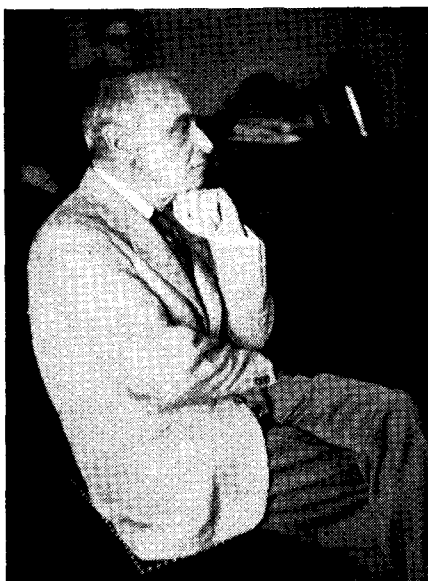


Recordings in Review



Serge Koussevitzky—"vitality and magnetism."

Boston Yesterdays

BRAHMS: *Symphony No. 4*; "Academic Festival" Overture. TCHAIKOVSKY: *Symphony No. 5*. SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphony No. 9*. RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: "Battle of Kershenetz" (Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh). RACHMANINOFF: *Vocalise* (arranged by the composer). FOOTE: *Suite for strings* in E. HANSON: *Serenade*, Op. 35. Serge Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra (with Georges Laurent, flute, and Bernard Zighera, harp, soloists in the Hanson). RCA Victor VCM 6174, mono only, \$9.59 (2 discs).

OF THE Big Three who dominated the American orchestral scene in the Twenties and Thirties (in part, in the Forties), the least current memory is that of Koussevitzky. His activity terminated half a dozen years before Toscanini's (Stokowski, of course, is still very much current), and his recordings have not persisted in anything like such abundant variety.

Had the question come up prior to the appearance of the present release, I would have surmised that the reason for this was the unsatisfactory quality of their sound, vis-à-vis current standards. However, in the light and weight of the quality conveyed in these restorations (only the Hanson was not issued previously) that surmise has no validity at all. Even in the case of the 1939 Brahms, the transfer to LP has been accomplished with such success that a very real sense of the orchestra, the conductor, and the special quality of sound

that emerged from their interaction is conveyed.

The reason for this is not wholly mysterious: it was, after all, recorded in Symphony Hall, up to the best technical mark then available. The results (in the case of the Brahms, I find my description twenty-five years ago to have been "one of the triumphant evidences of the miraculous instrument Koussevitzky fashioned in his twenty-five years of work"; and the Tchaikovsky, "full of rich wonderfully matched sounds") have been substantially exceeded by today's best, but it is remarkable how much remains. Together they should convey, to those who never knew it "live," something of the vitality and magnetism of the Koussevitzky experience.

For those who knew it well, the favorable recollections come back almost instantly; but also, in a curiously strong relief, the offsetting weaknesses. Outstanding among them, one discovers again in the performances of the Brahms and Tchaikovsky symphonies, was the absence of a really strong sense of structure. In his enthusiasm for what he was doing, Koussevitzky had a weakness for lingering on favored melodic passages, or dwelling on one section of a movement, whether it was rationally defensible or not. But there is abundant evidence, too, as to exactly why the great orchestra he evolved and the uses to which he put it exerted a fascination for so many.

As a protagonist of the unfamiliar as well as the new, Koussevitzky ran a close race for supremacy with his rival, Stokowski, as may be deduced not only from the fine performance of the Shostakovich Ninth, but also of the Rimsky-Korsakov "Battle of Kershenetz." The first of these is as good as any performance since, and the latter is yet to be exceeded. And certainly Hanson should treasure this performance (previously unissued) of his 1945 *Serenade* in which the singular sound of Georges Laurent's flute—best remembered otherwise from the unforgettable *Daphnis et Chloé* of Ravel—is perfectly displayed. The Elgarish work of Bostonian Foote was a frequent favorite of Koussevitzky, for reasons which this recording of 1940 makes clear. In it, as well as in the *Vocalise*, the now bygone sound of the Boston's strings has a resonance and purity rarely heard in orchestral performance today.

Two Bruckner Sevenths

BRUCKNER: *Symphony No. 7* in E. Carl Schuricht conducting the Hague

Philharmonic Orchestra. Nonesuch H-1139, \$2.50; stereo, H-71139, \$2.50. *Symphony No. 7* in E. WAGNER: *Siegfried Idyll*. Georg Solti conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. London CMA 7216, \$4.79; stereo, CSA 2216, \$5.79 (2 discs).

THERE IS a difference not only of time and place and personalities in these performances, but, actually, of generations. As might be expected from the circumstances, one is light, energetic, forward-moving, non-ponderous; the other is more deliberate, weightier, rather dwelt upon. What is hardly expectable, however, is the association of names with tendencies. For it is the Schuricht version (recorded in 1960 when he was at or near eighty) which certainly is the leaner and less ponderous of the two, the Solti (Schuricht's junior by thirty-two years) which is the more drawn out and stately. (The *Symphony* is also described on London's box front and liner as in "A" major.)

When Schuricht performed the same work with the Vienna Philharmonic on its first visit to Carnegie Hall in late 1956, it struck some that the ring and brightness, the clarity and transparency of the sound through which he conveyed Bruckner's ideas were inherent in the orchestra itself. As the fortunate juxtaposition here provided shows unmistakably, it is in the conductor, not the orchestra. What tradition it stems from I have no way of knowing. But it makes eminently good sense in making possible a stronger link, a smoother flow from the imposing material with which the work opens to the lighter episode that follows, or between the thump of the scherzo and the lilt of its trio. This is no small contribution to the better appreciation of what the true Bruckner is all about, and Schuricht must be credited with a handsome success in making it apparent.

Solti's treatment is rather more in the view of what is considered "conventional" Bruckner now, and beautifully performed in the style it suits him to pursue. It is interesting to note that the two conductors differ only by seconds in their delivery of the first and last movements (20:05 for Solti, 20:08 for Schuricht in the first; 12:10, 12:07 in the finale), but by considerably more in the slow movement (22:55 for Solti, 18:27 for Schuricht) and scherzo (9:40, 8:40). There is a plus, for those who are willing to pay the price for it, in the decision of London to give a full side to the adagio, rather than dividing it as Nonesuch does, which also brings on the *Siegfried Idyll* on the fourth face. This is an altogether curious affair, which combines a great deal of beautiful playing by a small ensemble of Vienna Philharmonic men with over-finicky detail and more than angular phrasing by Solti. However, for

those to whom the Bruckner is the thing, and who are satisfied with a fine rather than superfine sound, the concept of Schuricht and its reproduction are warmly recommended. The Solti is a shade better reproduced if not as attractively performed as the Klemperer combination of Symphony No. 7 and *Siegfried Idyll*. (Angel 3626; stereo, S-3626).

Opus 130 In Toto

BEETHOVEN: *Quartet in B flat, Opus 130 (with Grosse Fuge)*. Smetana Quartet. Crossroads 22 16 0055, \$2.49; stereo, 22 16 0056, \$2.49.

HEARING this recording in the afternoon preceding a recent evening in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium of the Metropolitan Museum of Art posed some interesting considerations of "live" vs. recorded performance. The evening in question was the one on which this same Smetana Quartet (performing, as is its preference, without the printed music) performed the B-flat Quartet as climax to a program of Haydn, Martinu, and Beethoven. It was the conclusion then that the tonal range at the disposal of the group (conditioned somewhat by the attractive but slender tone of first violinist Jiri Novak) was insufficient for the problems at hand.

Here, however, that is not at all the case. Thanks to the microphone and its advantageous placement, the body of sound produced seems quite sufficient for the needs of the work. However, another series of values comes into consideration as well. In the presence of the actual playing, it struck me that the Smetana players were thoroughly in command of the musical problems of the work. Here, however, with the opportunity for revisiting a section which requires it, the stronger impression is that they are attacking rather hastily and without quite the sure command that goes with mastery, a problem a little beyond them (especially in the "Cavatina," one of the greatest slow movements by anyone).

One thing that cannot be taken away from the Smetana ensemble is its disposition to see the whole problem through as it first occurred to the composer. As is well known, it was originally created with the *Grosse Fuge* (the jacket of the release makes a linguistic hash of "*Grosse fugue*") as the last movement, and another, less sizable finale substituted when some of Beethoven's circle suggested that the work had grown (at fifty minutes plus) too long. However, for those who prefer to have it as it was conceived, the Smetana players oblige. What is more, the whole intellectual plan of the movement (with its references to earlier movements) is thor-

oughly comprehended and vigorously followed through. If not the best performance ever on records of this quartet, it is one that has much to commend it, especially at the attractive price.

Haskil's Beethoven

BEETHOVEN: *Sonatas in D minor (Opus 31, No. 2) and E flat (Opus 31, No. 3)*. Clara Haskil, piano. Philips World Series 9001, \$2.50; stereo, 9001, \$2.50.

SAVE for the accident which resulted in her death six years ago, Haskil would still be reaping the rewards of a career which was slow to blossom but bore all the more remarkable fruit for that reason. She had such an uncommon combination of integrity and impulse that the ordinary machinery of concert-giving hardly conformed to her necessities, or she to its. Indeed, even in the later years, when she began to be welcomed by American orchestras and made much of in the press, her frail figure and (nearly) dowdy appearance seemed hardly part of a public "entertainment."

What she had to communicate is radiantly present in these performances, for those who may have missed them originally or developed their interest in the subject since Haskil's death. That is a musicianship as pervasive as it was encompassing (which means that it had depth as well as breadth), an uncompromising fidelity to the composer's personality as she conceived it (meaning that such a nickname as *The Tempest* for the D-minor Sonata did not press upon her a compulsion to make the work melodramatic rather than merely dramatic), a resolute disdain for the flashy



Hilde Güden—"natural evolution from maid to mistress."

or the meretricious. The result is an accomplishment as freshly alive as the day it came into being. This example of Philips's "compatible" stereo (derived from a master originally issued on Epic) strikes me as productive of about the same result as a mono disc played through two speakers.

Güden as Gräfin

MOZART: *Figaros Hochzeit*. Walter Berry (Figaro), Hermann Prey (Almaviva), Anneliese Rothenberger (Susanna), Edith Mathis (Cherubino), and Hilde Güden (Gräfin), with the Dresden State Opera Orchestra and Chorus directed by Otmar Suitner. Seraphim 6002, \$7.47; stereo, S-6002, \$7.49.

ONE OF the odder by-products of Angel's Seraphim enterprise, this recording from Dresden has the interest (among others) of presenting a number of familiar performers in a context strange to their American careers. That is to say, with the exception of Mathis, all are well known to audiences of the Metropolitan, though not all in the roles they assume here, or any at all in the language (German) which is utilized.

Perhaps the greatest interest will be centered in the presence in this cast of Hilde Güden as Rosina (or as she is known in Herman Levi's translation, the Gräfin). When Güden was singing Mozart at the Metropolitan, her role was Susanna, and a better one has rarely been seen or heard. Her natural evolution from maid to mistress finds her with ample vocal resource to deal with the altered problems to the advantage not only of the two great solos (in this version "Hör mein Flehn" and "Wohin flohen die Wonnestunden") but also of the ensembles. Indeed, the still shining sound she can command makes for an uncommonly silvery blend of values in the rapid passages with Susanna, and especially in the "Letter Duet."

As for the others, Prey is a much more satisfactory Count for the microphone than he is in a large theater, Berry sounds like the next fine Figaro, and Mathis is a delightful Cherubino. None of this would amount to very much were not the conducting of the little-known (in the West, anyway) Suitner full of relevant spirit and a thorough familiarity with the involutions of this highly sophisticated score. Of course, there is always the language to be reckoned with: But it may be said on behalf of all—beginning with Suitner—that there is nothing in the least ponderous about their treatment either of recitative or ensembles; that it is, musically, Mozartian if verbally in the vernacular. The reproduction makes all of it a resonant delight.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

RECORDINGS REPORTS I: Orchestral LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Brahms: Concerto No. 1 in D minor. Artur Rubinstein, piano, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Erich Leinsdorf. RCA Victor LM 2917, \$4.79; stereo, LSC 2917, \$5.79.

Self-improvement is one of anybody's most admirable traits, but when it brings with it a challenge to improve on the unexcellable, it may be more bold than wise. That, it strikes me, is the hazard with which Rubinstein was confronted in undertaking to improve on the version of this work he made in the Fifties with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Orchestra. That was one of those occasions when, in the sporting term, both men "came to play" and brought off a collaboration of immense brio and verve as well as a pooling of their long years of experience. To be sure, it wasn't stereo; but it was first-class Brahms, which cannot always be said of this venture. It is, in its own way, a solid and representative performance: but it doesn't, as its predecessor did, dare the unattainable, and come very close to it. It may even be more accurate, but that doesn't make it better Brahms.

Debussy: "Clair de Lune" (arr. Caillet); *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Bizet: Intermezzo (*Carmen*). Humperdinck: Prayer (*Hansel and Gretel*). Schumann: *Träumerei* (arr. Frost). Massenet: *Elégie* (arr. Frost). Offenbach: Barcarolle (*Gaité Parisienne*). Saint-Saëns: "The Swan" (*Carnival of the Animals*). Mendelssohn: Nocturne (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* music). Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 2 (arr. Harris); Nocturne Op. 28, No. 7; *Prélude* Op. 28, No. 7. Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Columbia ML 6283, \$4.79; stereo, MS 6883, \$5.79.

Columbia had a worthy idea in sending home the percussion section and heavy brass and letting the superb strings, woodwinds, and horns of the Philadelphia Orchestra entertain themselves and us with their low-key (dynamically, that is) artistry. However, they might have done even better had they kept the choice of material to matter conceived for orchestra (that is another way of saying: had they left out the Chopin nocturnes, the Schumann *Träumerei* and Massenet's *Elégie*). Taken together, however, the sequence is so well played and recorded that it will give pleasure to anyone who measures the appeal of music by the ear rather than the brow. The version of *L'après-midi* is specially distinguished by the flute playing of William Kincaid, a longtime adornment of the orchestra, who retired in 1960.

Falla: *El sombrero de tres picos* ("The Three Cornered Hat") Suite; "Danza ritual del fuego" (*El amor brujo*). Granados: *Andaluza*. Albéniz: *Navarra*; "El Corpus en Sevilla" (*Iberia*). Artur Rodzinski conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Scraphim 60021, \$2.49; stereo, S-60021, \$2.49.

Few of Rodzinski's recordings (most of them on Westminster) represent his qualities so vividly as this incisive, beautifully controlled treatment of Falla and affiliated Spanish composers. Unlike some more recent knights of the baton, who only work profitably in the presence of a major work, or within a specific segment of the literature, Rodzinski belonged to the generation of conductors to whom a *morceau* such as *Andaluza* was as deserving of consideration as a Strauss tone poem. It is, perhaps, no accident that the orchestra with which he achieves such good results is one thoroughly indoctrinated in that point of view through its long association with Beecham, another believer in the doctrine of *molto in parvum*. "El Corpus en Sevilla" is a particular instance of Rodzinski's virtues. This recording, though half a dozen or more years old, is excellent.

Gluck: Overture, "Pantomime," "Dance of the Furies," "Dance of the Blessed Spirits," Ballet Music, "Chaconne," etc. (*Orfeo ed Euridice*). Renato Fasano conducting the Virtuosi di Roma and instrumental ensemble of the Collegium Musicum Italicum. RCA Victor LM 2913, \$4.79; stereo, LSC 2913, \$5.79.

It is an undeniable pleasure to have so much that is great in the score of *Orfeo* offered in the meticulously produced, suavely polished performances directed by Fasano. With these virtues, however, are the inherent limitations of the complete opera recording directed by Fasano for RCA Victor (LM 6169; stereo, LSC 6169) of which it is a derivative: That is, the absence of theatrical urgency and dramatic intensity in what is, after all, a vital part of the earliest work for the lyric stage still regularly performed in the world's repertory theaters. The temptation to invoke the parallel passages in the Toscanini treatment may be resisted, but there have been other reminders, on a less exalted level, that if Gluck strove for his own kind of classicism, it had within it a pulse and warmth not present in this playing. Rather, as in the "Dance of the Furies," Fasano confuses haste with urgency, and short bow strokes with intensity.

Prokofiev: *Cinderella* (Ballet Suite). Jean Meylan conducting the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. Crossroads 22 16 0057, \$2.50; stereo, 22 16 0058, \$2.50.

To judge from this demonstration, the musical attitude in Prague toward Prokofiev's ballet is more concerned with its fantasy and fairy-tale values than with the opportunity it provides for orchestral display. Unlike some other versions from both sides of the Curtain, this one is unaggressive, almost reticent in its appeal, more concerned with the abundant lyricism at the root of Prokofiev's score than some of the vividly colored blossoms which decorate its branches. Jean Meylan is a conductor unknown to me (or to the Schwann "Artists" Listing save for another disc with the same orchestra) and the producers of this disc, who tell us nothing about him. However, the treatment of the multi-sectioned suite tells us that he is a musician of taste and a conductor of acute instincts where such matters as balance, dynamics, etc., are concerned. Good sound, too.

Strauss: *Don Quixote*. Pierre Fournier, cello, with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan. Deutsche Grammophon 39009, \$5.79; stereo 139009, \$5.79.

Fournier has recorded this work not once but twice (Krauss-Vienna Philharmonic, Szell-Cleveland) before, and lacks no element of control or understanding to sustain his high standard. And under Karajan, the Berlin Philharmonic delivers a high powered, unfailingly detailed exposition of the score. What is wanting is not in the category of execution but rather of story telling, a transference into aural imagery and narrative sequence of the verbal elements in Cervantes which Strauss vitalized musically. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Karajan's concept of the way they can be made meaningful doesn't convey as much as he might think it does. Every so often Fournier has a stretch in which he can rhapsodize by himself and create a mood, but re-entry of the orchestra brings with it a return to "reality." Giusto Cappone, who is otherwise unidentified but is probably first desk man of the orchestra, performs the solo viola part capably.

Wagner: Overtures to *Flying Dutchman* and *Rienzi*; Prelude to *Lohengrin*; and "A Faust Overture." George Szell conducting the Cleveland Orchestra. Columbia ML 6284, \$4.79; stereo, MS 6884, \$5.79.

The school of higher education in the art of orchestral performance that George Szell has brought into being in Cleveland has produced few finer examples of its curriculum than this one. It is both refined and animated, polished in detail but full-formed in sum. This applies especially to the "Faust Overture" and *Rienzi*, two works that rarely are favored with consideration on this level. There is, however, rather more dramatic content in the *Flying Dutchman* Overture than he realizes, and the glow of imagery and mysticism that can be imparted to the arrival and departure of *Lohengrin* flickers only occasionally in this treatment. The unsigned annotation rather undervalues the degree of difference between the "Faust Overture" Wagner wrote in Paris and its revision of a dozen years later.

—IRVING KOLODIN.