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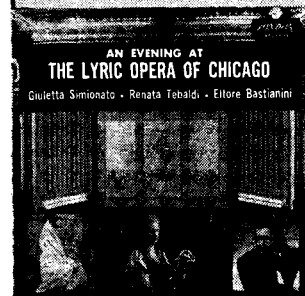
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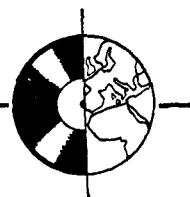
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# THE OTHER SIDE



## TRIUMPH FOR KLEMPERER

LONDON.

**A**PART from Covent Garden's "Ring" cycles under Kempe—by general consent the finest heard in London for nearly twenty years—two events have served to secure the current autumn season a lasting place in our memories: Klemperer's Beethoven cycle at the Festival Hall and Lotte Lehmann's series of master-classes at Wigmore Hall. A greater contrast could hardly be visualized! On the South Bank the austere Klemperer conducted the Philharmonia in deeply thought-out and meticulously rehearsed performances of the nine symphonies, the five piano concertos (with Arrau as soloist), and the Violin Concerto (Tosy Spivakowsky), as well as assorted overtures, before packed audiences ready to acclaim him as a paragon of virtues—Furtwängler and Toscanini rolled into one, if such a blend were possible—while, in the more intimate surroundings of the old recital room, informal charm plus more than a little nostalgia proved to be the order of the day.

The near-veneration with which a large slice of London's concert public now regards Dr. Klemperer is a strange phenomenon when one remembers that, only a few seasons ago, most of his followers were barely aware of his existence and that, apart from his striking, gaunt appearance, he has nothing whatever to offer to those who attend concerts in search of visual as well as aural excitement. In many ways, therefore, his success proves that our postwar generation of music-lovers finds personal glamour a poor substitute for artistic integrity and, were it not carried to excess, I should be inclined to regard this Klemperer-worship as an encouraging manifestation. As things are, I feel that the answer is to be found less in his own positive qualities than in the depressing mediocrity of most of his rivals at the present time.

Granted that he is a sterling and singleminded artist who knows just what he wants and how to achieve it, granted too that his Beethoven performances are never routine affairs but invariably hold our interest and rarely fail to shed new light or to provoke thought. What I do miss, however, is intuitive genius, a vital spark which ensures that the performance shall be greater than the sum of its splendidly rehearsed parts. Whenever I listen to Klemperer I

sense a certain caution, a suggestion even of pedantry, and as a result his readings interest me but I remain unconvinced by their frequently unconventional tempi and emphases. The Ninth Symphony, which brought the cycle to a triumphant conclusion amid tumultuous acclaim (and the presentation of laurel wreaths, which clearly embarrassed their recipient), is a typical case in point: here was a performance more thoughtful and better prepared than any Londoners had heard since the war. The playing of the Philharmonia was beyond praise and the contribution of the new Philharmonia Chorus (trained by Wilhelm Pitz, of Bayreuth fame, and appearing in public for the first time) proved to be of sensational quality. The gifted solo quartet (Nordmo-Löfberg, Christa Ludwig, Kmentt, and Hotter) were not always masters of the situation, but they fared better than most. Yet it was not until the Finale, when the chorus set the evening ablaze, that the performance ceased to sound overdeliberate and began to storm the heavens.

As a matter of fact, this performance of the Ninth Symphony, or one very like it, has been earmarked for posterity, as it were, since Columbia recorded it during the following week so that it might take its place at the apex of Klemperer's complete Beethoven set with the Philharmonia. Lotte Lehmann's master-classes, on the other hand, will have to live on unaided in our memories, though the BBC did eavesdrop at two of the sessions devoted to "Der Rosenkavalier" and Third Program listeners will be able to hear edited recordings shortly after Christmas. Professional musicians, students, and critics are of course well aware that, more often than not, rehearsals or classes are apt to be far more stimulating and revealing than finished performances, but Lotte Lehmann's sessions (which were arranged by Joan Cross's Opera School for its students) attracted in addition many ordinary opera and concertgoers eager to revive treasured memories of the inter-war years and others, too young to have seen Lehmann on the stage, whom she had captivated solely by her records.

New December issues from EMI include the Schwarzkopf/Karajan "Rosenkavalier" on Columbia-Angel, an excellent performance in many respects in which, however, "the lady

doth protest too much, methinks"; HMV offers another "liberated" Savoy Opera, "The Mikado," conducted by Sargent and with a cast similar to that of its recent "Gondoliers," as well as the five Beethoven cello sonatas played by Piatigorsky and Solomon (who, sad to relate, is still partly paralyzed following a long and severe illness, and whose future as a performer remains shrouded in uncertainty), an odd disc entitled "The Art of Guido Cantelli," which consists of isolated movements from familiar symphonic recordings—I should have thought that a miscellany of this type would scarcely appeal to those able to discriminate between the work of different conductors—and, best of all,

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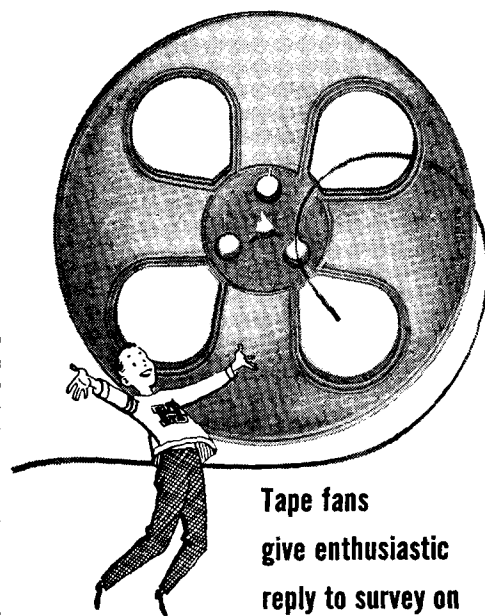
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"Lollipops: Favorite Pieces of Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart., C.H." After hearing these superb performances I should not have cared had the title been "Beecham's Pills," and it is good to hear that Sir Thomas's prolonged absence from these shores, grievously as it impoverishes our concert-going, has not kept him from the studio: recently the Royal Philharmonic joined him on the continent and spent much time making records in Paris. Some half-dozen Haydn symphonies were committed to tape, and it is said that Sir Thomas's future plans will involve several famous French operas, among them—keep your fingers crossed!—"The Trojans."

**D**ECCA'S much-publicized set of the Third Act of "Die Walküre," which also includes the "Todesverkündigung" from Act 2, is sure to be a focus of interest in Wagner-orientated households this Christmas, for the recording is full of excitement despite Edelmann's prosaic and undersized Wotan (after Hotter's cataclysmic rage and melting tenderness, he sounds more like a bank-manager discussing a proposed overdraft). Although it was the desire to preserve Flagstad's Brünnhilde even at this late stage which provided the impetus for this project, and she is in wonderful form apart from some anxious, overcareful top-notes, the outstanding feature of the set is the glorious playing of the Vienna Philharmonic under Georg Solti. Despite some unorthodox tempi, the Hungarian conductor emerges as a Wagnerian to be reckoned with: his reading shows none of the current trend towards understatement and the sound he draws from the orchestra, especially from brass and strings, is something to marvel at. Marianne Schech is a fair Sieglinde, though nowhere near as fine as Covent Garden's Sylvia Fisher, but Svanholm remains one of the best of present-day Siegmunds despite his inability to produce any really beautiful sounds. Flagstad's Brünnhilde shows greater warmth and tenderness than of old.

Decca's December list proper features "Andrea Chénier" with Mario del Monaco in the title-rôle, Renata Tebaldi as Maddalena di Coigny, and Ettore Bastianini as Carlo Gérard; Gianandrea Gavazzeni conducts the chorus and orchestra of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome, and the performance is splendidly recorded on a pair of twelve-inch discs. Singers like del Monaco, Tebaldi, and Bastianini do need a firm hand as well as greater help from the orchestra in building up dramatic tension if their fine voices are to be heard to best advantage. —THOMAS HEINITZ.

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## Early English

ENGLISH POLYPHONY OF THE THIRTEENTH AND EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURIES; MUSIC OF THE MIDDLE AGES: Volume IV. Russell Oberlin, counter-tenor; Charles Bressler and Donald Perry, tenors, Seymour Barab and Martha Blackman, viols. Experiences Anonymes EA-0024. \$4.98.

A GREAT DEAL of interest has been expressed recently in archaic music, much of which is historically interesting rather than intrinsically worthwhile. I have no quarrel with extensive representation of our musical heritage. The amount of time, ability, and concern which went into the performance of this music is out of all proportion to its value, though, and one is painfully reminded of the condition of modern music, which is performed and recorded infrequently and usually not well.

Particularly disturbing to me was the paucity of musical content in *Edi beo thu hevene quene*. This song is strophic; that is, the melody is repeated with slight or no alteration for each stanza of text. In addition, the basic melody contains an inordinate amount of repetition within itself. There are eight stanzas. The rhythms are not slow, fortunately, but only two tenor voices are employed, and each sings a highly restricted conjunct line. This adds up to eight uses of very sparse material. Denis Stevens, who writes the liner notes, invites us into the area of absolute value by saying "By any standards, this song is an unqualified masterpiece." Despite the invitation, which I find welcome, I am afraid that a great deal more discussion and thought would have to be given this song before giving such approval.

The singing throughout the album is splendid, especially Oberlin's, whose high tenor voice (called counter- or contratenor) goes much above the ordinary male range and is possessed of wondrously exact intonation. His highest tones on *Thomas gemma cantuarie / Thomas cesus in dovria* are magnificent. (The relationship between the two simultaneously performed texts and the instruments and voices is worth noting here.)

When the music requires moments of passion, however, the voices are frequently too intense and employ a vibrato which is considerably too fast. This is not as offensive on *Beata viscera*, which has an exultant flavor, as it is elsewhere. The viol players, incidentally, merely perform what is written for them and can hardly be chastised for their continual droning.

—WILLIAM RUSSO.

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