

A New "St. Matthew" by Klemperer

LONDON.

A FEW years ago, EMI's plan to record the St. Matthew Passion with some of Europe's finest singers and the Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus under Dr. Klemperer had to be abandoned when the conductor suffered a serious accident and was compelled to cancel all his engagements for a prolonged period. At the time many of us felt despondent lest the opportunity might not recur, but we had evidently underestimated Klemperer's astonishing physical resilience—he is now busier than ever in concert hall, opera house, and recording studio—not to mention Walter Legge's tenacity of purpose. Thus the mighty project was never wholly shelved, but only postponed until such time as the artists concerned could gather in London.

The result of their labors is now before us—an album of nine LP sides—and it is difficult, in retrospect, not to feel that the postponement forced upon EMI has turned out wholly to their and our advantage. From an artistic point of view the performance, as originally planned, might have reached a level comparable to that now achieved (though the contralto soloist previously scheduled could never have equaled Christa Ludwig's beautiful contribution to the present set), but EMI's engineers have made such strides in stereo techniques during the past year or two that an earlier recording would scarcely have earned the praise which the splendid sound of this issue so richly merits.

Both in tonal quality and in the imaginative use of space this St. Matthew Passion is an outstanding achievement, easily surpassing all previous attempts at recording a work so dear to most of us. Of course the score, with its double chorus and double orchestra, cries out for stereo; the solo voices, too, have been positioned in a way consistent with their narrative or contemplative function in Bach's ground plan, without necessarily reproducing a typical concert-hall layout. Thus Jesus and the Evangelist appear slightly closer to us than the aria soloists, while the narrator's role as one standing slightly outside the drama is further emphasized by placing him not at the center of the "platform" but to our right. In the chorales, originally intended to be sung by the entire congregation, the two choruses lose their

separate identities as they jointly fill the center of the sound picture (a position which, in the opening chorus, is accorded to the ripieno boys' voices).

In the last analysis, however, we are concerned with audible results, not the producer's intentions, and the results here achieved seem to me wholly attuned to the requirements of the music. Occasional slight variations in volume level and balance are scarcely to be avoided in so long and so varied a work; on the whole the results are remarkable for their consistency.

As an artistic achievement it is safe to say that the performance amply justifies the generous once-for-all, don't-count-the-cost attitude of its sponsors. It is not always thus with star-studded ventures: if the total result here is greater than the far from inconsiderable sum of its parts, the credit belongs mainly to Klemperer, whose ability to see a large-scale work as an entity has never been more impressively demonstrated. His slow tempi in some arias and choruses may give rise to argument (though he takes the final chorus and several other pieces faster than most conductors), but these are mere details whose significance diminishes the more we grow conscious of the extraordinary unity and discipline of the overall conception.

So monumental is this conception, with its rhythmic firmness and textural clarity, that Klemperer is able to allow his singers considerable emotional license without risk of sentimentality, though he is of course fortunate in having as his principal protagonists two supreme artists: Peter Pears and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Pears is a truly marvelous Evangelist, profoundly musical and most expressive; his handling of Peter's Denial is surely as moving an experience as can be found in recorded music. Fischer-Dieskau—who sang the bass arias in the Archive St.

Matthew Passion under Karl Richter—is the most eloquent and accomplished Christus I have ever heard; his ability to suggest gentleness allied to strength of character and a commanding dignity makes each of his utterances memorable, none more so than his "blasphemous" prophecy before the High Priest.

The arias are sung, for the most part splendidly, by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Christa Ludwig (whose lovely, warm mezzo-soprano is heard to particular advantage in "Erbarme dich"), Nicolai Gedda (slightly below his best form), and Walter Berry. The bass, who copes manfully with some of Klemperer's slowest tempi in "Gerne will ich mich bequemen" and "Mache dich, mein Herze, rein," also sings the part of Peter, and Schwarzkopf is heard as First Maid and Pilate's Wife, but the other minor characters in the action have been assigned to a "supporting cast" of unusual distinction. Thus Otakar Kraus, famed for his Alberich at Covent Garden and Bayreuth, can be heard briefly as the High Priest and as Pontius Pilate, Judas is sung by John Carol Case, and such noted artists as Helen Watts, Janet Baker, Geraint Evans, and Wilfred Brown contribute no more than a single line apiece.

THE Philharmonia Chorus sings magnificently throughout, in the opening chorus the boy trebles of Hampstead Parish Church ring out clear and true, and there is much splendid obbligato playing by leading members of the Philharmonia Orchestra—such as concertmaster Hugh Bean, flautist Gareth Morris, and oboist Sidney Sutcliffe. Keyboard duty is shared by George Malcolm and Viola Tunnard (harpsichords) and Ralph Downes (organ); the only other instrumental "outsider" is Desmond Dupré (viola da gamba).

Of course there can be no such thing as a "definitive" performance of the St. Matthew Passion; I do feel, however, that Klemperer's reading, monumental in feeling yet using suitably modest forces, represents the kind of compromise between instinct and scholarship that most of us find acceptable. Provided we do accept the style of the performance, it is difficult to see how its execution could have been bettered; such imperfections as remain serve to remind us that even the best performers are human. One last point of interest to those holding strong views on the subject: in his treatment of the chorales Dr. Klemperer favors the time-honored tradition of pausing at the end of each line, whereas some other conductors—Karl Richter among them—tend to regard this device as redundant when the chorales are "performed," without any help from audience or congregation. —THOMAS HEINITZ.



Music in Japan

Tokyo.

THE ENORMOUS musical appetite of the Japanese shows no sign of abating, such events as the International Music Festival in Osaka supplementing but in no way diminishing the always intense activity in Tokyo itself. Thus, on the same evening that Eugen Jochum and the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam opened this year's Osaka Festival with a concert introducing a contemporary Dutch score, Masashi Ueda led his Tokyo Symphony Orchestra in the capital in the Japanese premiere of the Shostakovich Twelfth Symphony and the first performance anywhere of Ikuma Dan's suite "The Silk Road." Another Shostakovich work (the Fourth Quartet) was introduced in Tokyo the following evening by the visiting Komitas Quartet, and several other important concerts and recitals were scheduled for the city during the period of the Osaka Festival (April 12-May 5), some of them repeats of Festival programs.

The Dutch work mentioned above is the Symphony for Strings by the young composer Hans Kox. Kox is a pupil of Henk Badings, the Symphony his Opus 1. Aside from that, the Concertgebouw programs under both Jochum and Haitink were more or less standard. Other participants at Osaka included the Virtuosi di Roma, harpist Nicanor Zabaleta, cellist Andre Navarra (who undertook the Schumann and Dvorak concerti on one program, scheduled for repetition in Tokyo), and singers Christel Goltz, Fritz Uhl, and Joseph Metternich. The vocal trio took part in the Asian premiere of "Salome," a role Goltz has made a specialty (and has recorded twice), conducted by Manfred Gurlitt, a long-time resident of Japan. In addition to the musical features, performances by the Comédie Française were also scheduled.

While these foreign musicians gave the festival its international character, one of its most interesting features was the concert during the first week, in which three of Japan's leading young composers conducted the Osaka Philharmonic in their own works. Represented were the suite by Ikuma Dan, premiered in Tokyo a few days earlier, Yasushi Akutagawa's one-act opera "The Dark Mirror," and Toshiro Mayuzumi's "Nirvana-Symphonie." All three men are well known here for their film scores; Mayuzumi alone is credited

with almost 120. They were students together, and now have joined together to promote the performance of their music, but they write in three utterly different styles. Dan's work is heavy and romantic, with many nineteenth-century echoes. Akutagawa has adopted the musical language of Shostakovich. Mayuzumi, the most original of the three, is a strictly twentieth-century musician who finds little pleasure or stimulation in music antedating 1910, his own work admittedly influenced by Stravinsky (specifically, the Stravinsky of "Le Sacre"), Webern, and particularly by Messiaen.

Mayuzumi, who is thirty-three and one of the founders (in 1957) of the Tokyo Institute for Contemporary Music, visited the United States last year on a Ford Foundation grant. During his stay in New York his String Quartet and Piano Quintet were premiered there, and the Philharmonic (under Seiji Ozawa) performed his "Bacchanale." He will return this fall to deliver, and possibly to conduct, the ballet score, "Bugaku," that he has just completed on commission for the New York City Ballet. The title means "Court Dance Music," and the work expectedly calls for a more conventional orchestra than required by the "Bacchanale" or "Nirvana-Symphonie." He is also completing a piece called "Texture," to be introduced this summer by the American Symphonic Wind Orchestra of Pittsburgh, which last summer presented his "Music with Sculpture." Although Mayuzumi was the pioneer of electronic music in Japan, he has abandoned it now, and he has written virtually no vocal music, not only because he prefers the orchestral medium but also because of the scarcity of good singers in Japan. However, he was so impressed by Hans Werner Henze's "Elegy for Young Lovers" that he now plans to write an opera, probably about Marco Polo, although the libretto has not been selected.

The Toshiba recording of Mayuzumi's "Nirvana-Symphonie," a work the composer advises "may just as well

be considered a sort of Buddhistic cantata," features the NHK Orchestra under Wilhelm Schüchter, and has been rereleased in America on the Time label (SR/Recordings, Feb. 24, 1962). Toshiba is planning to release another disc of Mayuzumi's works, the "Bacchanale" and "Phonologie Symphonique," played by the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra under Tadashi Mori, but it is not known whether this record will be issued in the United States.

While the quality of orchestral playing in Tokyo leaves a bit to be desired, it is nevertheless remarkable that the city boasts no fewer than six orchestras—a seventh is in the process of being organized by the Yomiuri Press Company (five of the others are sponsored by broadcasting or publishing companies)—and that most of them play an eleven-month season. The most important is the NHK Orchestra, operated by the Japan Broadcasting Company (Nippon Hoso Kaisha). Its first conductor was Joseph Rosenstock, and it has generally engaged Western conductors as musical director for terms of one to three seasons. Following the return to Germany of Wilhelm Schüchter, who was in charge for the last three years, the NHK Orchestra is playing its current season under five guest conductors, including Efrem Kurtz, Seiji Ozawa, and three local men.

The Japan Philharmonic, whose conductor is Akeo Watanabe, is rated with the NHK at the top of the list. The Tokyo Symphony Orchestra toured the Soviet Union two years ago, and its conductor, Masashi Ueda, recorded with Moscow orchestras; Ueda has introduced many scores by Shostakovich and other Soviet composers to Japanese audiences. The ABC (Asahi Broadcasting Company) Orchestra is conducted by Count Hidemaro Konoye, whom discophiles may remember for his recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic (including a really stunning "Pictures at an Exhibition") more than twenty years ago. The Japan Philharmonic and Tokyo Symphony are not to be confused with the Tokyo Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, of which Yoichiro Omachi is conductor. The Imperial Philharmonic, the only private orchestra here, was organized by its conductor Stefan Hagen, the German former concertmaster of the ABC Orchestra. While the other five orchestras have entirely separate personnel, Hagen actually draws from all of them to make up his orchestra for the relatively few Imperial Philharmonic concerts. Most of the Tokyo orchestras make records, and several of them may be heard on discs available in America, particularly in contemporary works on such labels as Time and CRI.

—RICHARD D. FREED.

