

# Recordings in Review

## A New Voice for Poulenc

POULENC: "*Le bestiaire*"; "*Les banalités*"; "*Le pont*"; "*Montparnasse*"; "*Reine des mouettes*"; "*C'est ainsi que tu es*"; "*Main dominée par la cocur*"; "*C*"; "*Tel jour, telle nuit*"; and "*La fraîcheur et le feu*." Bernard Kruysen, *baritone*, with Jean Charles Richard, *piano*. Westminster WNX 19105, \$4.79; stereo WST 17105, \$5.79.

All sorts of recollections are aroused by this disc: primarily, but by no means exclusively, the memory of Pierre Bernac performing certain outstanding songs with the composer at the piano. But there are other values to be recalled as well: performances by Gerard Souzay, by Jennie Tourel, by Povla Frijsh. That Kruysen's effort may be matched by the high standard of any, or all, of them is proof that he is, indeed, a new voice for Poulenc.

On investigation, the expectable becomes the inevitable: He has found his example at the source, as a student of Pierre Bernac. Though of Dutch birth, Kruysen spent much of his early life in France, which provided him with his fluent, idiomatic command of the texts. However, there is little explanation of the quality of the voice in the references to his operatic experience in Holland. It is, for all its flexibility and responsiveness, a more robust sound than commonly associated with the *disneur*. And though the top is light enough to suggest an aptitude for *Pelléas*, it also possesses

the bottom to dip into the low register required for *Tel jour, telle nuit*.

Beyond all questions of range and register, quantity and quality of sound, the clear fact is that Kruysen is that real rarity, an interpretative personality. He responds to each nuance of meaning with a comparable personal flair, and sustains the interest no less by his sense of verbal values than by his highly refined feeling for tonal coloration. Richard, who is also a new name to me, plays all of the piano parts very well, and some of them better than any predecessor, including the composer himself. As the two sides contain some of the greatest songs written in this century—as well as the best qualities of Poulenc in microcosm—they are destined to be close to the top when the best records of 1966 are designated. The reproduction (which appears to derive from a small, live concert hall or large studio) shares the distinction of all the other elements.

## The Art of Gauthier

FEBRIER: "*La lettre*." DESSAUER: "*Le retour des promis*." HEROLD: "*Souvenir du jeune âge*," from *Le pré au clercs*. DEBUSSY: "*Romance*"; "*Fantoches*"; "*La chevelure*." DUPARC: "*Chanson triste*." FALLA: "*Seguidilla*." BARTOK: "*Mein Bett ruft*." WATTS: "*The Wings of Night*." NIN: "*Alma sintamos*." TURINA: "*Rima*." Eva Gauthier, *soprano*. "*La Chevelure*" and songs from "*Seguidilla*" on, with Celius Dougherty, *piano*. Mono only TH 003, \$4.95.

For those to whom she has a place in history, Eva Gauthier is recalled as the daring young woman who, on November 1, 1923, ventured to include on the program of a recital in New York's bygone Aeolian Hall a group of songs by Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and Walter Donaldson. She also persuaded the composer of "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise," "Innocent Ingénue Baby," and "Swanee" to accompany her in these and the preceding sequence of "Alexander's Ragtime Band," "The Siren's Song," and "Carolina in the Morning." That it provided the first appearance on this or any other concert stage of George Gershwin, and promoted the circumstances in which he returned to Aeolian Hall not much more than six months later to perform his *Rhapsody in Blue* for the first time, is considered by some the most important part of this happening. This may or may not be the case, but it related the two names inseparably.

However as this disc—and particularly the first side of it—demonstrates, the Ottawa-born Gauthier was considerably more than a woman with a gift for attracting attention. She was a singer of the same type and some of the same accomplishments as Mary Garden and Maggie Teyte. She never came close to equaling them in artistic magnitude, but she commanded a vocal quality of lovely hue, a style that built on her French-Canadian heritage through studies in Paris, and a real capacity for grasping the essence of a song in the brief time that art form allows. Her *Chanson triste*, for example, is probably as good a performance of it as had been recorded in the acoustic period it represents. (The first six songs listed above, with the exception of Debussy's *La chevelure* are all acoustic.)

What happened to the Gauthier voice in the next dozen years is unknown to me, but those who heard her in an occasional performance of the Thirties would associate the results more with the qualities of Side Two (Fallá, Bartók, Watts, Nin, and Turina, of the above sequence plus *La chevelure*). That is the strained, harsh, sometimes off-pitch and worn kind of effort that could be praised for intention but rarely for accomplishment.

Allowing for the insufficiencies of the "Musicraft" recording techniques (they sounded almost as bad when new as they do nearly thirty years later) the voice still lags below the piano playing of Celius Dougherty.

I would, indeed, petition Town Hall to honor the real abilities of Miss Gauthier in her best days by making up another disc of the French-Canadian songs she recorded for Victor around 1917, and to which Philip Miller refers in his commentary. Combined with some Columbia sides (Miller also mentions Franck's *Panis angelicus* and "Les larmes" from Massenet's *Werther*) they might very well add to the image of the Gauthier career conveyed most vividly on this disc by material from the same early period of her activity. (Readers outside New York may address Town Hall, publisher of this disc, at 123 West 43rd Street, New York, 36.)

## Rudolf's Mozart

MOZART: Serenade No. 9 (K. 320). Symphony No. 28. Max Rudolf conducting the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Decca DL 10120, \$4.79; stereo DL 710120, \$5.79.

Opportunities affect individuals no less differently than the lack of them. That is, there are those who sustain their level of effort whether or not they are in prominent situations, as there are those who fail to make the most of a prominent



Eva Gauthier: "A gift for attracting attention."

situation when it presents itself. With Max Rudolf, the transition from occasional appearances in the pit of the Metropolitan Opera to the bright light of the Music Hall in Cincinnati has been accompanied by an artistic growth as beneficial to that city's orchestra as to his own reputation.

The best recorded evidence to date is offered in this crisp, lovingly shaped and withal spirited performance of the *Post-horn Serenade*. It has not lacked for previous recordings, but none that comes to mind has equaled this one either for the quality of execution it embodies or the artful application of it to the advantage of the composer. This applies equally to the concertante (third of the seven movements) and to the minuet, in which the archaic instrument from which the work takes its name appears. Doubtless there could be some learned words here on the *galant* style and how it is embodied in this work of Mozart's twenty-third year, but the essential fact is that Rudolf not only comprehends all the musical values the work contains but commands the means to make them audible.

The accompanying symphony is rather less special an example of Mozart's ability to spin an enchanting web of sound (he wrote great music at seventeen, but not in this particular instance). It does, however, benefit from an application of effort no less concentrated. This underscores the qualities of ensemble playing and personal participation in the results that Rudolf has instilled in this orchestra since assuming its command in 1958. It may still be only the second-best orchestra in Ohio, but this gives it a rank much nearer the top, nationally, than for many years past.



Decoration from the album of *Misa Criolla* by A. Kleinhof.

## "Misa" from Argentina

RAMIREZ: *Misa Criolla*. RAMIREZ-LUNA: *Navidad Nuestra*. Los Fronterizos, the Choir of the Basilica del Socorro and regional orchestra directed from the harpsichord by Ariel Ramirez. Philips PCC-219, \$4.98; stereo PCC-619, \$5.98.

OF ALL the efforts in recent years to express churchly sentiments in terms derived from secular sources—a mode of expression that has a long and honorable tradition from Bach to Janáček and Poulenc—this seems to me by far the most imaginative. That might well relate to the particular secular sources utilized, the lack of immediate other implications in the Argentinian dance rhythms as there have been in the jazz-oriented masses. But there are other important factors, not least the musicianship and sensitivity of Ramirez.

A native of Santa Fé (in Argentina), Ramirez blends a warm feeling for the dance rhythms of the whole area with a cultivated sense of color and contrast. He has not hesitated to bring together, as solo vocalists with the choir of the Basilica, the quartet called Los Fronterizos, whose Gerardo López has the kind of tenor voice that compels attention whether raised in praise or supplication. And if the Spanish text suits the sound of the voices that sing it, such phrases as "Gloria a Dios" and "Tu que quitas los pecados del mundo" are sufficiently similar to the familiar Latin to convey the same kind of universality.

As the medium of his sentiments, Ramirez has employed such dance-derived elements as the "Carnavalito" (for the *Gloria*), the "Chacarera trunca" (for the *Credo*), the "Carnival of Cochabamba" (for the *Sanctus*) and the "pampa" style (for the *Agnus Dei*). And to bind the close-harmony style of Los Fronterizos with the mostly unison-chanting of the choir, he has put together a fascinating combination of instrumental colors. These range from large drums, gongs, clacking sticks, and subtly stroked guitars to his own *continuo* on the harpsichord. The latter may strike some as an intrusive touch of sophistication, but its plucked sonorities are, after all, an extension of the guitar sound and, as used by Ramirez, not the least bit intrusive.

Indeed, it is just the ability of Ramirez to employ his musical sophistication without corrupting the satisfying sense of spontaneity in his *Misa Criolla*

that makes it the sometimes infectious, sometimes sobering, thing it is. There are suggestions here and there that Ramirez is not unaware of Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy*, Orff's *Carmina Burana* and perhaps Poulenc's *Gloria*, but he applies his knowledge to the advantage of the folk spirit he is trying to evoke rather than to its dissipation. The one section that strikes me as failing of its objective is the *Agnus Dei*, which may be a natural consequence of the success of the preceding *Sanctus*, which praises God in terms so infectious that it might cause an infidel to join in.

The emotions of the Nativity have been embodied in so many different musical moods from Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* to Menotti's *Amahl* that still another would seem to have drawn on some predecessor or other. However, in setting the poetic text of Felix Luna, Ramirez has evoked a mood and manner all his own. Here the dance rhythms are more subtle, less dynamic than in the *Misa Criolla*, but more consistently applicable to "The Annunciation," "The Pilgrimage," "The Nativity," "The Shepherds," "The Magi," and "The Flight." As a sample of Luna's imagery, one may cite his likeness of the Child as a "Bud that becomes a flower and that will blossom at Christmas."

Generally speaking, the musical elements employed by Ramirez for the *Navidad Nuestra* ("Our Nativity") are similar to those of the *Misa Criolla*. However, there are appropriately lighter touches, such as the accordion which punctuates the "chamame" for "The Annunciation." The other dance rhythms run a gamut from the "huella pampeana" ("The Pilgrimage") to the "vidala tucumana" ("The Flight"). It would be an engaging enterprise for some merchant interested in promoting North and South American relationships to videotape the native tableaux that accompany the musical score of the *Navidad Nuestra* for showing on TV here at the appropriate season. (In color, of course.)

In any case, Philips has extended the reputation for venturing from the well-worn path (won with its releases of folk material from Africa) with this sponsorship of Ramirez. The reproduction of both works is exemplary.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

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