

Recordings in Review

The Uncommercial Commercial

PURCELL: "Let us wander," "Lost is my quiet"; HAYDN: "Schlaf in deiner engen Kammer"; BACH, J. C.: "Ah, lamenta oh bella Irene"; BEETHOVEN: "Oh! would I were but that sweet linnnet," "He promised me at parting," "They bid me slight my Dermot dear," "The Dream"; SCHUBERT: "Mignon und der Harfner"; BERLIOZ: "Le Trébuchet"; DVORAK: "Möglichkeit," "Der Apfel"; TCHAIKOVSKY: "Schottische Ballade"; SAINT-SAËNS: "Pastorale"; FAURÉ: "Pleurs d'or." Victoria de los Angeles, soprano and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone, with Gerald Moore, piano. Angel 35963, \$4.98.

Odd and unusual as is the combination of two voices such as those of Victoria de los Angeles and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in duet, the music they perform is even less commonly heard or, even, known about. Thus in endorsing Angel's impulse in matching these two "commercial" attractions, it has earned even more credit in providing them with occupation worthy of their art.

That is especially true of Side 2, which is as absorbing as the succession of names and materials suggests. Outstanding, to my taste, is Tchaikovsky's treatment of "Edward! Edward!" which adds to those known by Loewe and Brahms another of gripping power. The Schubert and Dvorak are also beautiful, as are the lightly attractive settings by Berlioz, Saint-Saëns, and Fauré.



Fischer-Dieskau-de los Angeles — "as absorbing as the succession of names . . . suggests."



Mayuzumi—"creative discrimination."

It is always dangerous to draw inferences from the succession of materials on a record, as the first may have been last, and vice versa. Here, however, it sounds as though matters went much as they are recorded, for the ensemble increases markedly on Side 2. In the earlier settings of folk materials (Haydn's, incidentally, is the song known here as "All Through the Night"), the two superb voices are being heard at the same time, but not, really, together. At best, the span between them tends to put prominence on the side of the higher voice, especially as Fischer-Dieskau has an almost exaggerated deference to his partner. Always, however, Moore mediates impartially, and effectively, between them. When the fusion finally occurs it is equally binding on all.

"Nirvana" in Sound

MAYUZUMI: "Nirvana-Symphonie." Wilhelm Schüchter conducting the NHK Symphony Orchestra and chorus. Time S8004, \$5.98.

Of the numerous percussionists now engaged in putting together sound patterns and calling them music, Toshiro Mayuzumi has a better claim to serious attention than most. He has, in the first place, a valid series of esthetic premises on which to base his expression: in the second, he has the kind of creative discrimination which separates the truly motivated from the merely calculated.

Among the elements which enter into

the "Nirvana-Symphonie" are Japanese temple bells and a "vocal noise," as Mayuzumi calls it, similar to "the voices of Buddhist priests reciting Sutras." Combined with them are a conventional large symphony orchestra augmented by additional high woodwinds and bass brasses, the latter arranged at opposite corners of the playing area to immerse the listener in sound. A solo male voice is heard from time to time.

As befits a composer in his thirties who has studied at the Paris Conservatoire, made repeated visits from Japan to Stockholm and Darmstadt, and recently visited the United States, Mayuzumi is well versed in Schoenberg's *Klangfarbenmelodie* ("tone color melody") principles as well as Stravinsky's rhythmic innovations. I would guess, too, that he has heard some Orff here and there, though there is no allusion to that source in his own commentary.

There is, rather, a good deal about the relation of the work to the "ideal state" of Nirvana associated with the tolling bells, and paralleled in the sections titled "Campanology I," "Campanology II," and "Campanology III." About this I have no qualifications for an opinion; but I can say that the sound texture is seductive to my ear, full of nuance and color as well as some monotony. The Japanese-made tape yields an imposing total of well-defined timbres.

Beethoven No. 9 by Szell

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony No. 9*. George Szell conducting the Cleveland Orchestra, with Adele Addison, soprano, Jane Hobson, mezzo, Richard Lewis, tenor, and Donald Bell, bass, and the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, Robert Shaw, director. Also: *Symphony No. 8*. Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra. Epic 2-BSC 112, \$11.98.

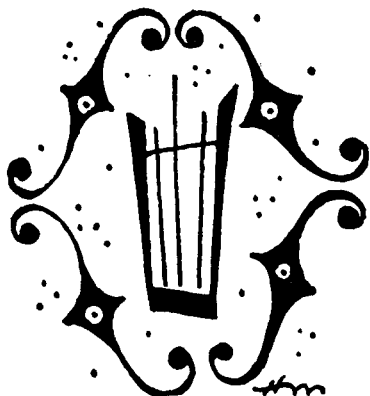
For three-quarters of its length this is not only the best-sounding version of this work to be made in the United States and comparable to the best from any source, but also one of the most tenacious in its pursuit of musical meaning. For the first discovery, surprise need not be implied, for Epic is quite capable of achieving the ultimate that contemporary sound techniques permit, especially in Cleveland. For the second, some impact of the unusual is permissible, for the Cleveland Orchestra does not perform such a work on its tour, and how else is the non-Cleveland to know of the ever-broadening command Szell has developed in matters of such scope?

So far as the three instrumental movements are concerned, it is not

merely meticulous in its realization of detail and nuance, solo incident and ensemble episode, but also arresting in its penetration of meaning and its estimation of atmosphere. There is a harmonious interrelation of colors through the choirs, a similar beat and vibrato from low strings to high woodwinds—by no means common even in very good orchestras. The horns, in particular, are outstanding in both the scherzo and the slow movement, in circumstances of recording that would make any minor blemish a major fault. And Szell gives us a steady, insuperably logical, and well-sustained estimation of the music and its meaning.

But where are the controlling factors of taste and judgment, which have shaped such results, in the choral finale? First off, the solo quartet has apparently been positioned in such a way that the microphone which picks them up discriminates, slightly, the acoustic environment in which they are placed (against a screen, perhaps) so that their sound has a different texture from that of either the chorus or the orchestra. Then, too, it appears that a special effort is being made to get the choral sound into the recording, so that the orchestra, now and again, drops below audibility. And, finally, Szell's direction here is much more choppy, less regular or well-paced than in the movements without chorus, diminishing by more than a little what should be the cumulative impact of the whole. Indeed, at the crest of the crux (the climaxing B major chord on "Flügel weilt") a pause is indulged for a breath by Miss Addison which takes the air out of this soaring moment. Vocally, Lewis and Bell are more nearly equal to their task than the ladies, which leaves Beethoven only half served.

So much of this is so good that one can only regret that the problems of the finale were not better resolved. Certainly every mechanical care has been taken in the arrangement (on three sides) and processing of the work. The companion Symphony No. 8 matches the best standard of the instrumental No. 9, which is to say that it is impressive.



"Ballo" à la Nilsson

PART of the responsibility in record making is to resist temptation as well as to embrace opportunity. London has earned recent praise for its enterprise in seizing the opportunity presented by the development of Joan Sutherland to give us a mostly well-considered "Lucia"; but it has fallen well short of such worthy aspirations in mingling Birgit Nilsson as Amelia in its new treatment of Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera" with the Riccardo of Carlo Bergonzi, the Renato of Cornell MacNeil, Giulietta Simionato's Ulrica, and the Oscar of Sylvia Stahlman (London OSA 1328, \$17.98).

For the weight and displacement of her voice are as much out of place in juxtaposition to theirs in Verdi as theirs would be juxtaposed to hers in Wagner. The mere fact that Miss Nilsson has the technical capacity to sing the notes of the part and that she is not averse to any employment for which she is suitably compensated does not mean that any useful ends—always excluding merely commercial ones—are advanced by this kind of "all-star" booking (a far cry from her restrained part in RCA Victor's "Don Giovanni" of several years back).

Essentially, Miss Nilsson's sound is lacking in warmth, tenderness, or the flexibility of texture to bind itself to the flowing kind of line Verdi writes for Amelia's big scene at the gallows. Some effort has been made to compensate for this by placing Miss Nilsson at a distance from the main microphones: but this induces another distraction—a curtain of orchestra between the listener and the voices. I don't know what the philosophical concept at work here is, save that it seems to be derived from London's one, atypical "operatic" success with "Das Rheingold," which has now settled into formula. As for the kind of climax induced by Solti on the words "O signor, miserere," with its rumble of percussion under the voice, it bespeaks either ignorance of Verdi's intentions or else a disregard for anything that might interfere with a startling effect on the microphone.

These and other grotesqueries (such as the torrent and the trickle in the exchanges of Amelia-Nilsson and Riccardo-Bergonzi in the following duet) are deplorable, for there are the elements of a quality "Ballo" in this cast. Best of them is Bergonzi, especially in the first two scenes in which the resonant yet flexible sound he commands makes a

caressing effect on the microphone. He tends to decline in quality as the work progresses and the demands of the music change (as he does in the performances currently being heard at the Metropolitan). There are ways and means of keeping him in adjustment, relative to the record—such as moving him into the microphone for his outburst "M'ami, m'ami! . . . oh sia distrutto . . .," which cannot be duplicated in the theatre. However, the succeeding course of this scene, with Nilsson in full voice and Bergonzi not even achieving audibility in "in petto l'amor," is symbolic of the vocal mismatch for which no compensation is truly possible. Perhaps it is London's view that a fortissimo high C from Nilsson compensates for Bergonzi's disappearance from the aural horizon, but that is a crude "solution" for Verdi's problems.

For that matter, Solti is no particular help to MacNeil in his Renato, tending to confuse the boisterous with the dramatic and the conspicuous with the meaningful. As for the explosive timpani burst before "Odi tu come fremono cupi," it would be ludicrous did it not



reflect the "musical" concept of people who have some reputation for artistic aspiration. More than anything else it tends to dull the ear to the really fine sound produced by MacNeil here as well as in his well sung "Eri tu."

Having recently pursued a close scrutiny of the other existing "Ballo" recordings, I can testify that the RCA Victor conducted by Arturo Toscanini is still the man-sized achievement of this task beside the boyish ventures of his competitors. Maria Callas's Amelia in the Angel set is the most interesting performance of this character to my ears, Ferruccio Tagliavini's Riccardo (in a hard-to-find Cetra) possessed of some attention-commanding subtleties. The other stereo "Ballo" (on DG) doesn't make a closer approach to the musical essence of Verdi than the London does.

—IRVING KOLODIN.