H. H. The Maharajah of Mysore's Musical Foundation

(MEDTNER SECTION)

THE recording by His Master's Voice of the principal compositions of Nicolas Medtner is, perhaps, one of the greatest romances in the history of the Gramophone.

Christopher Stone, writing on Medtner, describes him as "gaunt, other-worldly, distinguished, neglected, living with his wife and his grand piano in the simplest seclusion in the north of London."



How fortunate, and indeed, wonderful that destiny should have brought Medtner's genius within the sphere of vision and great musical appreciation of H.H. the Maharajah of Mysore. For the Maharajah thereupon decided that Medtner must no longer languish in the desert of neglect, and that his genius and contribution to the world of music must be made known.

A star led man—a star that shone from the firmament into the life of Medtner. Let us for a moment consider and contemplate this remarkable happening. Medtner is 67 years of age. He was a close friend of Rachmaninoff, and he has that simple charm and trusting outlook which are usually found in one who has given his life to Art. He had moments of joy, when occasionally a work of his was performed or broadcast, but he now knows that all his toil was not in vain. The Maharajah has made funds available that Medtner's work might be recorded, and Medtner's star is aflame.

I shall not forget the look of wonder in Medtner's countenance as Captain Binstead, the Maharajah of Mysore's Commissioner, in my presence, put the proposal to him. What a service has been rendered to music, and oh! what joy for Medtner. I remember, too, my own wonder at the whole of the great project on my visit to the studios for the first of these great recordings.

Good Readers, you will now appreciate my reason for calling this a romance.

Since that day, some eight months ago, the greater part of Medtner's rich musical creation has been recorded, the Composer both supervising the recording, and playing the pianoforte parts. There has been a team of expert advisers behind these recordings, composed of Compton Mackenzie who was privileged in Mysore to discuss this project with the Maharajah in person, Walter Legge, of His Master's Voice, who brought Composer, Conductor, Artists and Recording Engineers together to make this an issue of the greatest artistic merit, Christopher Stone with his sage advice, and Benno Moiseiwitsch, whose friendship with Medtner and knowledge of his music are of paramount importance. The albums will be issued as Society Volumes, as directed by the Committee, of which I am privileged to be a member, under the capable management of my good friend Mr. C. H. Thomas, of His Master's Voice. I must again mention here Captain S. T. Binstead, who is, as I said before, the astute Commissioner for the Maharajah in this country. He has left no stone unturned to bring this project to fruition.

Let us then warm to this romance, for it is clear that Medtner, in the autumn of his life, has found recognition, that the reward of his life's labour has been made certain through the inspiration and timely intervention of H.H. the Maharajah of Mysore.

A service has been rendered to music, and to posterity, which you will agree is unique.

On another page I give particulars of the first album and a photograph of Medtner. FRED SMITH

Rimingtons

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I, p. 116 ; on theme II, 123. The pressure of Münch's mind pleases me, and the integration of the recording. Are the reminiscences a pleading for another chance ? This swift treatment gives us little time to think. I know I like the pace and packed drive of it. Many conductors tend to dawdle and sentimentalize, or to dig you in the ribs, with this symphony. Let it rive away, I feel, and see if the power doesn't exhale the more surely. Try this recording, and form your own judgment. It is not for the very old-fashioned, perhaps. Excessive pomposity might lie in the music, if merely read on paper. The Recapitulation (131) omits the cornet tune (theme II). Coda, 138. Note the last bar but one of the cor anglais theme (descending arpeggio). Franck comes near a Beethoven stylistic element, here. " Faith " looks in (139), and the first theme of all (142) is heard over that powerful repetitive bass, like a great sea-surge, on which plays the sun of key-changes. This conductor works up in a big swoop ; he pulls no punches, makes (I should imagine : I have never seen him) no yeasty gestures, shakes no shaggy locks. He strikes me as embodying some of the best French qualities of precision, unsentimental approach to problems which are—as ever—largely those of structure, in the last analysis. I think the recording, in its swift and strong sparseness, shows an aspect of Franck that may not formerly have struck some listeners. I like the reading very much.

La Scala Orchestra, Milan (Franco Capuana) ; **The Force of Destiny—Overture** (Verdi). Decca K1698 (12 in., 6s. 4d.).

The N.B.C., with Toscanini, gave us this (October, 1946). I have not since then heard the record, and cannot compare the two. My general impression is that this present one is rather more delicate in tone, with perhaps a less strong impression of gloom. (In noticing the former, I mentioned that all four principals are killed in a blood-feud). The delicacy of tone pleases me highly, in this record ; and the swift rises of passion are admirably conveyed. It is quite a stunning effect at moments, in this opera of 1862 (altered 1869), which perhaps the B.B.C. will give us.

London Philharmonic Orchestra (Cameron). **William Tell—Ballet Music** (Rossini). Decca, K1454-5 (12 in., 12s. 8d.). Auto. AK1454-5.

Piquant, admirably solid and round recording of a series of tunes in the best style of finesse and finish. The contrast between levels is striking, the volume capital. The players seem to get more than the average point into the phrasing ; yet there are tiny elements that could be improved.

No one bettered Rossini in dapper music (Verdi learned from him). Here are tunes sprightly, tender, Tyrolean, pastoral. In the finale the triangle is so good that on hearing it I ran out to answer what I thought was the telephone bell. Here our orchestra scores a decided success —thanks, not least, to Rossini's deft scoring. The ballet is rather oddly dragged in through the tyrant Gesler's reminding the Swiss, in Altdorf market-place, that in celebration of the centenary of Austrian rule they must present songs and dances, after saluting the conqueror's hat.

La Scala Orchestra, Milan (Krauss) ; **Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche** (Richard Strauss). Decca K 1681-2 (12 in., 12s. 8d.). Auto. AK1681-2.

My *Till* arrived with a small bit missing from one record, so there is a slight hiatus in my hearing. The recording has plenty of tonal vivacity, but I feel that the spirit is a bit too hurried. Till sounds almost like a small-town American youth. The outbursts are cleverly recorded, but the spirit isn't right. One might wonder how much there is in nationality : Italians playing German music, conducted by an Austrian (Krauss was born in Vienna in 1893). He has, we read, specialized in conducting Strauss's operas. The wilder parts of the music have a fine swirl (the drum is almost too much for me), but I can't feel that the players got the fun of it, the rich German lights. There seems to be a bit of " throwing away " here, but not, as in the Franck, to the clarifying of the music. I feel that it's hasty, too : not my old Till. The orchestral detail is not, I think, quite so rich and free as in some other recordings.

The weight and dash are the best qualities : distinctly strong. I'm not sure that the orchestral quality is superfine ; but without hearing an orchestra in a hall I am never prepared to judge it finally. That, I venture to insist, is quite impossible, from records only, however many you may hear. W.R.A.

MEDTNER SOCIETY

Nicolai Medtner, and **Philharmonia Orchestra ,** (Dobrowen) **Pianoforte Concerto in C minor. No.2, Op. 50.** (piano solos, **Medtner**) : **Fairy Tales in D minor, Op. 51, 1. F minor, Op. 26, 3. Arabesque. Op. 7. 2.** Songs : **To a Dreamer Op. 32. 6** (Pushkin) ; sung by **Oda Slobodskaya** ; **Spanish Romance Op. 52. 5** (Pushkin); **The Butterfly Op. 28. 3** (Fet) ; sung by **Tatiana Makushina.** At the piano : **Nicolai Medtner.** H.M.V. seven 12 in. records with booklet £2. 15. 8½d.

Most readers will have read about the remarkable act of culture of H.H. the Maharajah of Mysore, who, having become devoted to the music of Nikolai Medtner, has translated his enthusiasm into fact by financing recordings of many of his works, including the three piano concertos. After studying the records of those selected for the first album I have no hesitation in declaring that when these records become well known to gramophone enthusiasts and music lovers in general, a feeling of astonishment will be experienced at music so vital in thought and so striking in sheer creative genius, so long languishing in comparative neglect. The old Medtner album has for many years been a precious possession of mine and I have wondered why nothing further followed. Doubtless there are many good reasons. The war, Medtner's rare modesty (he is the last man to " push his wares "), the fact that although he is the ideal interpreter of his music, the subtle idiom and the unusual technical " make-up " of which demand the most intimate study, he has been so much more bent on quietly composing than on recital work, the circumstances of his life, which made him, like Rachmaninov, into an exile, and so on ; all this has helped to divert attention from his music. But now, at last, comes this magnificent act of the Maharajah's to focus the limelight on music which, though it has earned the composer the title of genius in musical quarters, has not yet acquired the popularity it so richly deserves.

The album contains the Second Concerto, some songs and piano pieces and I make so bold as to declare that this concerto will at no distant date take its rightful place by the side of the popular and well-loved works in that form, for not only is it a work of profound musicianship, but also music gloriously tuneful and colourful. Anything more diverting (it is called Divertimento) more gay in spirit and more light-hearted than the last movement I do not know in the realm of piano concerto. The first movement, Toccata, with its dynamic opening section and its three-old second subject, of which a snap-figure is ingeniously treated and subsequently made the object of a bracing *fugato*, is masterly, while the Andante or Romanza, is full of Medtner's individual type of poetic sentiment and fancy. A most effective feature is the exploitation of a descending interval (a fifth) forming part of the lovely first subject. The middle section (the movement is in A-B-A form) consists of a dialogue between piano and clarinet, based on a quiet and sadly expressive melody, which is later expanded into a passionate contrasted section. The themes of the work are exploited in all sorts of subtle ways and the rhythmic ideas, with their interlacings and ingenious juxtapositions, form an attraction in themselves. But the Concerto is notable, above all, for its inspired musicianship and the high quality of its thought and texture. It is dedicated to Rachmaninov and here and there are traces of consanguinity in the piano writing but the whole work is pure Medtner and it is indeed a matter for admiration that a work so original in style and execution should be built on a system of harmony and tonality entirely orthodox. It is futile to try to describe Medtner's genius in this short space but one cannot do less than comment on his amazing resourcefulness, his power of original invention, his remarkable skill in manipulating his ideas, varying and transforming them by an apparently inexhaustible fund of fancy. The Concerto, with its ceaseless stream of nervous rhythmic thought and its depth of sentiment, is, without any shadow of doubt, a master-

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piece and, as I said, I am certain that at no distant date, it will be recognised and enjoyed as such. Medtner's playing is in the grand style and reminds one of Rachmaninov's ; the orchestra gives a very fine performance and Dobrowen's reading is impressive though here and there one feels the composer's scheme of accents and rests, and the balance between parts has not been ideally realised, but the performance is regarded by the composer himself as excellent and that is enough, for he is exacting indeed in all that appertains to artistic standards. The recording, on the whole, is brilliant, only a slight overpowering of a part or an outline here and there calling for remark. The piano pieces comprise the delightful and brilliantly written Fairy Tale in D minor, a characterisation of Ivan the Fool or simpleton ; the popular Fairy Tale in F minor, with its nocturne-like lyricism and the wonderful Arabesque, Op. 7, No. 2, for which Rachmaninov felt the highest admiration. Needless to say, these pieces are played perfectly by their composer. Oda Slobodskaya gives a magnificent rendering of that great song, *To a Dreamer*, based on Pushkin's poem, in which he warns against trifling and insincerity in love and by implication in life and art. This song is, like the Concerto, a convincing testimony to the Russian feeling in Medtner and, in passing, may I state that he regards his art and music as entirely Russian in spirit. Much as he esteems and loves Beethoven, Schumann and others, he also cherishes Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and the other great Russian composers. It is also of interest that he has a very high opinion of Britten and Purcell. The other two songs are the enchanting *Butterfly*, in which the spirit of that ephemeral creature is expressed in an accompaniment which is a piano piece in itself, and the very original and captivating *Spanish Romance*, with its intricate and fascinating accompaniment. Both are sung with admirable charm and spirit by Tatiana Makushina. I would urge all readers to subscribe to this album, for I feel that they will not only delight in this great music but also feel deep gratitude to the Maharajah for having made it possible. At any rate that is my own feeling. Finally, may I add that the booklet contains translations of the type I did for the Parlophone Russian song albums, based on a method which enables the listener, knowing no Russian, to understand fully the song and the interpretation.

R.H.

INSTRUMENTAL

Georg Kulenkampff (violin). **Georg Solti** (piano). **Sonata No. 1 in G major for Violin and Piano Op. 78** (Brahms). Decca K1705-7 (12 in., 19s.). Auto. AK1705-7.

The recording balances well the piano both aloft and alow. Perhaps its tone is a shade dry, but that presumably is the player's affair. I do not know either of the two at "first ear." The violin is always finely outlined, with a tense strength that for me is a shade restrained.

The first sonata did not come out until Brahms was well on in years (1878-9) ; it was the product of a happy summer holiday. The sensibility is sweet, tender, strong, yet never loudly outspoken. The players give us all the requisite strength, without very notable tenderness. It is a wee bit sober : but then, it can be argued, Brahms did not spill over. Yet he might have been treated a trifle more smilingly. In the development there is splendid partnership and aplomb. I think the violinist could make rather more of that opening phrase, which so pervades the work. He is very true and pure in tone, if not extremely warm. The playing is shapely, strong, and such as I think Brahms would have approved.

There is a phrase employment in the second movement (as the start was used, in the first) : that opening rise and fall ; we find it also in the finale. Here is an essence of Brahms's nobility. Throughout the work he sings gloriously. The agitation is almost confined to the first movement. The end of the slow one is exquisite : the pressures of the middle part soothed and endeared. *Finale* : The theme is derived from two songs, Regenlied and Nachklang (Nos. 3 and 4 of Op. 59), both of which begin alike, but continue differently, as do the attacks in the sonata. There is an obvious connection with the first theme of the first movement. Then, too he uses his slow movement theme in this one. The sonata gets its nickname, *Rain*, from the prevalence of this figure, and perhaps of the idea of gently pattering rain—not in a sorrowful sense, but as a mood and colour element, and to some extent a unifying one in the three-movement work. The work of the partners in this sonata is particularly apt, neat, gracious, without the least sentimentality : with perhaps, as I suggested, even a trace of dryness that does not at all connote dullness : rather it is the opposite of sweetness, as in wine. There is a curious little inward withdrawnness in the finale, I feel : very typical Brahms, musing happily, self-contained, always solitary, yet the philosopher who cannot demand love, only offer it sullenly.

Hungarian String Quartet : Quartet, Op. 64, No. 5 ("The Lark") Haydn. H.M.V. DB6390-1 (12 in., 15s. 11d.).

In recent broadcasts I found these Hungarian players at times electrifying. Such vim and high spirits in their Haydn, so strong a power to make one feel how modern and advanced much of his writing must have seemed to contemporaries. In this recording, full of sweet vigour, they are in fine fig. The recording secures the aptest of zestful ease, truth and tonal fulness : delight, indeed.

The *Lark* is the fifth of a set of six quartets published in 1790, and dedicated to one Tost, about whose identification with a former Tost there seems some doubt. The six are thus generically known as the "Tost" quartets. There can be no doubt about the reason for the "lark" name : the fiddle soars from the ground-nest of the other strings. The second nickname is the "Hornpipe," because of the nature of the dashing finale, quite irresistible, with its double fugue thrown into a rondo-sonata movement, for good measure. That Haydn so often felt like this is one of his most engaging qualities : it was quite a habit of his to zip up a finale with a fugue : we recall, in familiar symphonies, the *Clock*. So there is a lark going on even here.

The first movement's themes are first, the soaring, then the syncopation, and lastly the codetta, tripleting down. Then, what splendid athletic resource in the long development, that starts with No. 1, plays with 3, takes to the syncopations of 2, octaves down in 3, and proceeds, it would seem, to recapitulation : only to develop away again, having fun with the octave descent, which the bass lengthens to minims : then syncopating again, and demurely falling at last to its real re-presentation of the three ideas, the first shortened.

The slow movement in this and the other (remaining) quartets of the opus takes a fresh form : we have the long singing melody, of the tenderest significance, a minor-key meditative middle section (middle of the side) here developing the first idea ; then the first back again, with decoration (last inch, side 2, running on to side 3). On side 2, at one inch, mark a magical key-change.

The minuet might be suspected of harbouring another bird than a lark. If you like to imagine the clucks of the busy hen, there seems no harm in the fancy. Again we get key-freedom, early in the first section. The middle part follows up the runs of the first section, with a bit of neat imitation.

The finale is of the constantly running order that simply dances us off our feet. There are two bits in the theme ; then comes the double fugue (the two subjects together, one part being provided in the running style of the former theme, and the other, the upper one, being new). In a trice the first section is back, with its two bits, and then the coda continues the glorious team race to the tape. Time, two minutes. Beat that if you can ! This is a movement I have never failed to encore several times on every recording, the first of which, I think, was the old Spencer Dyke one, many years ago. Haydn, by the way, used part of the movement's motion for one of his little musical-clock pieces a few years later.

W.R.A.

Budapest String Quartet (Roismann, Ortenberg, Kroyt, Schneider with Milton Katims, viola). **Quintet in D major K593.** (Mozart). Columbia LX1046-8 (12 ins., 23s. 10½d.). Auto. LX 8592-4.

Mozart's four last string quintets belong to the years 1787-1791, the last being the year in which he died, and they are among the most precious documents in all music. The first movement of the D major begins with a *Larghetto* which is heard again towards the end, and the whole movement is, as Einstein says, introductory in character. It is full of broken phrases, and much of the exquisite slow movement continues in this vein ; but just before the recapitulation

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orders. Somebody should delve into the effect of the parodic sense on modern music: a big subject for which I wish I had time. Deft, alert, flirtatious, happily scored, the light music pleasantly fills a corner. The Nocturne is ingenious, but there seems very little that is really fresh in the suite; a composer of small ideas, it would appear. The finale shows this. I'm afraid Mr. Berkeley hasn't yet grown up.

L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris (Ansermet): **"La Valse"—Poème Chorégraphique** (Ravel). Decca K 1867-8 (12 in. 13s. 8d.). Auto AK1867-8.

La Valse was begun in 1914, just before the war, as a tone-poem about Vienna (*Wien*). In 1917 Ravel transformed it into a "choregraphic poem" with the present title. Diaghilev was to have produced it as a ballet, but decided not to. Ravel, we are told, never forgave him. Ida Rubinstein took it up and danced in it.

With the left-hand concerto (also recorded this month) *La Valse* can be considered as Ravel's last notable work with the orchestra. He was a great craftsman, though decidedly (to my mind) he cannot be called a great composer, in any full sense of the adjective.

Cleverly contrived sonorities, in conception, performance and recording. Remarkably good working-up. It is all got onto the disc brilliantly. In one or two passages, one wonders just how near the edge of pitch the strings were. The whole thing is starrily clever; but does it wear well? It comes into the parodistic class. Of this matter I was speaking in the Berkeley review—in another sense.

London Symphony Orchestra (Piero Coppola): **Symphonic Dances, Op. 64** (Grieg). Decca K1869-70 (12 in. 13s. 8d.). Auto AK1869-70.

I don't admire overmuch the orchestration. The music is played with fairly good expression, and recorded with some bloom on the tone. Grieg's sequences and repetitions seem a bit boresome now. No. 2 is very nicely swayed. Listening to No. 3, we realise how much more a man like Sibelius made of a simple idea.

Moura Lympany (piano), **London Symphony Orchestra** (Royalton Kisch): **Concerto in A minor, Op. 54** (Schumann). Decca K1884-7 (12 in., 27s. 4d.). Auto AK1884-7.

Rather tame, on the whole. It needs more subtlety. Nobody plays this quite like Hess. It needs a more spacious kind of romantic feeling, and more affection, not mere device. A tendency, I feel, to hurry. But then, I like my Schumann in the image I've created over a half century of playing and absorbing him. These moderns! The recording is good. Schumann let the orchestra off lightly, but the balance is important, and here it is not always ideal, to my ear; the music doesn't always sing, either. Prosaic, mostly.

New Symphony Orchestra (Josef Krips): **"Emperor" Waltz, Op. 437** (Johann Strauss). Decca K1874 (12 in., 6s. 10d.).

The mixture made up as before. I like the delicacies in the playing and recording, the fullness without strain, the coaxing, affectionate touch which this sort of music asks for.

W.R.A

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MEDTNER SOCIETY. VOLUME TWO

Nicolas Medtner, and **Philharmonia Orchestra** (Dobrowen): **Pianoforte Concerto in E minor, No. 3, Op. 60—Improvisation, Op. 31, No. 1** (Piano—Medtner) and Sonata Vocalise, with motto **"Geweihter Platz"** from **Goethe** Voice: **Margarete Ritchie:** Piano **Medtner.** H.M.V. seven 12 in. records, with booklet £3 os. 4½d.

Reports from the concert world during the last year or two show that two concertos, like Ben Adhem, lead all the rest and the spell cast by this "blessed pair of sirens" on audiences, has almost reached the pathological stage. That both works are masterpieces of concerto music is true but that they are of such towering magnificence as to take precedence of all other concertos is ridiculous. The well-known alternatives, it is unnecessary to enumerate but it is surely time that we had, at least, periodic performances of the splendid concertos by Dohnanyi, Liapounov, Glazounov, Arensky, Moszkowski, Sinding, MacDowell, Dvořák (a very fine work), Rubinstein, Bliss, Delius, Scriabin, Field, Moscheles and innumerable others. The playing to death of certain works has become a menace to musical taste and what with recorded duplications and what one might almost call lithographed concert programmes, our musical diet threatens to become as stale as our alimentary.

It is, therefore, refreshing to turn to the second Volume of the Medtner Society and thereby to hear the Third Pianoforte Concerto in E minor. In speaking of the Second Concerto (THE GRAMOPHONE, Feb. '48) I called it a masterpiece and many readers (for the album has gone very well) will have been able to judge the appropriateness of such a term. In dealing then with the Third Concerto, which, it is interesting to note, has been dedicated to H.H. the Maharajah of Mysore, who, be it recalled, has sponsored the Medtner recordings, in gratitude for and appreciation of His Highness's action, I would like to guard against any implication that I speak as a rabid enthusiast of Russian music. Only from this point of view, therefore, I venture to say that I am fond of all good music and the fact that I possess every available record of Mahler, Bruckner, Fauré, and Ravel may serve to dissipate such an impression and I may add that I cherish a great number of recordings by Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Elgar and others, not to speak of such masterpieces as the *Ninth*, the *Matthew Passion*, *Messiah*, etc., also, that I regard the B flat major Serenade issued by H.M.V. last month as one of the finest works in all instrumental music. I hope, therefore, that this will prove that I am not speaking from any partisan point of standpoint when I say that I do not know in the whole realm of piano concerto any more beautiful music, nor any written with more striking imagination and musicianship than this concerto. In support of this opinion, which I make with due responsibility, I may cite the view of that discerning critic, Kaikhosru Sorabji (whom I do not know) who stated that Medtner's Third Concerto was "far and away the greatest work of its kind, produced during the past thirty years." And that of Scott Goddard, "The great lyrical fervour in this Concerto is at once apparent: a rich and elaborate vision that is manifestly the product of an intensely poetic mind." The Concerto is a stream of melody from beginning to end, the various strands of melody appearing, now in detached form, now woven together, and assuming a different hue and character by all kinds of subtle changes and modifications. A haunting sort of motto-theme recurs throughout, dominating the moods of the music. The composer has declared that the themes resemble "characters in a drama, they come again and again as in a drama and each time they re-enter they have some variety in their mood and appearance." In general, the first movement, which was, to some degree, inspired by a poem, The Roussalka, of Lermontov's, moves in an atmosphere of dreamlike enchantment; there is a short Interlude, and the last movement assumes a triumphant and heroic character, while near the end, a noble hymnlike melody in D flat, expressive of thanksgiving, crowns the work. Whereas the first movement is a sort of free fantasia, the last movement, on to which the D flat episode is, so to speak, incrusted, is in fairly strict sonata form. A striking feature of the craftsmanship is the way in which the themes are varied, by harmonic and rhythmic devices and by contrasted tonalities, so that a melody, though keeping its identity, often sounds like a new theme. Climax is never overdone but perhaps the chief feature of the music technically, is its continuity of thought that is, the way in which every bar seems yoked with the next, and to grow inevitably out of the last bar. The rhythmic variety of this work, as of the Second Concerto, is as rich as it is subtle. Like Medtner's other Concertos, this work is outstanding for its organic homogeneity, that is, the way in which all the elements are knit together in reciprocal relationship. I said that the Concerto is predominantly melodious and I think even the listener new to it will be struck by the composer's gift of distilling latent beauty from his themes and of welding them together in different shapes and sequences. Medtner has the Toscanini passion for perfection, so far as it lies in him to attain it, and this dislike for the facile and commonplace results in an absence of clichés and padding, yet the music has complete spontaneity. It is truly original, in the sense which relates to the personal adaptation of the legacy which the artist, to use Goethe's phrase, owes to "great predecessors and contemporaries." Sibelius, for instance, is a strikingly original composer, yet, if you listen to those remarkable Symphonic Dances, Op. 64, which Decca have issued this month, you will realise that he too owes much to a "great contemporary." Ravel taught his pupils to "imitate," knowing that originality, if it existed, would assimilate what was imitated and issue out of it. Wilful eccentricity is not originality, but perversion. I can sit down now and write a duet for jew's harp and ophicleide, in which each will play alternately a theme and a ground bass, for 6 bars, then scales in opposite directions, with each instrument supplying an alternate note, and so on, and though I have no doubt it would be instantly performed by the Society for Contemporary Music, it would not be an original work of art but sheer idiocy. Such composers as Berlioz, Sibelius, Vaughan Williams, Medtner, and so on, are original because they build on the past.

Coming to the performance, it is one which has reasonably satisfied the very critical requirements of the composer, and Dobrowen supports the great playing of the soloist with a reading which is full of fire, spirit and sympathy. The recording is realistic, without the excesses of volume to be found in some modern recordings, and the piano recording has, for the most part, genuine piano tone. Particularly successful are the string, woodwind and brass tones, the trumpets and trombones ringing out with exciting timbre and buoyancy. Once again, listening to this noble music, one feels the most fervent thanks to H.H. the Maharajah of Mysore and to all those who have realised his wishes, for making these two concertos accessible to the music lover and may all pianists hear them! The Improvisation is an

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ideal example of Medtner's pianistic invention. It is in theme and loose (hence the title) variation form. The variations are both spectacular and expressive and the lithe rhythms are admirably featured in the masterly playing of the composer, who enables us to hear again, the art and quality of his great countryman, Rachmaninov, on the keyboard. Scale passages in thirds are played with the speed and clarity of single notes. The Sonata Vocalise, based on a poem of Goethe's, in which the Graces descend from Olympus and take part in the dancing of nymphs in a sacred grove, while the poet watches unseen, is a very original work in which after the opening section, the voice is treated instrumentally, in a duet with the piano. Ernest Newman once devoted a special article to this work, in which the interplay of voice and piano, and the peculiarly apt and eloquent themes, are an engrossing feature. The very difficult voice part is very skilfully sung by Margarete Ritchie (who shone in the H.M.V. recording of Britten's Lucretia) and she sings the tricky rhythmic phrases and the long legato notes and phrases with striking technical ability and tonal fidelity. Medtner's playing of the piano part, with its mercurial changes of accent and shape, and his expressive handling of the gracious main theme, are a model of artistic execution. The contents of these first two albums should banish for ever the ridiculous legend of Medtner, either as a Russian Brahms or as a dry and academic composer and I personally do not know any music more vibrant with feeling and rich in musical genius. Once again, may I say to the reader: I do not ask him or her to accept my word, as that of a great admirer of this composer, who for so long has been the object of such insensate neglect, but to hear this remarkable music for himself.

Richard Holt

THE BACH SOCIETY. VOLUME EIGHT

Pau Casals (violoncello). Unaccompanied. **Suite No. 4 in E flat major : Suite No. 5 in C minor.** H.M.V. (12 in., 56s. 1d.) Available on special order only.

The sixth and seventh volumes of the Bach Society, which was formed by H.M.V. in 1934, contained the first, second, third and sixth Suites for violoncello and this new volume, postponed for issue until now on account of the war, completes the Series with the fourth and fifth Suites.

Fred Gaisberg tells us in his book, " Music on Record," that Casals, at the age of thirteen, picked up a volume of the Bach Suites in a music shop while looking round for some pieces to enlarge his repertoire. He was then playing in a restaurant and had persuaded the proprietor to devote one evening to chamber music. In later years Casals was, Mr. Gaisberg says, " the first of all instrumentalists to play an entire Bach Suite at a public concert "—a quite common occurrence to-day—and it was the Suite in E flat major, No. 4, that he once played to an audience of many thousands at the Albert Hall. It is to Mr. Gaisberg that we owe, amongst so much else, these magnificent records of a performance that perhaps has never been and now certainly could not be equalled anywhere in the world. One can only guess at the immense labour and self-discipline that lay between the day when Casals first saw this music and his eventual mastery of it. I should be sorry to think that these records might only come into the hands of 'cellists, for whom their acquisition is a foregone conclusion, and be avoided as a kind of caviare by the ordinary music lover. I would beg him, or her, to try, as samples, the *Courante* of the fourth Suite or the *Prelude* of the fifth. This music, relying, except very occasionally, on the single melodic line (for harmony is rare) is a grand antidote if one has been soaking in luxuriant harmony or become conditioned to short-breathed melody. It is a discipline to listen—and it means genuine and concentrated listening—to this music : but the feeling of it being a discipline soon gives way to a sense of exhilaration and musical well-being. The *Prelude* of the fourth Suite, for example, begins like a technical exercise but this is arrested by a pause after which, as Professor Westrup says in his excellent notes, " the music acquires an unexpected eloquence." The *Sarabandes* in both Suites are of great beauty, the first being dominated by a dotted rhythm which Casals makes amazingly expressive. Above the *Sarabande* of the other Suite, a simple melodic line with a falling cadence very characteristic of Bach, there seems to hover another tune which we hear only in our mind's ear. But each movement has its special beauties and one can no more describe these than the superb playing which brings the music to life. The light and shade, the use of rubato, technical things such as these are applied with magical skill but it is the end to which they are applied that so deeply affects one, the noble expression of this highly wrought and noble music. Listening to these records, and especially to the fifth Suite, which is perhaps the finest of all, one realises afresh what our musical life has lost by Casals' refusal to play in this country but at least, in these really splendid recordings, we have, if at one remove, the finest fruits of his great art.

A.R.

INSTRUMENTAL

Solomon (piano) ; **Sonata in F, L384** (Scarlatti) ; **Chorale-Prelude : Sleepers, Wake !** (Bach—arr. Busoni). H.M.V. C3768 (12 in., 5s. 9d.).

Solomon's recording of Busoni's piano transcription of Bach's own organ transcription of the third movement of his cantata, *Wachet auf* (" Sleepers Wake") is the first really satisfactory disc we have had of this wonderful movement. The old H.M.V. Spanish recording was a cut version and so, I think, was the later H.M.V. French recording. Though one necessarily misses the contrast of tone between the tenors singing the chorale and the dance tune on the strings, Solomon manages to convey the sublime and contemplative beauty of the movement by adopting a slow tempo suggestive rather of Spitta's interpretation of " a dance of the souls in bliss " than of Schweitzer's " dance of the virgins in procession before the approaching bridegroom, accompanied by the watchman's blunt cry of warning." As Mr. A. E. F. Dickinson says in his excellent little book, " The Art of J. S. Bach," the dance theme is a serene, not a flamboyant one. Solomon keeps an admirable balance between the chorale tune in the tenor register and the dance theme in the treble, and the recording of the beautiful music is worthy of his admirable performance. On the reverse he plays Scarlatti's witty F major Sonata (Longo 384) with the utmost clarity, though one feels the loss of the original medium in the brilliant passages that close each section. Somehow the piano makes these sound out of character. The recording is, again, of very good quality.

Clifford Curzon (piano) ; **Mephisto Waltz : Liebestraum No. 3, in A flat** (Liszt). Decca K1723-4 (12 in., 13s. 8d.). Auto. AK1723-4.

It is deplorable, but true, that this record, issued some months ago, has only just reached me for review and might never have done so had not my friend Clifford Curzon, asked me more in sorrow than in anger why I had ignored it !

It was a badly needed record, and in case some readers are still unaware of its existence let me say, shortly, that the playing is of the finest quality. The label gives the title, often used, as " Mephisto Waltz " but in actual fact Liszt composed four such waltzes. This one, the first, is a piano transcription of the second episode from Lenan's " Faust," known as " The Dance in the Village Inn," and originally composed for the orchestra. No. 2 was also composed for the orchestra and later transcribed, by Liszt, for the piano. No. 3 was composed for the piano and orchestrated by Riesenauer, and No. 4, is still in MS. in the Liszt museum at Weimar. There is a well-known description, by Gregorvius, of Liszt after he had received Minor Orders, alighting from a carriage in the *Piazza di San Pietro*, in his newly donned cassock, " Mephistopheles disguised as an abbé " : and because of the duality of his nature, the eternal conflict of spirit and flesh, some writers, less familiar with human nature than they should be, have described this first Mephisto Waltz as haunted by the spirit of evil, a picture of the composer himself in the toils. This interpretation, to my mind, is strained.

Liszt paints a picture of Faust and Mephistopheles, in search of love, arriving at a village inn where a dance is in progress. The landlord's daughter brings drinks to the dancers and Faust, enraptured by her beauty, draws her into the dance. Mephistopheles seizes a violin (although the scoring makes it a 'cello !) and plays on it a wild tune. Two by two the dancers, intoxicated by the music, waltz out into the forest and vanish into the starlit night. A nightingale sings as Faust and the girl also disappear, and the piece ends with the mocking laughter of Mephistopheles. We may give him his due as the spirit of temptation but it is the passionate fervour and poetry of the scene that the music reflects and which Clifford Curzon so vividly conveys to us. His nervous, brilliant playing makes the piece a thrilling experience and it is also a grand technical achievement.

The recording is, on the whole, excellent though it cannot quite contain the big climax on the third side. I wish that Decca had been courageous enough to have asked Mr. Curzon to record the first and best of the two settings of *La Lugubre Gondole* on the reverse, or the exquisite *Andante Lagrimoso* from the *Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses*, instead of the too frequently recorded third *Liebestraum* ; but this complaint does not affect my admiration for Mr. Curzon's warm-hearted playing of the ever lovely piece, which also is well recorded. But I do beg Mr. Curzon, who really understands Liszt, to give us these other little-known pieces one day : I have reason to know that he plays them magnificently. When Liszt was old and his world-wide success was dust and ashes in his mouth he wrote some piano pieces of the most austere and terrifying quality. Amongst these " The Funeral Gondola " is the outstanding masterpiece and would prove a revelation to those music lovers who think of Liszt only as a typically romantic composer.

A.R.

Artur Schnabel (piano) : **Intermezzo in E flat major, Op. 117, No. 1** and **A minor, Op. 116, No. 2** (Brahms). H.M.V. DB6505 (12 in., 8s. 7½d.).

Schnabel plays these Intermezzi in a characteristically wayward and individual manner. He makes them sound like quiet improvisations, giving the impression that only at the end of one phrase does he think of the next. Personally I find both performances irresistibly beautiful and I think that I am captivated, not only by the beauty of the playing, but even

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Weber's *Freischütz*. The overture proper is vigorous and taut in mood, and formally well knit: it is only in the coda that we see how much greater a writer Beethoven was in comparison. I confidently recommend this disc to your notice. L.S.

DELIUS-MOZART

Hallé Orchestra (Barbirolli): **Deux Aquarelles** (Delius-Fenby); **The Marriage of Figaro—Overture** (Mozart). H.M.V. C3864 (12 in., 5s. 9d.).

You will not find the *Aquarelles* mentioned in any complete list of Delius's works, though the old Boyd Neel recording is included in the gramophone list in Arthur Hutchings's book. They are arrangements for strings by Eric Fenby (who did such astonishing work as Delius's amanuensis) of two unaccompanied part-songs *To be sung of a summer night on the water*: unpretentious and charming miniatures, of which the second seems far more instrumental than vocal in conception. They are played with loving attention by the Hallé: it is a pity the record surface is rather high. As to the reverse, the only excuse for adding yet another to the *seven* recordings available in the current catalogues would be that it puts the others completely in the shade. Despite some spirited playing, this is not the case: in bar 8 the balance of the horns and oboes is badly adjusted; and Barbirolli tends to exaggerate *sforzandi* so that the resolution of accented chords (as in the second subject) becomes almost inaudible. L.S.

LAMBERT-LISZT

Philharmonia Orchestra (Lambert): **Saraband for the Followers of Virgo** and **Bacchanale,** from the Ballet "Horoscope" (Lambert); **Galop,** from the Ballet "Apparitions" (Liszt - Lambert - Jacob). Columbia DX1567-8 (12 in., 11s. 6d.).

It is a truism, yet none the less regrettable, that Constant Lambert's gifts as a conductor, and his keen insight, brilliance and wit as a critic, have successfully distracted attention from his talents as a composer. Were he a foreign composer, we should be falling over our feet in efforts to perform his works: as it is, he is almost completely neglected in our concert halls and on our records. There is no recording of his *Aubade héroique*, of the *Eight Songs by Li-Po*, of the *Music for Orchestra*, the ballet *Pomona*, or his masterpiece *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, and only an old one even of that Prom favourite *Rio Grande*. His ballet *Horoscope*, produced in 1938, is recorded in penny packets, three movements from the suite being issued four years ago and the remaining two movements (with a different orchestra) only now. (It may be helpful to give here the right order of the Horoscope Suite for the sake of those who possess the earlier discs or who will want to get them when they hear these—Dance for the followers of Leo, Saraband for the followers of Virgo, Valse for the Gemini, Bacchanale, Invocation to the Moon and Finale.)

The incomprehensibility of our neglect becomes apparent when we hear these pieces. The graceful *Saraband* contains the most soothing and heart-easing music, and the *Bacchanale* is full of Lambert's lively syncopated rhythms. They are both played most beautifully and sensitively by the Philharmonia Orchestra; the quality of their performance is much superior to that of the Liverpool Phil., which recorded the other movements. The fourth side is taken up with an amusing Galop by Liszt in a brilliant orchestral dress by Gordon Jacob, which makes it sound like Offenbach. As to recording—well, if there is any better recording than this, I have yet to hear it. L.S.

MOUSSORGSKY

Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française (Kletzki): **Pictures at an Exhibition** (Moussorgsky-Ravel). Columbia LX1186-9 (12 in., 34s. 6d.). Auto LX8669-72.

Pictures at an Exhibition, as is well known, was written by Moussorgsky after a visit in 1874 to a Moscow show by his friend Victor Hartmann, who had died the previous year. It is a series of impressions of the various subjects in the gallery, linked in some cases by passages labelled *Promenade*; and at one point, contemplating Hartmann's *Catacombs*, the composer imagines that his dead friend steps out from the canvas to speak to him. Critics, while praising Moussorgsky's impressionism, have been unanimous in declaring that his choice of the solo piano medium was an unsatisfactory one: it neither gave the full range of colour to his sketches, nor was it good piano writing. Many willing hands have attempted to translate the original into orchestral terms, but Ravel's version is, by general consent, not merely a brilliant piece of craftsmanship, but a revitalisation by a composer of sympathetic intuition and integrity. Compare, for example, the *Catacombs* or the *Great Gate of Kiev* in Moussorgsky's piano and Ravel's orchestral versions, and it is impossible not to feel, not merely that the effect of the latter is so much greater, but that it is a true interpretation of what Moussorgsky originally wrote. It should be mentioned that in Boosey & Hawkes' miniature score, the piano original is printed under the orchestral layout, which is most valuable.

This new recording is bound to be compared with Koussevitzsky's famous set. The tone, though not so closely focussed as in the earlier version, is well captured, and the recording engineers have delighted in picking out the brilliance of the colours (notice the high lights on the tinkling celesta and harp in *Baba Yaga*, side 6—but still in proper perspective). The difference between the French and American orchestras is very interesting, for the former seems to excel at the gayer, brighter and delicate numbers such as the *Children in the Tuileries* and the *Ballet of Chickens in their Shells*, while the latter is better in the massive movements such as the finale. This is partly due, it must be said, to the superior quality and discipline of the Bostonians: the Parisians have one or two weak players who spoil the total effect. An unfortunate impression is created right at the outset, for example, by the solo first trumpet, whose intonation is never very true throughout the work, and in side 2 (*Il vecchio castello*) the woodwind is a trifle sour. There are also sundry minor studio noises—coughs, dropping things, etc.—which would pass unnoticed at a concert, but become most irritating on a record, where they recur at every playing. Nevertheless, this performance is a lively and intelligent one, with many points in its favour—in particular that it is meticulously faithful to Ravel's every mark of tempo and dynamics, which Koussevitsky sometimes masterfully thrusts aside. L.S.

SIBELIUS

London Philharmonic Orchestra (Cameron): **Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43** (Sibelius). Decca AK2127-31 (12 in., 34s. 2d.).

I often suspect that the gramophone companies, like small boys in exams who turn up suspiciously similar essays, must somehow look over each other's shoulders: how else do they manage to produce exactly the same works at exactly the same time? This version of the Sibelius No. 2 came out along with the Philadelphia set I reviewed last month, though review copies of this were not available at the time. In view of my strictures on the Americans' interpretation, my task this month has been of more than usual interest, for the differences between the two versions are profoundly illuminating, and are mostly due to the gulf between the personalities of the two conductors.

Cameron's friendship with, and championship of, Sibelius is well known, and gives him a certain authority. He approaches the job with all seriousness, and though I must confess that he is never one of my favourite conductors, I salute the complete integrity of his performance—a quality so conspicuously absent from Ormandy's reading: he gets nearer to Sibelius's intentions. He is meticulous about phrasing and dynamics to an extraordinary extent (he differentiates, for example, between *poco forte* and *un poco forte*), and, helped by good recording, gives us better proportioned and clearer detail than we mostly hear. At the same time, this pre-occupation with exactness precludes any great passion or excitement, and the music rarely gets its feet off the ground. Whether it is the actual size of the orchestra, or that the players are better fed in the American orchestra, I cannot say, but the L.P.O. strings, in comparison with the Philadelphia, lack body and sound somewhat under-nourished in those parts where they should surge out. The lack of self-confidence of the violins in their unison passage before letter B, for example, is as unsatisfactory as the Philadelphians' brashness.

The change-overs in this set are most discreetly done; but can anyone tell me what the advantage is of having enforced auto-couplings of long works to avoid turning over if, when the turn-over does come, it occurs right in the middle of a movement? L.S.

SMETANA

B.B.C. Theatre Orchestra (Walter Goehr): **Dance of the Comedians** and **Polka,** from "The Bartered Bride" (Smetana). Decca K1667 (12 in., 6s. 10d.).

The B.B.C. Theatre Orchestra under its present conductor, to judge from its broadcasts, is inclined to be uneven in quality; but it has rarely been heard in better form than in these two popular favourites. It is unnecessary at this time of day to say anything further about the honest gaiety to be found in Smetana's ever-fresh folk-style: either you already know and enjoy it, or you have yet to do so. This coupling inevitably invites comparison with Beecham's disc of the same two items. The B.B.C. Theatre Orchestra emerges most creditably from the *Dance of the Comedians*, and if it misses some of Beecham's subtleties in the *Polka*, this may well be because the tempo is on the fast side. (Is it my imagination, or is this recorded a semitone higher than usual?) The strings, if they have not the highly-polished sheen of the R.P.O., make up in zest what they lack in quality, and it is only the coarseness of the brass playing that drops the general standard. L.S.

MEDTNER SOCIETY

Nicolas Medtner (piano), **Philharmonia Orchestra** (Weldon): **Concerto No. 1 in C minor, Op. 33** (Medtner). **Oda Slobodskaya** (soprano), **Nicolas Medtner** (piano): **The Ravens, Op. 52, No. 2** (Pushkin-Medtner); **Serenade, Op. 28, No. 2** (Feth-Medtner). Sung in Russian. **Nicolas Medtner** (piano): **Canzona Mattinata, Op. 39, No. 4,** and **Sonata Tragica, Op. 39, No. 5.** Seven H.M.V. records in album with notes, 60s. 4½d. Special order only.

In future years, the Maharajah of Mysore's generous gesture to Medtner will be compared to that of Ludwig II to Wagner: the only question will be—and, though we may guess

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the answer, we must leave it to posterity to decide—were the two recipients of equal musical stature? Certainly only one was a progressive; the other a belated Romantic. Anyhow, the recording of Medtner's music proceeds apace, and, having already heard the Second and Third Concertos, we now have the First. As readers probably know, the piano is featured in Medtner's entire and considerable output—the concertos are his only orchestral works—and this first essay, written in Moscow towards the end of the First World War, is by way of being an endurance test for the soloist. Out of the concerto's 740 bars, he is silent in less than 90, and his part is full of every kind of technical feat, complex in texture and busy in mood. The 70-year-old composer romps through the work with all the gusto of a man half his age: would that the orchestral playing was so live—the players seem to be unsure of their ground (*could* it have been insufficiently rehearsed?), and on side 1 the clarinet gets a beat ahead in the second theme. I hesitate to use the orthodox term "second subject," because the whole concerto is in one vast movement, of which the development area, so to speak, is a loosely-knit series of variations. This rhapsodic, at times almost improvisatory, section is one of the weaknesses of the concerto, giving too diffuse an air to an otherwise well-constructed work. There is no lack of contrapuntal interest, nor even of brilliant technique—sides 4 and 5, the *Tranquillo* section, could well be sampled for a representative taste of this concerto at its best—but the thematic material, of prevailingly melancholy cast, is barely of sufficient interest to support the weight of the edifice built on it. So far as I am concerned, listening to this concerto is like making an entire meal of plum pudding—it is all so rich, so sugary, so very solid, that it soon becomes rather dull and finally turns indigestible.

The other two piano works in this album are thematically connected: they are but two of eighteen pieces (spread over three opus numbers) forming a cycle *Forgotten Themes*, based on a poem by Lermontov, which tells how a young soul, brought to earth by an angel singing of the joys of Paradise, throughout its life in this world tries to recall those forgotten themes. Both in the lyrical *Canzona* and the (one-movement) *Sonata* there is considerable artifice and keyboard freedom, and some pleasing passages, but once again the basic fault I find is that the themes are not intrinsically very distinguished.

It is only fair to say that out-and-out Rachmaninov fans may find this album more palatable than I, although I think there is no doubt who was the greater inventive genius. The recording, especially as regards the balance between the orchestra and piano in the concerto, is little more than so-so. L.S.

INSTRUMENTAL

BACH

Fernando Germani (organ): **Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor** (Bach). H.M.V. C3866-7 (12 in., 11s. 6d.). Recorded in Westminster Cathedral, London.

It seems to me that these Germani recordings on the Westminster Cathedral organ are setting an altogether new standard. His D minor Toccata and Fugue of a few months back is followed most worthily by this latest issue. The playing is impeccable and the recording of the organ really wonderful. Architecturally, Westminster Cathedral is not my favourite London edifice but if its acoustics are so admirably suited to organ recording, I wouldn't have a stone of it changed! The build-up in these two pieces is thrilling and the quality combines enough "cathedral atmosphere" with perfect clarity. My only complaint is that a composition that grows so inevitably has to be interrupted at the end of each disc—and for that I can blame no-one who had a hand in this all-round piece of great organ playing and recording. T.H.

BARTOK

Hungarian String Quartet (Zoltan Szekely Alexandre Moskowsky, Denes Koromzay, Vilmos Palotai): **Quartet No. 6** (Bartok). H.M.V. DB9380-92 (12 in., 34s. 6d.). Automatic couplings only.

Bartók composed his last string quartet at Budapest in 1939, thirty-one years after his first quartet and five years before his death in 1945. It precedes the wonderful final group of works, the concertos for violin, orchestra, and piano, and the solo sonata for violin, and may perhaps be regarded as the point of departure into the much warmer climate of these works, though there had been signs of such a change in the fifth quartet. But if the old exasperation and bitterness which show in the third quartet are absent the keynote of the work, as the composer clearly indicates, is sadness. The fourteen bar theme for unaccompanied viola with which the quartet opens is marked *mesto* (sad) and the theme is so marked in the two-part setting which introduces the second movement proper—a march—and again in the three-part setting that introduces the humorous *Burletta* (the third movement): and, finally, in the fourth movement in which this "motto" theme develops into a full-scale piece, the same direction is given. Such is the striking form of the quartet. The string writing, with its wonderfully original contrivances of sound, some of them of great beauty, shows the extraordinary mastery to which Bartók had attained. Listening closely to this quartet and recalling the five that had preceded it makes one realise anew that no composer since Beethoven has given us music of such intellectual power and of such penetrating expression: and when, as in this quartet, deep emotion suffuses the lyrical sections Bartók's claim to be the greatest composer of our time appears to me to be unchallengeable. The only possible analysis of the score is a close technical analysis, and that alone, as the excellent one Matyas Seiber has done in "The String Quartets of Bela Bartók" (Boosey & Hawkes) shows, can give little more than the bare bones. But the miniature score (B. & H. 4s. 6d.) together with these records will unlock the doors into this marvellous work and I strongly urge the purchase of this score.

A few outstanding points may be mentioned here. The *glissandi* that appear in the fourth movement (the second slow movement) of the fifth quartet, are used in every movement of the sixth quartet except the last, sometimes with ironic and humorous intention, sometimes with an effect of dismissal, and sometimes for pure beauty of sound. Notice also the lovely effect, observable elsewhere in early and late Bartók, of the sudden use of diatonic harmony, as at the end of sides 1 and 2. Another point in the first movement (on side 2) are the long sinuous melodic lines, highly chromatic, begun by the cello and taken up by the first violin. The march in the second movement is harmonically remarkable both in its asperities and sudden moments of euphony, the *glissandi* here producing a lovely effect (about half-way through side 3). Side 4 begins with an astonishing kind of cadence which the cello starts high up and when the march is resumed the cello plays fifths with the second violin playing sixths, the viola octaves with the first violin playing fourths—massed double-stopping!

The *Burletta* is an obvious burlesque of dance band technique with a delicately lovely "trio" to point the moral. In the last movement, one of sustained beauty throughout, there are two passages marked *sensa colore* (side 7) which produce a disembodied and ghostly effect which is most striking. The end is equivocal: notice that the top notes of the cello *pizziccato* chords are the opening ones of the "motto" theme.

The performance seems to me authoritative and superb, every player having the fullest understanding of his difficult task, and all playing together in a rarely perfect ensemble. There are occasions when the admirable recording fails to catch all the sounds. At figure 68 the first violin does not tell sufficiently and his trills at 278 are barely audible. Both the tremolos in the inner parts, and the first violin above, are too faintly recorded in the introductory section to the second movement: and some of the highest notes of the first violin are lost at 174. The tone of the viola, at the start of side 1, which resembles that of the English horn, is, I imagine, deliberately so contrived.

Music lovers who take pride in the exercise of their intellects as well as their emotions have here a rare treat in store. A.R.

BEETHOVEN - SCHUMANN

Wolfgang Schneiderhan (violin), **Friedrich Wührer** (piano): **Sonata in C minor, Op. 20, No. 2** (Beethoven); **Allegretto,** from Sonata in A minor, Op. 105 (Schumann). Columbia LX1190-3 (12 in. 34s. 6d.). Auto LX8673-6.

This seems to me to be an honest performance that entirely lacks real greatness. It is all well played but phrase after phrase goes by without that illumination of real artistry which so distinguished the Busch-Serkin performance. There are some things about this new recording which I greatly prefer to the latter—the recording itself, of course (excellent), the speed of the 1st movement, the rather more controlled rhythm of the scherzo. But nothing can get by the fact that when I hear the Busch-Serkin records I am gripped from start to finish and at times I cannot keep back a smile of sheer pleasure at a touch of phrasing or some other point of interpretation: this new performance never sounds momentous enough, urgent enough—how difficult it is to find the right word—to make me feel it is what the Germans call *Weltklasse*. I prefer, as I said, these players' speed for the 1st movement but the *adagio* feels a good deal too slow: it would have to be incomparably played at this tempo and you have only to compare the two performances of the opening melody to sense which has that real greatness.

The fill-up, a charming and welcome movement, is spoilt by being played too slowly. This allegretto has become an andante and Schumann made it clear that he wanted the former. For all that, it is played with style and charm.

A gramophile friend of mine was deploring the fact the other day that whereas red and light-blue labels used to guarantee you only the greatest of world artists, nowadays all sorts of good but less great players and singers are being admitted to the elect. This performance strikes me as good—but not great. T.H.

Max Rostal (violin), **Franz Osborn** (piano): **Sonata in A major, Op. 12, No 2** (Beethoven). Decca AK 1958-9 (12 in. 13s. 8d.).

Here are two players, each of genuinely solo artistry, who are well-used to playing together in sonata work and who give what seems to me to be a very good performance indeed. This is a delightful sonata and Rostal and Osborn catch the freshness of the first movement most attractively. The whole performance, indeed, has style and, as it should, real unity of style from the two players. The recording is excellent and I can recommend this pair of discs. T.H.

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