uneven "Bartered Bride" from the source that has provided the bulk of London's "Russian" operatic literature. Dimitri Gebré doesn't provide the kind of leadership to make for outstanding results, nor is Latko Koroshetz a Kezal to match the present Kurt Böhme or others of the recent past. However, Yanez Lipushchek is a delightful singer as the stuttering Vasek, and Vítma Bukovetz a charming Marenka. More care in such episodes as the sextet would have improved the results. Reasonably good recording, though not what one expects of Epic.
Strauss, J.: "Fledermaus" suite; Strauss, Josef: "Music of the Spheres," "Sword and Lyre." Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Columbia ML 5166, \$3.98.	Ormandy's own "arrangement" of a foursome of excerpts (plus the overture) is doubtless a fluffy by-product of his Metropolitan enterprise of a few years back (the "arrangement" consists largely of assigning the vocal parts to instruments, including the solo flute sumptuously played by William Kincaid). Full bodied performances, and recording to match, also of "A Thousand and One Nights" (from "Indigo") as well as the likeable waltzes of brother Josef.
Strauss, J.: "Nacht in Venedig" (excerpts). Ruthilde Boesch, Dorothea Siebert, Elisabeth Fahl, Valerie Zörner, Rudolf Christ, Waldemar Kmentt, Kurt Preger, and Roman Hendl, with Rudolf Moralt conducting. Epic LC 3324, \$3.98.	Typical Volksoper "querschnitt" (potpourri) of Strauss's spirited tunes, meaning that spirit and style take precedence over de luxe vocal qualities. All the singers are suitable enough, save that high notes most often seem a penance for pleasure, rather than an invitation to expression. The flavorsome score fares well under Moralt's knowing direction, and the reproduction is notable for finesse as well as clarity.
Verdi: "Otello" with Apollo Granforte, Nicola Fusati, and Maria Carbone, with Carlo Sabajno conducting La Scala Orchestra and Chorus. Camden CCL 101, \$5.94.	Writing about this issue on 78 RPM in 1941 I noted: "Sabajno's beat, his fine energy and incisiveness are the dominating factors of this performance . . . there is a strong sense of Scala tradition in the ensemble, to which the chorus and orchestra contribute more than a little." There were rumours when the Scala issues were new (1933) that some of them were actually Toscanini conceptions carried out, for disks, by Sabajno—a theory which, in the light of his subsequent own "Otello," makes more than a little sense. In any case, this is a performance notable for the fine Iago of Granforte, the occasionally excellent singing of Carbone and Fusati's good intentions. A surprising amount of power has been mustered from the original wax recording, though sounds of wear are apparent. Originally priced at \$17, its current quotation is decidedly attractive.
Wagner: "Prelude" and "Good Friday" music ("Parsifal"), "Prelude" ("Meistersinger"), and "Siegfried Idyll." William Steinberg conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Capitol P 8368, \$3.98.	Steinberg's reputation as a Wagner conductor is even more evident in his flavorsome, flowing performances of the "Parsifal" excerpts and the "Siegfried Idyll" than it was in an earlier disk devoted to "Götterdämmerung" and "Tristan" material. The brass does not have the mellowness for best results in the "Meistersinger" overture but what can be done by an honest appraisal of the values in the music and a sensitive reaction to them is done well. Capitol's recording technique is not the kindest for Wagner.
Weber: "Freischütz" and five other overtures. Fritz Lehmann, Eugen Jochum and Ferdinand Leitner conducting. Decca DL 9906, \$3.98.	Reissues from DG's variable period of postwar recording, with Jochum's fine "Oberon" better than Lehmann's "Freischütz" or "Preziosa." Side two offers Leitner directing routine performances of "Euryanthe," "Jubel" and "Peter Schmoll" overtures. The Berlin Philharmonic in full cry in the "Oberon" overture is worth hearing, but the miscellany is otherwise too miscellaneous. —I. K.



Teatro della Scala, in Milan.

—Foto-Enit-Roma.

## OPERA ON THE ITALIAN PLAN

By WILLIAM WEAVER

ROME.

**I**N THE past few years readers of Italian picture magazines have become familiar, not to say bored, with a certain kind of photograph that constantly reappears on those glossy pages: an Italian opera singer is shown boarding an airplane, her hand waving goodbye to Milan or Rome; or the singer is depicted arriving in New York, showing her Aida costume to a customs officer; or the singer is leaving London, or Berlin, or Vienna, her arms clasping a colossal floral tribute. These recurring images indicate not only that singers over here are as popular as, say, baseball players in the United States; the photos also prove that Italian opera singers are world travelers.

The remarkable thing about the debut of Maria Meneghini Callas at the Met last fall was that it had taken so long; she had become famous first, then arrived at the Met. Usually it works the other way round, and Callas came to 39th Street after most of the other Italian singers of her generation, of whom Tebaldi is only the most noted example. With Antonietta Stella, their younger rival, Tebaldi and Callas are now as active in America as in Italy.

So one is tempted to ask: what is the difference between Italian opera at the Met and Italian opera at one of the major Italian houses? Why should American opera fans trouble to make a pilgrimage to Milan or Naples or Rome, when they can hear the same singers, often in the same roles, at home?

The answer is that there are many

more differences than similarities. In some ways, a Met performance is likely to be superior to an Italian one, even at La Scala. But at the same time, anybody's first experience of opera at La Scala is bound to be memorable for purely sentimental reasons, and it can often be unforgettable for musical ones.

The most obvious difference between the Met and the Italian theatres is the repertory. True, the Bing regime has been brave about new productions and can count among its credits an important American premiere ("The Rake's Progress") and a number of significant revivals, like "Ernani," "Arabella," "Cosi," and "La Perichole." Still the staple fare in New York remains "Carmen," "Aida," "Boheme," and the other sure-fire masterpieces. In Italy, "Carmen" is relatively rare, and several seasons can go by in one of the major Italian opera houses without an "Aida" or a "Butterfly." at the same time, an Italian theatre performs between twenty and thirty different works in a season. Some of them, of course, are standard, but the aim is always to offer a balanced and varied musical diet. Verdi is often represented not by "Traviata" or "Trovatore," but—as in Rome this winter—by "Simon Boccanegra" or by "Falstaff," offered this year at the San Carlo and La Scala. And even in the more limited choice of Puccini's works, managements seek as much diversity as possible. Florence last year presented "Il Trittico" all together in one evening—and a very interesting evening it was. "La Fanciulla del West" is regularly done (Milan last year; Rome and

Naples this year), and in Siena a year or so ago they even staged "Le Villi."

The variety in the Italian repertory here is matched by the wide range of the non-Italian operas given. German companies visit the major theatres regularly to perform Wagner, Weber Strauss, "Fidelio," and "Zauberflöte"; a French company was imported to Florence a month ago for "Pelleas"; and of course, the American touring company of "Porgy and Bess" brought Catfish Row to the gilded stages of La Scala and the San Carlo with the same triumph that it enjoyed throughout Europe. When visiting companies do not come, then foreign works are done in translation: "The Bartered Bride" was done in Naples for the first time last month; "Manon" is being done in Italian in Rome (with de los Angeles); and "Louise" becomes "Luisa" at La Scala in May.

If diversity of program is the major difference between the Met and the Italian theatres, it is also the difference that lies most in Italy's favor. The question of *quality* arises at once; and the chauvinistic American opera-goer may rightfully say: it's all well and good to mount these rare operas, but how are they done? In other words, is an excellent "Boheme" more enjoyable than a second-rate "Cardillac"? There is no simple answer. To the amateur who has never seen the work, even a fifth-rate "Wozzeck" is worth seeing. But the fact remains that in Italy, the quality of production varies enormously from one opera to the next. Thus, even at La Scala, one may see in the course of a couple of seasons productions as close to perfection as "La Sonnambula" and "La Traviata" with Callas singing, Luchino Visconti staging in beautiful sets (the first by Piero Tosi, a brilliant discovery, and the second by Paris's Lila de Nobili). Then a few weeks later one may encounter something tacky like the ballet "Lumawig e la saetta," with fifth-rate music by Adriano Lualdi (head of the Florence conservatory), and with sets by Nicola Benois that would perhaps have been acceptable in 1925.

To be sure, there are bad nights at the Met, and some of the Met's productions are ugly and unimaginatively staged; but for night in, night out performance, one's guess is that the Met's general level is higher, that it would never permit something as ghastly as "Lumawig" or as some of the contemporary Italian operas (mostly by Conservatory heads) which are staged, by law, every season here. Nevertheless, when an Italian production rises to the occasion, it is just about unbeatable. In every season there is something

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