

# Recordings Reports II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Bach: " 'Tis thee I would be Praising," "Invention No. 8." Ravel: "Pièce en forme de Habanera." Serly: Concerto. Davis Shuman, trombone, and chamber orchestra, Serly conducting. Audio Fidelity AFLP 1811, \$5.95.	A valiant if not wholly successful effort by trombone virtuoso Shuman to persuade us that the wind instrument is as much at home in Ravel's "Pièce en forme de Habanera" as the violin, or can manage "Ich grolle nicht" as well as a tenor. The Serly concerto is an audible thesaurus of the effects possible on the cumbersome instrument, but not a striking work on its own. For Shuman, praise for attempting the impossible which (in the rapid moving Bach aria) also turns out to be the unattainable. Trombonists may be interested to know that the recording is faithful; others that the studio is very small.
Beethoven: Sonatas Op. 109, 110. Walter Gieseking, piano. Angel 35363, \$4.98.	The promise of this disc is not fulfilled by the performances, which are small scale, withdrawn, and emotionally restrained. The A flat does attain a breadth of statement in the finale that provides a climax to what preceded, but the E major walks in shadows from first to last. The execution is faultless in the pianist's chosen style, and it is mirrored faithfully in the reproduction. However, it is in another musical world than Schnabel's performances of these works.
Boccherini: "La Tiranna Spagnola"; Cambini: Quartet in G minor; Galuppi: Quartet in G minor. Quartetto Italiano. Angel 45001, \$3.98.	Fine mating of literature and performers, with the quality and quantity of the Quartetto Italiano's string sound closely related to the needs of the music. The Boccherini is tautly turned, with lively spirit and clean detail, the others likewise. The disc is clothed in what Angel calls its "library" garb: a gold imprinted "tweedy" looking fabric, which conjures up pipe, slippers, easy chair, and other adjuncts of contented listening. Neatly done.
Brahms: "Handel" variations, G minor Rhapsody, Intermezzo in E flat minor (Op. 118, No. 6). Witold Malcuzyński, piano. Angel 35349, \$1.98.	The pianistic needs are constantly better served in the variations than the musical ones, as Malcuzyński tends to lose the thread of idea in a concentration on sounds and fingerings. Neither the Rhapsody nor the Intermezzo provides convincing proof that Malcuzyński is wholly happy in Brahms. Good sound.
Brahms: Capriccio in B minor, Op. 76, No. 2, Grieg: Albumblatt in A, Berceuse, "An den Frühling," etc. Harold Bauer, piano. Camden CAL 348, \$1.98.	What made the great interpreters of the piano's golden age great is intermittently evident in this absorbing reissue (Volume 2) of "The Art of Harold Bauer." As those who grew up in his time can attest, Bauer was not in the first line of piano virtuosi, but he had an inquiring mind, a rich spirit, and a fine sensitivity to the atmosphere and intent of a musical conception. Schumann's "Novelette" in D, "Nachtstück," Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," the A flat Impromptu of Schubert, the Chopin "Fantasie Impromptu" and Debussy's "Claire de lune" are among the characteristic items of his repertory represented. Tinkly reproduction for the most part.
Debussy: Preludes (Book I). Guiomar Novães, piano. Vox PL 10180, \$4.98.	In a month when Gieseking plays the late Beethoven sonata literature and Novães undertakes Debussy, it's inevitable that the standards of one are going to find the other lacking. All of Novães's intelligence, musicality, and fine pianistic command cannot establish a sympathy which she does not possess with the composer's idiom. The rich sound is too palpable, the articulation too sharp for the sonorities suitable for "Voiles," "Des Pas sur la Neige," or "Ce Qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest." The more conventional "Fille aux Cheveux de lin" and "Minstrels" are more enjoyable listening. Oddly, the kind of reproduction (for the eye) which makes Seurat's "Afternoon at la Grande Jatte" a suitable cover decoration is not provided for the ear.
Faure: Sonata in A, Franck: Sonata in A. Lola Bobesco, violin, and Jacques Gentry, piano. London LL 1549, \$3.98.	A combination of two performances formerly offered on individual ten-inch LPs. The rehearing is occasion for renewed esteem for Miss Bobesco, a suave performer with a sound something like the late Ginette Neveu's. Her partner is a capable performer, in the same refined style to which she is partial. Excellent reproduction.
Lambert: Concerto for Piano and Nonet: Eight Songs by Li-Po. Gordon Watson, piano, the Argo Ensemble, and Alexander Young, tenor, with Charles Groves conducting. Westminster XWN 18254, \$3.98.	The sensitive performances add much to the appeal of these works, full of musical impulse if not always the most productive sense of organization. There is more atmosphere in the "Concerto" than in a previous issue on M-G-M; the ensemble also participates profitably in Young's fine performance of the songs. Excellent reproduction.
Rossini: "Una voce poco fa" ("Il Barbiere"), Donizetti: "Il dolce suono," etc. ("Lucia"), Verdi: "Caro nome," "Tutte le feste" ("Rigoletto"), etc. Roberta Peters, soprano, with the Rome Opera Orchestra conducted by Jonel Perlea and Vincenzo Bellezza. RCA Victor LM 2031, \$3.98.	As the list of contents suggests, those who have missed Miss Peters in her Metropolitan specialties this winter will find most of them accounted for, in typical fashion. That is to say, the execution is clean, the sound good, the taste inclined to excess ornamentation, and top notes held too long. This may conform to Miss Peters's ideas of how to "sing coloratura," but it downgrades her artistically. Altogether, it is easier to take her seriously in the soubrette parts ("So anch'io la virtù magica" from "Don Pasquale" and "Or non sola" from Auber's "Fra Diavolo") than in the tragic ones of Lucia and Rigoletto. Also included is a rightly rung "Bell Song." Excellent sound throughout.
Schubert: "Gretchen am Spinnrade," "Die Junge Nonne," "An die Musik," etc. Kathleen Ferrier, mezzo soprano with Phyllis Spurr, piano. London LL 1529, \$3.98.	A reissue of some of the most notable performances of the late Ferrier, showing her artistry and spirit at their most cherishable. In addition to the best sung "An die Musik" now available, the songs include a beautiful "Musesohn" and a finely sung "Widmung" (Schumann). Side two offers excerpts from Handel's "Rodelinda" and "Xerxes," Gluck's "Orfeo" (with Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting), and Mendelssohn's "Elijah" (Boyd Neel Orchestra). Not the richest recorded sound, but outstanding.
Smetana: "Aus meinem Leben" Quartet. Borodin: D major Quartet. Endres Quartet. VOX PL 10190, \$4.98.	Two excellent performances by a fine quartet otherwise unknown to me. The players combine a high standard of technical execution with a thorough understanding of the works, also of the best traditions of chamber music playing. For another plus, the recording is ideally spacious.
Verdi: "Salce, salce," "Ave Maria" ("Otello"), etc. Elisabeth Rethberg, soprano, with various orchestras. Camden CAL 335, \$1.98.	A choice collection of reissues from the Rethberg catalogue, including her superb "Ma dall' arido" and "Morrò, ma prima" from "Ballo in Maschera" as well as Mozart's "L'amerò sarò costante," the lighter "Hab' ich nur deine Liebe" (Suppés "Boccaccio") and "Klänge der Heimat" (Strauss's "Fledermaus"). Whether in these or Wagner's "Traft ihr das Schiff" ("Holländer"), the Rethberg equipment is in peerless order, the results unique.
Verdi: "O patria mia" ("Aida"). Rose Bampton, soprano, etc. Camden CAL 346, \$1.98.	Something of a non-critic's choice, with nine other singers of the 'thirties represented: Swarthout ("Carmen" excerpt), Bori ("Ah fors è lui"), Crooks ("Salut demeure"), de Luca ("O Carlo ascolta"), Jeritza ("Il est doux"), Miliza Korjus ("D'r Hölle Rache"), Martinelli ("No, Pagliaccio"), J. C. Thomas ("Credo in un Dio") and Tibbett ("Toreador"). Much fine operatic art, reasonably well reproduced. —I. K.

## Balladry

Continued from page 50

tions need checking: one text is lacking a line; 's is at least twice omitted. While some easy terms are glossed, *taver* and *spey* are not.

And while one cannot argue over tastes, it seems to me that no favor is done the ballad by dubbing it "poetry of the highest order." It does not in the least vitiate the charm or the significance of balladry to admit that few ballad texts can meet any rigid poetic standards. But this is beside the point. Ballads are meant to be heard as songs. If the texts are to be considered without music, they should be compared with the lyrics of popular non-folk songs, and here they stand up very well. Lest it seem carping to deal with the editorial function at this length, may I point out that, in such a recording project with such an avowed purpose, it is the editorial function which is most important?

AND with that, may I turn to more positive qualities? Within their defined field, as you might expect from Mr. Goldstein's wealth of experience, these records are the best thing available, fully comparable with—though musically not so intriguing as—the Library of Congress recordings of American versions of these same and other ballads. As I've already said, the scholarly apparatus is full, yet succinct and remarkably helpful. It provides leads to further study and deftly summarizes the more interesting theses about some of the ballads, particularly about the texts rather than the tunes.

And what of the songs themselves? There is a kind of sameness to some of the tunes, which is probably emphasized by the facts that they are all unaccompanied and that there are only two voices. But there are some exciting tunes too: e.g., "The Cruel Mother," the rollicking "Minoree," and the truly haunting "Lang A-Growing." The texts are, of course, very full, and some of those from strictly oral sources are quite unusual.

And finally the singers. Ewan MacColl is well-known to ballad scholars. He has a rich voice and mannerisms similar to Burl Ives's, although the two have very different ranges. A. L. Lloyd's voice is more typically that of a street-singer and will be less attractive to lay listeners, although he is faithfully representative of one folk-singing tradition. Both play rather freely with a tune in a way that will intrigue the scholar more than the layman.

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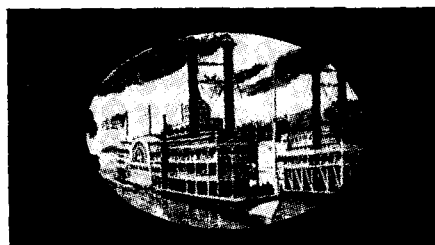
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## Hofmann

Continued from page 49

radio recently. Later your friend (and always mine), Sascha Greiner of Steinway, informed me that a beautiful new three-year-old piano had been used (abused). Were a certain Society tuned in, the alleged artist would surely be imprisoned for cruelty to children!" (Hofmann, it may be recalled, was restrained by such a "Society" when he first came to America as a prodigy.)

On another occasion Hofmann wrote: "I have a new little sixteen-foot boat. It is a peach! I gave her the very modest name of 'Majestic.' From this, you will gather that by now I am fully artisticalized, modern style."

And what is left of Hofmann's contribution to "un-modern" artistry? One LP disc that recaptures the fortunate documentation of Hofmann's Golden Jubilee Concert at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1937. In my discussion of this disc (SR Sept. 24, 1955) I said that every performance furnishes ample material for a treatise on the art of piano playing and interpretation. I now submit that it serves to fill, however skimpily, a gaping void in the consecutive history of piano playing. This is the truth. And it is also the truth that in 1937 Hofmann was not at his greatest. The statement will only underline the extent of Hofmann's mastery at his height, for when he had less than that he still towered above most of the famed pianists of our day as a giant towers above pygmies. And were it not for the vision and persistence of the present executives of Columbia Records nothing at all but the recollections of an ever-decreasing band of music lovers would remain.

A few more recorded performances may turn up (especially from the acoustic period of his earlier European activity), but at the moment the Hofmann discography consists of the Jubilee disc. The absence of others has been loudly lamented and explained as "largely Hofmann's fault" in all the eulogies I read following his death. I do not think so. At any rate, it is at least a moot point. Here are the ramifications as I know them, the reader may judge for himself.

First, during Hofmann's greatest period (c. 1916 to 1931), Europe was the origin of the significant piano recordings of the large-form works, and such European favorites as Backhaus, Schnabel, Cortot, and Rubinstein supplied the bulk of the playing. Hofmann's career had firmly become largely all-American, and our re-

cording companies were concentrating on small works that could be heard in their entirety on one side of a 78 rpm disc. Evidently, they had gauged the public taste perfectly, for they made fortunes on a literature of encore-size pieces, and so did the great artists who performed them—Caruso, Kreisler, Elman, Heifetz, Alma Gluck, McCormack, Paderewski, and a few others.

Hofmann was reluctant to be represented only by small works. He told me that his suggestions to do larger works were unenthusiastically received. He was also naively surprised to "sense some resistance" to his demand for "absolute veto." Everyone knew of Hofmann's dedication to artistic and technical perfection. The recording executives were undeniably right to shun the possibility of a week of solid work and costs to obtain one Chopin Ballade that Hofmann might grudgingly admit was "not too terrible."

He also held stubbornly to the conviction that recordings adversely affected box-office, and therefore he insisted on higher royalties as compensation. Undoubtedly he posed further problems to a company—this artist who not only demanded more money but insisted on performing a repertoire that was more expensive to produce and less salable.

**H**OFMANN never told me what he actually asked. I therefore cannot judge whether or not his terms were exorbitant. But I do know from his personal disappointment and bitterness on the subject that persuading Hofmann to record was not impossible. It seems to me that had the guiding lights of the recording companies of those days fully understood what Hofmann represented to the history of piano playing, nothing would have stood in the way of perpetuating his playing; that had he asked for the moon they would have made every effort to get it for him.

While probing the possibilities of working out some long-term project, Hofmann did make several experimental discs in the Twenties. He loathed them. The playing reflected his apprehensions. The acoustic shellacs reflected very little of his inimitably subtle and colorful art. That was another reason why he became difficult. But I repeat, his eventual cooperation would not have been impossible to obtain. Then would we have had, as we have from Rachmaninoff, a worthy heritage and the inspiration of an incomparable master who conceived ideals of harmonious magnificence, who molded and fashioned them and set them forth in beauty and noble perfection.



# HOFMANN: ARTIST, MAN, INVENTOR



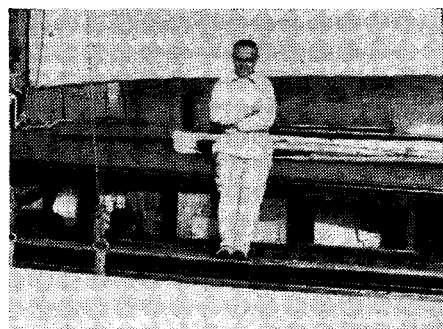
First American tour (1887).



—Gessford.  
Turn-of-the-century trio, with Jean Gerardy  
(Belgian cellist) and Fritz Kreisler.



Playing tennis—probably in Switzerland.



—Boughtons.

Off Camden, Maine, in his self-designed sailing-motor yacht (1934).



With A. W. (Sascha) Greiner  
of Steinway and Sons (1937).



At the keyboard built to his specifications (1930s).

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—Albert Petersen.

With his son Anton, now a nuclear physicist.



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## STEREOPHONIC

### *Up to Date*

**I**T'S NOT quite ten years since the LP record came in (Spring 1948), with results that everyone knows about. What might be called the era of good feeling that followed the "war of the speeds" has brought the cost of good music per minute to its lowest cost ever, with well-defined price categories ranging from \$1.98 for "economy" reissues to as much as \$7.98—via dollar step-ups—for one company's de luxe "Laboratory" series. The largest area of choice in the high (if not highest) fidelity category has settled at \$3.98, with public confidence restored and industry minds pretty much at one.

However, technology is a dynamic thing—especially if it involves the dynamics of music—and new horizons are beckoning. Like Cinerama and other wide-screen devices in the films, tape is challenging the old concepts of playing-time, fidelity, durability, and all the rest. And though it isn't even old enough to call itself a flourishing business, it has already developed its own factions, with the champions of stereophonic pushing aside the claims of monaural.

For those not indoctrinated, the distinction is a simple one. "Monaural" is basically the same kind of sound one hears from a conventional disc. (It is, in fact, a replica of the tape used in the studio from which discs are cut.) It provides true continuity, in the sense that no interruption need be tolerated for a conventional symphony or concerto, or an act of opera. It can be played through the usual audio amplifier from a "tape deck" (reels, etc.) and does not require more than a single good speaker. "Stereophonic" is a leap into the wild blue yonder of tomorrow, for it professes to approximate the concert hall or opera house effect of "direction" as music is performed—horns and other brass from one side, strings and percussion from another, piano soloist in the middle, etc. For the perfectionist dissatisfied with the "artificial" flavor of ordinary reproduction—no matter how skilfully processed—it suggests new vistas of realism in home listening. It requires some radical alterations in present facilities—an additional amplifier and second speaker are minimal, as well as the "tape deck"—also in habits of listening. Each monaural tape costs several times the equivalent on a

disc-recording, and "stereo" adds appreciably to this in equipment cost, though the tape itself costs about the same as monaural.

It is no secret that virtually all of the major companies (and the more enterprising lesser ones) have, for some months, been recording virtually all their sessions monaurally and stereophonically. (The experience of LP has taught them to guard all exits where a competitor's innovation might find them at a commercial disadvantage.) A good many refinements have already been introduced, particularly the use of a "fill" microphone to plug the "hole in the middle" characteristic of stereophonic sound several years ago. Several companies have pursued the production to the point of public sale—particularly RCA Victor and Westminster—which is the present point of contact with SR's readers.

**S**O FAR I have been able to hear only a sampling of each, in most instances duplicating performances already released on LP and evaluated in the customary terms—artistic and mechanical. Among the RCA issues are the Heifetz performance of the Brahms Concerto with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the same conductor and orchestra's version of the Bartok "Concerto for Orchestra," Stokowski conducting Menotti's "Sebastian" ballet, Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony in Berlioz's "Fantastique" and Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet," etc. Asked for a sample of its catalogue (trade-named Sonotape), Westminster provided Artur Rodzinski and an English orchestra performing sundry works of Tchaikovsky (Symphony No. 4 and "Nutcracker" ballet) and the Beethoven Fifth Symphony, Egon Petri playing Beethoven's "Appassionata," Robert Mandell conducting Stravinsky's "Histoire du Soldat," etc.

The variation in quality is considerable, of course, but at its best "stereophonic" attains a degree of realism not common with disc and single speaker. As the experienced listener knows, a second speaker attached to a conventional system will add materially to the enjoyment provided by ordinary means. The sound is diffused, the point of origin masked. These are advantages built into the "stereophonic" system, which tend,