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THE OTHER SIDE



"PARASTAT" AND ELECTROSTATIC SPEAKER

DECCA has at last allowed us a brief glance behind the iron curtain of secrecy which had so far hidden its stereo-disc plans from the public gaze. Provided that a trade recession does not undermine the economic stability of the record industry in the meantime, next autumn should witness the commercial launching of microgroove stereophony, and thus another notable milestone in the history of the gramophone will have been reached. For the present, however, other technical developments of no little consequence vie for our attention. One of them is the "Parastat," a strange-looking device developed by Cecil Watts (for many years now a leading light in the British Sound Recording Association) which, it is asserted, will effectively eliminate static electricity from microgroove discs. Watts has already devoted much time and thought to this problem, and his "Dust Bug" is by common consent the most successful record-cleaning gadget on the market.

The "Parastat," however, will be no mere cleaning device but is designed to inject into the tiny crevices just under the shoulder of the groove an electrically conductive substance which provides a leakage path for static electricity. It is claimed that the treatment is permanent and that it leaves the area of contact between stylus and groove untouched; the whole operation takes only a few seconds. The "Parastat" is unlikely to gain wide currency in the home—it will probably be too costly for the average collector—but it is anticipated that, with its help, record shops will be able to offer this service to their clients and, in time, the process may be incorporated in record manufacture.

For the past three weeks the major part of my listening has involved a piece of equipment which I had been anxious to add to my "hi-fi family" ever since I first encountered it at London's first Audio Fair, in April of last year. After many disappointing delays, production of the QUAD Full-Range Electrostatic Loudspeakers began towards the end of September and, even since then, the customary greeting between hi-fi specialists is no longer "How are you?" but "Have you got yours yet?" The idea of listening to first-class, reproduced sound involving no cone, no

magnet, and no voluminous enclosure requires some degree of mental readjustment, but already I am convinced that, barring sensational developments in other directions (such as the Ionophone, for example), the QUAD Loudspeaker represents "the shape of things to come."

In many respects it is already strikingly superior to the best of conventional systems: the treble response, in particular, is unbelievably clean, crisp, and smooth—after listening to the QUAD, even the finest moving-coil assembly sounds slightly "dirty" and curiously sluggish in dealing with transients. At the lower end of the scale however, the QUAD is less impressive than, for example, my large Voigt horn, though still very good in view of its modest size. Perhaps its most noticeable characteristic is its "neutrality," in other words the astonishing absence of coloration—what the uninitiated used to call "a nice tone"—which enables it to tell us the truth about any recording without exaggerating possible faults.

THE QUAD Loudspeaker, in its present form, is a remarkable achievement but it is not, nor was it intended to be, all things to all people. The lunatic fringe—those who use hi-fi mainly in order to sublimate their aggressive instincts—will find in it little cause for rejoicing since its capacity for handling loud volume is strictly limited, the bass does not thump nor the treble pierce your eardrums. It is not readily matched up with any amplifier you may happen to possess and its efficiency is well below that of any conventional system. On the whole it yields its best results with music employing limited forces and depending on subtle tonal shadings. Solo piano, voice and piano, violin and piano, chamber orchestra—such discs, provided they are cleanly recorded, show the QUAD speaker to be in a class all its own. The most revealing experience so far was provided by a Decca harpsichord disc (Scarlatti Sonatas played by George Malcolm: London LL 963): here, I felt, were the most enchanting and truly lifelike sounds yet heard from any recording. No less astonishing in its way was the "kindness" shown by the speaker to the re-issued Schubert B flat Trio played by Cortot, Thibaud, and Casals (vintage 1926),

thus proving that, in its highest sense, recording quality does not date nearly as readily as suspected.

One of the most interesting of operatic issues to appear this season is Rossini's "Mosè," recorded in Naples by Philips. Half opera, half oratorio—the composer described it as a "sacred melodrama"—this work is given in its expanded Paris version (complete with rather prolonged ballet) though sung in Italian. It is fascinating music which somehow manages to find a link between late Haydn and early Verdi; Serafin is the stylish conductor but the singers, headed by Rossi-Lemeni in the title-rôle, are rather an ordinary lot except for Giuseppe Taddei's splendid Pharaoh.

Among current Archive releases we have a fine new version of Bach's Christmas Oratorio, directed by the late Fritz Lehmann and Günther Arndt. Evidently Lehmann died before the recording could be completed, for he is in charge of parts 1 to 4 while in the last two sections Arndt, who presumably had been training the combined choirs for the performance, assumes control of the talented forces lined up by DGG (Gunthild Weber, Sieglinde Wagner, Helmut Krebs, and Heinz Rehfuss are the soloists). Also from Archive comes a sensible disc of Bach Violin Concertos: Schneiderhan with the Lucerne Festival Strings plays the works in A minor and E major, and he is joined by Rudolf Baumgartner for the D minor Double Concerto. The Bach Orchestra of Berlin (conducted by Carl Gorvin), on the other hand, devotes its energies to music by Leopold Mozart: the "Cassatio ex G" for orchestra and children's instruments, and a Divertimento entitled "A Musical Sleigh-Ride."

Parlophone has released a 45 rpm Extended Play disc entitled "More Out of the Hat," which features four further numbers from the show recently favored in the U.S. by an Angel issue. It differs from the original issue in that it was recorded in the studio, not in the theatre before an audience. It includes "Too many cooks"—concerned with modern kitchen utensils and ending with the heart-rending plea: "Please don't save us labor any more!"—and a Flanders solo tour de force, his monologue about the disenchanted Wimbledon umpire ("upon whom the sun never sets"). This last number had to be slightly revised for a sound-only medium since in the theatre much of the fun was visual. If you miss the spontaneous laughter of the audience on this disc, you can easily repair the omission by inviting a group of friends to listen to it.

—THOMAS HEINITZ



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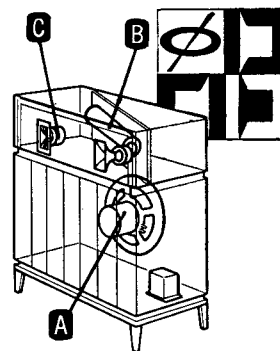
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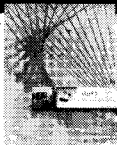
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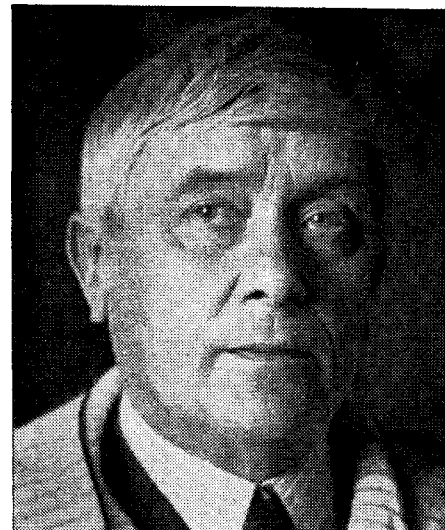


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Debussy and Maeterlinck—"the unearthly fragility of the heroine."

—Culver.

"PELLÉAS" AND "ALCESTE"

THE unveiling of the fourth complete recording of Debussy's "Pelléas and Mélisande" (Angel 3561, \$15.94) seems to affirm the long harbored suspicion that this operatic *rara avis* has far more devotees than can be measured by theatrical attendance. Phonophiles, who are already accustomed to hearing the kind of Pelléas seldom experienced by their operagoing brethren, will now find their choice enriched by another Paris-made entry offering for the first time the combined attractions of Angel and Angeles. Other substantial assets of the new set are the authoritative presence of André Cluytens at the helm of the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française and a cast of seasoned performers.

From the musical point of view, Victoria de los Angeles leaves little room for criticism. Her Mélisande is sung with tonal purity and with the sensitive restraint the role demands. Dramatically, however, she falls somewhat short of capturing fully the unearthly fragility of Maeterlinck's heroine. The vocal honors in the cast clearly belong to Gérard Souzay. While one could perhaps prefer a more sonorous Golaud (Hector Dufranne, who created the part in 1902 was a huge-voiced singer, as is Etcheverry in the now-deleted RCA Victor version), Souzay offers here a masterful conception of the role, sung with astonishing flexibility and expressive force, and achieves a rare blend of human passion and musical understatement. Jacques Jansen contributed a more youthful-sounding Pelléas to the RCA Victor set (recorded in 1942), but he imbues the part with

evident authority and, save some instances of forcing, due artistic polish. The important minor roles are in capable hands and the entire performance benefits from the disciplined yet relaxed reading of Cluytens. Balance between voices and orchestra is exemplary and the exquisite orchestral interludes are rendered with poetic insight. The tonal realism of the Vaults Scene (Act 3) is praiseworthy. Side One, on the other hand, ends with an awkward mid-sentence interruption that should have been avoided. In sum, a pearl for Pelléasites, though London's Ansermet-led version ((LLA-11) has strong attractions no prospective buyer should overlook.

—GEORGE JELLINEK.

* * *

THE most interesting facts about the new complete recording of Gluck's "Alceste" (London XLLA-49, \$19.92) are that it conveys (more or less) the original Italian version, in Italian, as first heard on December 26, 1767, in Vienna—and that the role of the noble heroine is sung by Kirsten Flagstad. When the Metropolitan Opera has produced "Alceste," it has employed (more or less) the French revision—actually a complete re-composition—of 1776.

Between the Italian "Alceste" of 1767 and the French "Alceste" of 1776, Gluck had composed "Paride ed Elena" and "Iphigénie en Aulide" and had transformed "Orfeo" et Euridice into "Orphée et Eurydice." The decade marked off the difference between a highly gifted composer of fifty-three and a liberated genius of sixty-two, a man ready to compose