

"Snow Maiden" by Tchaikovsky

"THE SNOW MAIDEN" by Tchaikovsky? Almost everybody who knows opera has heard of "Snegurochka" by Rimsky-Korsakoff, but almost nobody has heard about Tchaikovsky's music on the same subject. This recently resurrected work, performed by the USSR Symphony Orchestra conducted by Alexander Gauk, is a "collectors item" indeed, though even Zara Doloukhanova's excellent performance does not instill enough life into a bloodless work (Artia MK 213B, \$11.98). The main trouble with Tchaikovsky's version is that it suffers from monotony. When in 1873 the "Small" theatre in Moscow was being renovated and the three companies—dramatic, ballet and opera—gave their performances at the "Bolshoi," one of the directors decided to produce a play, a fairy tale in which all the three companies could cooperate. Alexander Ostrovsky, the well-known Russian dramatist, was commissioned to write the

play and Tchaikovsky to compose the incidental music. Tchaikovsky claimed that at that time he needed money (nothing particularly unusual) and therefore agreed to join this enterprise. Whether because he had some difficulty in keeping up with Ostrovsky's rapid writing and constant changes of the text, or because of lack of genuine inspiration, he used in this score some music from his earlier opera "Undine," which had been rejected by the Bolshoi. Altogether, he wrote nineteen numbers: an introduction and finale, choruses, entr'actes, songs, and dances, but despite the wide range of the composition, which offered a great variety of possibilities, not a single piece was worthy of his later pen.

The play received a rather tepid reception, and while some excerpts from his score were occasionally played at concerts, the work as a whole was almost forgotten. Nine years later, when Tchaikovsky was unusually depressed



because of his "bad season"—his opera "The Maid of Orleans" was not scheduled to be repeated, nor was his "Evgeny Onegin," nor were his Violin and G major Piano concertos played—Rimsky-Korsakoff's charming opera was winning the highest praise. Tchaikovsky wrote his publisher that he could cry with mortification, that it was as though someone had torn a piece off him and presented it to the public in a new and brilliant setting. And he added that Lyel (one of the principal characters in the opera) "will now sing new music to the old words."

To avoid ending on this sad note, I feel I should point out another newly resurrected Tchaikovsky item: the duet of Romeo and Juliet. It is beautifully sung by Sergei Lemeshev, Russia's leading tenor, and Tatiana Lavrova, a soprano of the Bolshoi (Monitor MC 2055, \$4.98). Tchaikovsky always wanted to write an opera based on Shakespeare's drama, but he never did. However, using some material from his Overture, he did sketch out the duet, and Sergei Taneyev completed and orchestrated the composition after Tchaikovsky's death.

The same recording presents several songs by Mikhail Glinka. Although Glinka is primarily known for his operas, "A Life for the Tsar" and "Russlan and Ludmila," he has written a number of choral and vocal works. Most of them are unknown to the general Western public, and I feel that these selected seven songs would be particularly enjoyed by those who love Russian chorus singing. The Radio Ensemble of Songs, conducted by Serafina Popova, should be congratulated for its sensitive rendition especially of "Oh, Nightingale Be Silent" and "The Wind Howls," and Ivan Kozlovsky and the chorus and the orchestra of the Bolshoi for Glinka's "A Prayer," which suits so well Lermontov's poem "In Time of Need."
—VICTOR SEROFF.

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LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR

BRAVOS AND BRUCKNER

IRVING KOLODIN's major argument in "Bravos for Bruckner" [SR, Dec. 16] has considerable force: the "bravo" has certainly depreciated in meaning. But the implication that Bruckner-Mahler partisans are significantly responsible seems unfair.

Applause—including the cry "bravo"—has never been restricted to the expression of approval merely of interpretation or performance. It has been as well a valuable means of expressing enthusiasm for the piece performed. This has been true especially of new and controversial works.

Bruckner's symphonies remain controversial. This fact alone would explain why they seem invariably so generously applauded: enthusiasm both for Bruckner and for his interpreters is being expressed. Moreover, the increasing interest of American audiences in Bruckner's works is a phenomenon of considerable musical significance. Curiously, however, live performances have not matched this growth of interest. Whenever the demand for something exceeds its supply, the consumer (or concertgoer) is less discriminating than otherwise he might be. This is especially true in music, where frequent hearing is necessary to the development of critical appreciation.

If an audience responded to a mediocre Beethoven Fifth with a "noisy outburst" such as Mr. Kolodin describes, one would necessarily question its sophistication. Until the day a Bruckner symphony is as well known as the Fifth, however, musical tradition justifies each "bravo" as a demand for more Bruckner. There seems to be quite a lot of demand.

NED K. HOPKINS.

Cambridge, Mass.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Or, very concentrated.*

BRUCKNER AND THE INTELLECTUALS

Saturday Review did balance your comments on Bruckner with those of Mr. Ringer, and still I'm not satisfied. It isn't that everyone has to like Bruckner or that, as a composer, he had no faults. It's the way you said things. For instance: I don't applaud the Eighth Symphony simply because Bruckner is "intellectually fashionable." One, I'm no intellectual; two, perhaps in your circles he's fashionable, but of the few near-intellectuals I've known, scarcely one cared much for Bruckner. I applaud (figuratively, that is) the Eighth Symphony with the same enthusiasm I've felt for Bruckner since the first time I ever heard him; several nonintellectual years later he has not worn thin. . . .

I don't rank Bruckner as a composer of the stature of Beethoven or Mozart (but such comparisons are sort of phony anyway). However, I don't think he can be ticked off just because some people talk about his "nobility" and "spirituality" and "humility" where such qualities seem to be lacking. I listen to the opening move-

ment of the Sixth Symphony and none of these words comes to mind—no words, in fact, come to mind at all. If you scouted out more Bruckner admirers (if the thought doesn't seem too repellent) you might get different reactions from the ones you describe.

Indeed, speed is not "the answer to interest in Bruckner." But why did you make it sound a bit as though the arousing of this interest were a nearly insuperable problem? But I'm being too sensitive, no doubt. Your comments on unmerited applause and bravos at concerts were certainly justified.

STEVEN MOLL.

Urbana, Ill.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The "balancing" was done by the Music Editor.*

MONOS AND PHONOS

THOUGH IN THE main I agree with your comments on . . . Capitol's "duophonic" reprocessing of Beecham's Haydn, I must take issue with your statement that "any monophonic disc will sound better on a stereo unit."

I find that one must be constantly wary of the characteristics of individual cartridges and speaker units. Many older LPs that sound fine with my mono cartridge (VR II) are exposed as having edgy string tone and an overall lack of solidity by the more deeply probing talents of my stereo cartridge (Empire 108).

In the majority of cases your statement applies—but beware the exceptions.

WARREN E. WHELOCK.

Rockford, Ill.

THE SABAJNO-TOSCANINI "REQUIEM"

THE REVIEW in *SR* of December 2 by Winifred Cecil was most interesting. I am inclined to agree that the "most" of Verdi's Requiem in a modern recording is to be found in the Toscanini performance and this Russian performance really sounds interesting in spite of the glories of its competitors. I have also been inclined to wonder how Russian artists were to find the time and energy for political and ideological "platforming." Like artists elsewhere, I'll bet they leave that to those who really know the business.

I am afraid however, that Miss Cecil overlooked a very important Requiem recording in her investigation of those extant, the first one to be recorded electrically, in fact. I am referring to the version done at La Scala during March, 1929, Toscanini's last season there. This performance is certainly superior to all the others that have come out since then; in spots and in the quality of the soloists, even superior to the Toscanini performance. But this is not surprising since it was recorded at a time when the Maestro had been performing it and features his own orchestra, chorus, and his chosen "Maestro Sostituto," Carlo Sabajno (Toscanini did not record during his years in Italy as he considered the process unsatisfactory and his productions could be preserved only in this fashion).

The soloists featured Pinza, superior



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