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Bach by Szerying and Olevsky

THE simultaneous publication by Odeon and by Westminster of albums of the Bach Sonatas and Partitas for unaccompanied violin is an index of the wide interest taken by the general public today in the master's instrumental works. Thirty years ago average violinists, when asked what they felt about the Bach Sonatas, would have replied that though they were conscious of the greatness of the music they never obtained complete satisfaction when they heard them, for even the greatest soloists seemed ill at ease with them. Even in the early nineteenth century, when Mendelssohn launched the great revival of Bach by his performance of the St. Matthew Passion at Berlin in 1829, he and Schumann tried to stimulate interest in the Chaconne of the second Partita by writing accompaniments (they were published in 1854).

The violin was Bach's first instrument and at an early age he learned its secrets from his father, John Ambrose Bach, a violinist of Eisenach, and he became familiar with the beautiful instruments fashioned by the Cremonese luthiers, Niccolò Amati and Antonio Stradivari for Arcangelo Corelli in Rome, and Antonio Vivaldi in Venice. The young Johann Sebastian soon enlarged his musical circle, and passing on from the church and chamber Sonatas of Corelli and the concertos of Vivaldi he absorbed works by the spirited French composers of "Le Roi Soleil," such as Rébel, one of the "Vingt-quatre violons du Roi," who composed music for violin alone. Already, too, in Bach's youth the German monarchs had invited to Germany the celebrated virtuosi, such as Veracini and Tartini, and had sent the young German violinists abroad to study with Corelli and Vivaldi, with the result that violin technique in Germany had advanced by leaps and bounds, as we can see from such works as Biber's Sonatas for violin, which were published in 1681. Biber and Thomas Baltzar (another German virtuoso, celebrated in Paris at the time of Lully) taught Bach to consider the violin not merely as a melodic instrument in the Italian manner, but one capable of playing in various voices. Already after his studies at the college of Lüneburg he obtained when eighteen the post of solo violin and assistant concertmeister in the private chapel

years at the court of Weimar (1703-1717) and during the Cöthen period (1717-1723), when he directed the band of Leopold, Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen, a talented violoncellist, he performed German, French and Italian instrumental music, consorting with such famed virtuosi as Johann von Westhoff and Pisendel. The Cöthen years were the happiest in the composer's life and his serenity is reflected in the lyrical melodies and piquant rhythms of these Sonatas and Partitas, which were published in 1720, on the eve of his marriage to the fair Anna Magdalena Wilcken, who, it is said, copied the master's score for the first edition.

There is, it should be noted, a difference between the words "Sonatas" and "Suite" or Partita. In Italy, Corelli divided his Sonatas into two classes: those of formal pattern that he played in the Sistine chapel on Sundays called Church Sonatas (Sonata da Chiesa), and those that he performed in the palace of his patron, Cardinal Ottabuoni, called Chamber Sonatas (Sonata da Camera), which consisted of a succession of dances. In England a succession of dances was called "Suite"; in France, "Ordre"; in Germany, "Partita."

When considering the technique of these works we must not forget that in Bach's day the stringing of the instrument and the curve of the bridge made possible a more simultaneous performance of the notes of a chord. In the Germany of the Baroque period the stick of the bow was of almost semicircular shape and the tension of the hair was regulated by the thumb.

The great merit of Henryk Szerying's interpretations of Bach is that he has combined his profound musicianship with his technical mastery of the violin in an attempt to solve the problems that baffled many a preceding virtuoso. While accentuating the passionate lyrical quality of the instrument in the cantabile movements, he has made the voices of the fugues converse with each other without ever losing the horizontal movement of the music. Possessing as he does so many technical assets all rigidly controlled, he produces magnificent climaxes as in the two fugues of the first two Sonatas. His performance is more satisfying than the exuberance of Julian Olevsky who, when a presto arrives, whips up his violin as if it were a race horse. -WALTER STARKIE.

Lincoln Center

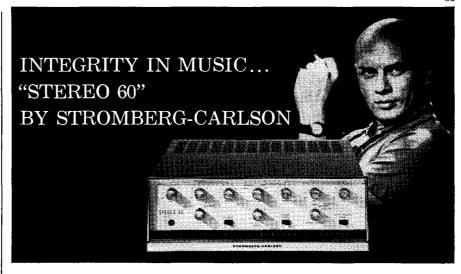
Continued from page 37

expected that resident companies will play longer seasons in their air-conditioned houses, but it is anticipated that an expanded audience will cause the months presently regarded as out-of-season to be in useful demand by visiting companies from all over the world. In fact the prospect of important summer festivals at Lincoln Center may be but a few years removed from reality.

The difference between what is best for a visiting attraction, booked only for the length of time it can fill its theatre, and a house whose capacity is designed to obtain the highest quality of performance from resident companies, is the vital issue in recent criticism of the size of Lincoln Center's houses. In commenting on the Center's plans, a famous impresario has been quoted in the press as saying, "No concert hall should be built in New York today with fewer than 3,500 seats." But, by the standards of acoustical quality, modern comfort and safety that New Yorkers have a right to expect, such a house cannot be built. If (for the sake of argument) it were possible to build it, it is unlikely that a resident orchestra could long survive the pressure of its magnitude through even the present standard length season of thirty weeks averaging three or four concerts a week. The fact that there is in the world no important concert hall-home of a resident orchestra of this capacity may perhaps argue more strongly than words against ever building one.

CONTRARY to popular critical belief, the present business experience in orchestra (Philharmonic) and opera (Metropolitan and City Center) attendance shows that the high-priced seats sell first and outsell the low-priced. In fact, over a full season the unsold low-priced seats outnumber unsold high-priced seats, in some instances by as much as five to one.

These last few years have brought boom times to the Metropolitan Opera and Philharmonic box offices. Such SRO business has made their existing quarters appear if not too small at least barely adequate. But—to borrow a phrase associated with an unrelated performing art—a house is not a home if that house is so large that its resident orchestra or opera company cannot survive in it in depressed times as well as boom times. The overhead of large theatres is sized to match, and the psychological effect of acres of empty seats on small audiences in partially filled houses heaps human



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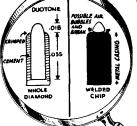
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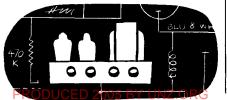
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Give to the RED CROSS

depression on economic depression. Lincoln Center is planned for 100 years. It would ill serve New York and the nation if it built inflated theatres for inflationary times, which later became the super-garage or office-building tombs of defunct, once great institutions. Trustees of the public's cultural savings should not invest in the speculative quick turnover and in the grandiose.

The same impresario who favored a 3,500-seat concert hall declared that the Theatre for the Dance and Operetta should be built to take care of a minimum of 4,500. Again, there is no precedent for such giantism among the great theatres of the world that house resident operetta and ballet companies. Hit Broadway musicals open in theatres of such capacity as to require sometimes twelve to eighteen months of SRO business before they begin to show a profit. Their producers do not elect such an investment hazard from choice. If larger theatres were practical for such musicals, so that they could "work off their nut" in a much shorter time, there would be many such houses on Broadway and they would be very popular. Instead, such rare memorygiants as the Hippodrome, the Century, and the late-lamented Center Theatre are gone with the dinosaurhistoric testimony to the limitations of human eye and ear and to the demand for intimacy between stage and audience (as well as the feeling of intimacy within the audience itself) which have proven theatres of such large capacity unacceptable except for short visits of traveling spectacles.

Herein lies the great difference between these two points of view. Are Lincoln Center's theatres to be built for a century as ideal settings for the human voice and for musical instruments, or are they to be built for only tomorrow's stimulating jangle of the cash register? Is the greatest city in the world better served by traveling companies, if and when available, on a short run at maximum audience basis and with the obvious limitations of repertoire needed to safeguard such a procedure-or by a resident symphony orchestra, a repertory opera company and a repertory ballet company whose healthy existence, week in and week out, year in and year out, becomes an important common denominator of the city's cultural background from generation to generation?



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LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR

UNANNOUNCED DELETIONS

I was overjoyed to read Mr. Freed's article, "Gone but Not Forgotten" (SR April 25). For years, I have been greatly irritated by the practice of unannounced deletions from the record catalogues. Many of my favorites have disappeared without warning . . .

Most of the companies are offenders in this regard, although Columbia Records seems to be the worst. Since there is virtually no market in second-hand records (unlike books), the music lover is at a total loss when something he wants and loves is lifted from the catalogue. One suggestion which seems to me to have merit is that record companies send to all dealers, along with notices of new recordings, lists of those which will be cut from the list, say, three months hence. The dealer will then have a chance to notify his customers who might be interested. It seems to me that the sale of records from this procedure would more than compensate the companies for the expense of preparing such lists.

PETER MORSE.

Washington, D. C.

IS THE PRICE RIGHT?

SR IN THE PAST year has commented on many of the developments in recorded music and sound, but has not, to my knowledge, discussed the increases in record prices. Record buyers, collectors, are only too well aware of this phase of recorded music . . .

I suggest that it is quite possible that these increases were justified on no other ground than that the classical record buyer would continue to buy at whatever price the manufacturers thought proper.

I further suggest that the increases in record prices to \$4.98 for twelve-inch long-play is imposing upon the good sense of the discerning buyer; that a selling price of \$2.50 for a first quality recording in an uncomplicated package and no more than \$3.50 in a custom package, are representative of prices that would sustain an increase in sales that would more than offset the reduction in prices in total sales, and profits.

May we have some comment on this subject?

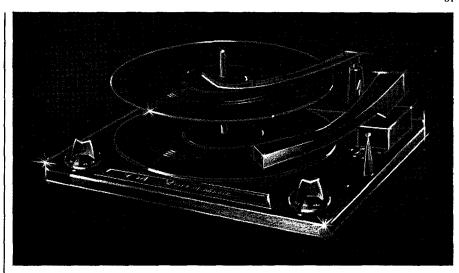
MARVIN PECHTER.

Chicago, Ill.

SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

The article (SR Jan. 31) by Teodoro Celli about the diva Maria Callas was by far the most interesting, explanatory and comprehensive writing yet to be printed about the most controversial musical personality of our time (let's not forget Arturo Toscanini), and a proper beginning for a new series, "Great Artists of Our Time."

Since 1947 I have read much about Callas pro and con, yet this article should once and for all set the record straight as to just what this fantastically gifted person is all about and why she is re-

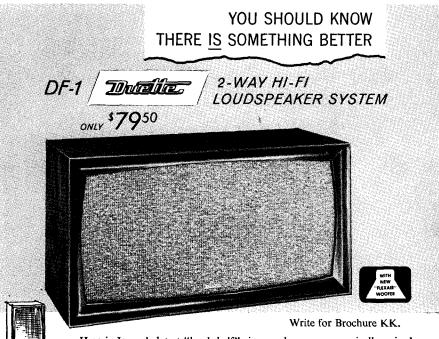


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