

over and listened to Schumann's concluding and tender *Dolce* in the belief that the next listed work was being played. That work, placed just before intermission, was the Prokofiev Third Sonata with its clangorous opening. When the Schumann ended the audience rose, almost to a man, and poured out into the foyers.

Now that I think about it, perhaps I may have been unduly critical of that audience for I cannot honestly say that in Brailowsky's hands I had too easy a time recognizing the Prokofiev either. A concluding Chopin group found Brailowsky on home ground, far more relaxed and convincing. Although he picked and poked and slapped the notes, I was agreeably surprised to hear many beautiful sounds in a thoroughly sustained legato. I closed my eyes and realized that the cantabile was sustained through pedaling, a pedaling that would inevitably produce harmonic confusion and melodic blurring on any record. In Carnegie it came out clearly, and yielded some lovely moments.

The moments occurred chiefly throughout a Chopin Impromptu, Nocturne, and Waltz. In the more challenging G minor Ballade and A flat Polonaise Brailowsky sounded like a hardworking journeyman. One could hear the perspiration rolling off him. The playing became punched and strained. The audience became ecstatic. I pondered.

DESPITE his battles with the keyboard, Brailowsky gets through every time. Is it not possible that some of Brailowsky's appeal derives from our kinship with one who struggles as all of us do in some way or other, and finally wins a victory over obvious difficulties? Further, Mr. Brailowsky poses no intellectual problems to himself or to his auditors. Is it not possible that some audiences are glad to hear the main outlines of a work without being involved in its subtle or profound meanings?

What I discovered without a doubt is that Mr. Brailowsky wants to play the piano more than anything else in the world. It might appear strange in a man who has so little natural ease at his work, but it accounts for a sincerity, an enthusiasm, and a kind of fierce intensity that carry genuine force and conviction. Add to that a man without pretense, who loves what he does and makes his public love it, who keeps doing it year after year in continent after continent, and you have an object of admiration.

Brailowsky may not be a pianist's pianist or a musician's musician, but he is undeniably a people's pianist. There is no question about that.

A TOSCANINI RETROSPECT

SINCE the first issue of *RECORDINGS* (August 30, 1947) in which Friedelind Wagner, granddaughter of the composer, reviewed a then-new album of Wagner on RCA Victor, down to the last issue (January 26, 1957), in which Irving Kolodin reviewed a Verdi collection, the name and fame of Arturo Toscanini have resounded through our pages. How the late Maestro impressed co-worker and critics, here and abroad, may be recalled in the following excerpts:

ERNEST NEWMAN, of the *London Sunday Times*, writing in the issue of April 25, 1953 on the appearance of the nine Beethoven symphonies: "Here in seven priceless records we are given in abundance everything that has gone to make him the unique figure he is—his artistic integrity, his complete selflessness in the service of the composer, his all-embracing sense of the totality of a work, which is implicit in every one of its details, the curious and grateful impression he gives us as the performance unfolds itself that we are following the natural organic course the work must have taken as it came into being in the mind of its creator, the incomparable clarity of all the details without undue dwelling on any of them for its separate sake."

NEVILLE CARDUS, of the *Manchester Guardian*, writing in the issue of March 27, 1954 on the appearance of the four Brahms symphonies: "These records which Toscanini has made with the NBC Symphony Orchestra will become historical in next to no time. They will preserve for long the essentials of Toscanini's style and method; the reproduction of tone and of vital rhythmical motion and accent almost convey to us the Maestro's living spirit. They are rather terrific records, so realistic in suggestions of orchestral attack and sonority."

SAMUEL ANTEK, a longtime member of the NBC Symphony's string section, in the issue of March 25, 1950 on the occasion of the orchestra's nationwide tour and the Maestro's eighty-third birthday: "Many people in writing of Toscanini or discussing him use the word 'perfection.' This always rather jars me, for to use this word about him seems particularly inappropriate. His music making is too lusty, too human, too seething with inner

warmth to be summed up in something so chaste, pure, and technically cool as perfection. I was struck with this earthy, healthy robustness at the first contact in 1937, and it has remained a dominant characteristic ever since.

"Music with him always seems intuitive, never intellectual or musical, a natural outpouring of emotion, as if music was the simplest but the most meaningful and heartfelt language in the world. The tempo, articulation, or phrasing that he had insisted upon with such passion five years before is now dismissed with a self-deprecatory gesture as he says: 'You know, I was so stupid then—but now I understand.' As if only now, in his eighties, he were approaching maturity! I often think of his remark: 'Trouble is most musicians have such big heads and little hearts—they know so much and feel so little.'"

IRVING KOLODIN, in the same issue: "It is well to remember that we are discussing, as a symphonic conductor, a man whose first forty years of life were spent largely in the opera house, who spent six years (1908-1914) conducting several times a week at the Metropolitan. His repertory of 'Aida' and 'Tristan,' 'Manon' and 'Falstaff,' 'L'Amore de Tre Re,' 'Orfeo,' 'Armide,' 'Carmen,' 'Meistersinger,' all of Puccini, 'Götterdämmerung,' and 'Boris' (plus a full dozen others including 'Otello' and 'Euryanthe') ranged through virtually every school and every style except Mozart. It was at that remote time—thirty-five years ago—that H. T. Parker, in the *Boston Transcript*, wrote of him:

He was thrilling to hear in his mastery of rhythm, magnificent in the advance and the breaking of the musico-dramatic climax, wondrous in the adjustment of the whole tonal mass of the orchestra and the instant it enforced or illuminated on the stage. Doing these things, his ear and the ear that listened to him rejoiced in the beauty, the vitality, the euphony, and the expressive quality of tone he drew from his band. . . . The nervous force within him he infused into the music and play, singers, band, and audience until when he was at his highest and fullest, and in the music that stirred him, it made the atmosphere of the opera house electric."

“DUTCHMAN” FROM BAYREUTH



By ROBERT LAWRENCE

THE controversy over the merits of opera recorded in the studio as against a performance taped in the theater will surely be revived by London FFRR's new release of Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman," taken down in its entirety during a Bayreuth Festival presentation in the summer of 1955. For those who prefer their opera on the spot, there is plenty of colorful material at hand. The auxiliary brasses of the Festspielhaus sound the "Dutchman" motif at the outset of the recording, summoning the audience to its seats. One hears the buzz of conversation and the tuning of the orchestra. Then silence descends upon the hall and the overture begins. In this same vein, there is much audible moving of scenery and a good deal of resonant stomping about by Daland and the sailors. At the climax of the opera, when Senta mounts the cliff and throws herself into the sea, her voice comes from a distance, far upstage . . . a realistic arrangement geared to visual rather than auditory effect. This listener casts his vote for a studio performance of recorded opera, minus audience coughing and plus a flexibility of balance between voice and orchestra which the present album does not possess.

Completed in 1841, and first performed two years later, "The Flying Dutchman" remains a remarkable work—equivalent, perhaps, in the Wagnerian chronology to "Ernani" in the output of Verdi. Much of the mature Wagner is already there—more, in fact, than in many of the pages of his later "Lohengrin"—with stirring emphasis on the fantastic, the heroic, and the mercurial interplay of contrasting moods. There is also present the seed of that monumental boredom, achieved by driving a point into the ground, which Wagner was to cultivate so relentlessly in certain subsequent passages of the "Ring" and "Parsifal." In the uncut recording at hand, some of the repetitions of the spinning chorus and of the celebration

in the final tableau become well nigh unendurable. Weighed against this drawback are the magnificent sweep of the opera's opening, with a seascape unparalleled in musical literature; a youthful, vernal melodic line which flowers especially in the song of the Steersman; and much of Senta's music, touched with a glowing lyrical spark. The most satisfying portion of the score—the Dutchman's opening aria, "Die Frist ist um"—is based, ironically enough, on the traditional scene and aria of Italian opera, a formula transplanted so tellingly by Beethoven in "Fidelio" and Weber in "Oberon." Here Wagner employs the time-honored sequence of recitative, cavatina and cabaletta with such skill as to render almost superfluous his own later theories of music drama. Art of this caliber needed no reforming.

The present recorded version of "The Flying Dutchman" is given in one act, with orchestral interludes connecting the individual scenes. This is as Wagner originally intended. It was only later that intermissions were inserted, the scenes became acts, and the interludes were transformed (by the composer himself) into curtain-raisers. The one-act version was first performed, years after the composer's death, at the Bayreuth Festival of 1901, and it must be said that the onward sweep of the music makes this edition inevitable for the serious opera-goer.

Performance quality in the discs by FFRR is quite respectable but lacking in dramatic profile; and in this lack lies a total ennui which might otherwise have been avoided. "The Flying Dutchman" is a work which lives or dies according to its interpreters. The score must blaze with intensity from beginning to end, even when this quality is absent from the music (a great conductor will provide the necessary ersatz). Joseph Keilberth, who directs the album, does a workmanlike, scholarly job, but one hardly calculated to raise the listener's blood pressure or start his pulse a-pounding. Hermann Uhde, as the Dutchman, reveals a fine intelligence

and well proportioned vocal delivery. He has his troubles with the pitch, on occasion; and, arousing our compassion more than our sense of fantasy, he lacks the demonic drive which lies at the core of the character. His performance, nevertheless, has style and dignity.

The minor rôle of the Steersman is sung with lovely tone by Josef Traxel. Elisabeth Schärtel is a tremulous Mary, Rudolf Lustig a passable Erik (perhaps the truest page in all Wagner is to be found in the cavatina, "Willst jenes Tags"), and Ludwig Weber an impressive Daland. Mr. Weber, though no longer in vocal bloom, conveys a vital musical and dramatic authority.

Essentially, the opera stands or falls with Senta; and Astrid Varnay turns in a very good performance, marked by commanding intensity throughout. The beauty of her voice, however, is constricted by a set of mannerisms evidently modelled on the Flagstad approach: the sudden crescendo after a vocal attack, the frequent darkening of the voice, the wedge-shaped top tones, the caressing of vowel sounds in midstream. These traits worked admirably for the great Norwegian artist to whom they were native. They distort the bright and glinting voice of Miss Varnay, an excellent dramatic soprano in her own right.

Regrettably, "The Flying Dutchman"—in this present edition—remains an item for the Wagner scholar. There is much in it to stir the imagination, particularly for those already familiar with the work on stage. For the general public, however, a more magnetic performance would be of greater attraction.



—Blechnann.

Varnay—"commanding intensity."