

Analytical Notes and First Reviews



CHAMBER MUSIC

POLYDOR.

66425-8 (four 12in. records, 5s. 9d. each).—The Amar String Quartet : Second String Quartet, Op. 17 (Béla Bartók). A min. score is obtainable from Chester's.

These records, now issued by Polydor in the ordinary way, were originally made for the Japanese Society corresponding to our own N. G. S. I offer fraternal congratulations to our Japanese comrades; if they can already assimilate such strong meat as this when the Society is still in its infancy, what will they not do later on?

As for me, I cannot pretend that I have fully digested the work in the short time I have been able to devote to it. It is not the atonal harmony that defeats me, for this, extreme though it is, sounds quite intelligible (except in places) under the sympathetic treatment it receives at the hands of the Amar Quartet. Nor is its form beyond the grasp of the ordinary man, for though it cannot be called orthodox it is far more logical than the work of many less revolutionary composers, and it is quite possible to get the hang of it after one or two hearings, especially if one has the score (which I recommend everybody to get). No, the main difficulty lies with the content; this quartet is no mere *jeu d'esprit* written *pour épater le bourgeois*, nor has it any of the lightness of the Hindemith Quartet that I reviewed in the Christmas number of THE GRAMOPHONE; it is "sad earnest" throughout, never turning aside from its purpose (though what that purpose is I am not sure), and rising at times to a poignancy of expression which cannot fail to affect even the most unsympathetic hearer.

I shall attempt no analysis; this would be unnecessary to those in possession of a score and useless to others. I will only say that the work opens with a serious movement (*moderato*, three sides); this is succeeded by a kind of *scherzo* (two sides), of which the prevailing mood is a kind of sombre fierceness; and at the end we have an extremely slow movement (twenty-three lines of score occupy three sides) which for sheer, black misery makes the *Finale* of Tchaikovsky's *Symphonie Pathétique* seem cheerful by comparison. This is not everybody's music, but for those of stout hearts and strong digestions it can be recommended as something which will, I feel sure, repay careful study. Bartók is in the forefront of the advanced group in Central Europe; and the serious and liberal-minded musician cannot ignore him, and he is not likely to hear him more adequately interpreted than here by the Amar Quartet. The fine, clear recording does everything to make the student's task as easy as possible, and it will bear a loud needle.

MISCELLANEOUS CHAMBER MUSIC RECORDS.

A Columbia disc (9156, 12in., 4s. 6d.) by the Catterall Quartet contains one of those queer things of which Russian writers are fond, a *Polka* composed by Sokolow, Glazounov and Liadow in combination. Such a work has interest as a curiosity, but though it is impeccably written it contains little of importance musically. The same may be said of a *Berceuse* (d'Osten-Sacken) on the back. Both pieces are played with the absolute propriety they require, but they do not allow the players a chance to show their mettle. Even more peculiar is Columbia 4155 (10in., 3s.), on which we hear the *Carnival of Venice—Variations* (Briccialdi, arranged Stainer) and *Scotch and Irish Airs* (arranged Stainer) played on four flutes (the *London Flute Quartet*), the lowest instrument being, I think, the rather uncommon bass flute. It is a strange experience to listen to these four flautists twittering away together, though perhaps hardly a satisfying one musically. A curious effect, as if a reed were joining occasionally in the concert, is probably due to the rather clarinet-like quality that the gramophone gives to the lower notes of the flute.

P. L.



ORCHESTRAL

Instruments used; H.M.V. new model, large table grand, No. 126, sound-box No. 4, and Columbia large table grand, sound-box No. 7.

HIS MASTER'S VOICE.

D.1150, 1151, 1152, 1153 (12in., 26s.).—Royal Albert Hall Orchestra, conducted by Ronald : Fifth Symphony (Beethoven).

C.1304 (12in., 4s. 6d.).—International Concert Orchestra : In a Persian Market and In a Chinese Temple Garden (Ketelbey).

In the symphony the first two records each contain one movement, the third containing the *Scherzo* and the beginning of the *Finale*. This re-recording does fitting honour to the centenary year of the master. It conveys, as no previous recording has done, the bigness of the *Fifth*. The old H.M.V. was, I thought, an uncommonly good piece of work for its day, but the power and capacity of the music could not then be shown forth in full beauty. The conception here is solid without being stodgy, and apart from the empty-concert-hall feeling, which is the point I like least in the new recordings, I have scarcely anything but praise for the performance. I recommend everyone to get these fine records. The lower parts in the second movement, that never used to tell very well, now balance excellently, and would be still more clear and lineally valuable if the slight buzz that seems unavoidable at present were not there. I wish it were possible to record in a full concert-hall, but without applause, coughs, sneezes, conversation, programme-rustling, late-coming, shuffling, and the thousand annoyances that one's fellow creatures set up. The music would sound a good deal finer, I believe, than it can at present. The only solution I can think of is to get the audience together and drug it into insensibility. Perhaps the performance of appropriate pieces by certain composers we know might do the trick?

In the notes given in H.M.V.'s album holding this symphony I fancy a little too much is made of the "Fate knocking at the door" idea. It seems to me that this story is too slick. Beethoven, apparently, simply said, in answer to a rather foolish question: "Thus Fate knocks at the door." So it may, but that does not imply that he had that idea in mind when composing. He did not say so, and I imagine he was merely returning the sort of answer that is fitting when people ask silly questions. In any case, it is well that people who are grown-up musicians, or are growing up, should use such props as little as possible. Drama is ingrained in this great music. If one doesn't feel it in one's bones, labels won't do one much good. Where music is authentically inspired by some poetic or literary impression let us think of it in such terms, by all means. A Strauss symphonic poem without the music may still be dramatic, but it would be foolish not to bear in mind the composer's literary basis, in listening to it. Beethoven very rarely used such a basis, and where there is no real evidence of extra-musical ideas being in his mind during the process of composition we do well to seek the emotional and dramatic values in the texture and life of the music itself—nowhere else. There is plenty to occupy us there, in all conscience.

I expect many music-lovers find, as I do, that magnificent things such as the *Fifth* are not only emotionally moving, but actually stir the moral fibre, in a sense that may be compared (at a distance) to that in which it is stirred and braced by such a book as, for instance, Captain Scott's "Voyage of the *Discovery*"—the sort of book that definitely does good to one's spirit when it is heavy, when the world is too much with us and too heavy upon us.

Therein, to my mind, lies the greatest and grandest justification of music—not its only use, by any means, but its noblest and fullest.

After the *Fifth* it is rather a shame to have to come to earth by way of Chinese temple gardens and other paths of Eastern dalliance. Of course it is not Mr. Ketelbey's fault; but I do wish he and his like would stand up to their art in a bolder fashion, as Beethoven stood up to life. It would be foolish to blame Mr. Ketelbey for not being a Beethoven, or Sullivan for not writing great oratorios. But Sullivan did his job as an artist, and stood up to it, with all its implications, like a man. Our small singers might at least do that. They do their best, we are sure, but they simply haven't the ideas. The giving-out of these trivialities by the International Concert Orchestra is highly adequate.

COLUMBIA.

L.1810 (12in., 6s. 6d.).—Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, conducted by Mengelberg: *The Sylphs and Hungarian March from The Damnation of Faust* (Berlioz).

L.1813 and 1814 (12in., 13s.).—New Queen's Light Hall Orchestra, conducted by Eric Coates: *Summer Days Suite (In a Country Land, On the Edge of the Lake, and At the Dance)*. On last side, *Valsette, Wood Nymphs* (Coates).

9160 (12in., 4s. 6d.).—B.B.C. Wireless Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Pitt: *Overture to the Bohemian Girl* (Balfe).

Last month, in reviewing the new *Faust Ballet Music* records, I made a slip, for which I offer the trustworthy Columbia people my apology. In my pleasure at hearing these fine new recordings I brought out all my older discs that have various pieces of the *Ballet Music* upon them, in varying order, and in naming the Columbia items I contrived to get a wrong title before me, and so said that after the *Waltz* on 1795 there was another movement not mentioned in the title. This, of course, is not so. The title correctly gives the items recorded. It is perhaps the best tribute to new records that one should want to have the additional enjoyment of comparing them with the old, and noting how great is the improvement.

This month's batch gives great pleasure also. Mengelberg's reading of the Berlioz is comfortable. The sylphs are a wee bit solid for my liking, but very neat, and the texture of the music is well reproduced. The *March* is first rate. Only our Goossens could beat it, I think. The knife-edged keenness of the lash of it is the thing we want, and that is well conveyed here.

The colours in the Coates Suite, already recorded, are the chief thing to enjoy. The ideas follow a little too much the lines of those in the best work of our chief composer of light music, to be quite exciting for their own sake. It is all gracefully done, and that satisfies us, if we are not too exigent about music of this calibre. The orchestra wears its well-known air of Saturday-afternoon gaiety, in which we faintly but clearly perceive the influence of the mind of the audience, dwelling lovingly on the thoughts of tea and crumpets in far Streatham, after the show. "If trumpets be the food of such, play on."

The old favourites in the *Bo' Girl* overture are sweetly sung out. A record of happy memories this, for sophisticated lovers of past days and unsophisticated lovers to-day.

BRUNSWICK.

50089 (12in., 8s.).—Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Sokoloff: *Danse Macabre (Saint-Saëns)* and *Overture to The Merry Wives of Windsor (Nicolai)*.

The Cleveland Orchestra made an excellent impression when it came over here a few years ago, and that impression is strengthened by its records. Plenty of rehearsal gives a finish to its performances, the effect of which is enhanced by its brilliance. These two items are splendidly thrown off. This recording seems even better than the excellent recent British one. The low strings in the Nicolai are splendidly sonorous. I believe that Mr. P. Wilson will have something interesting to tell us soon about Brunswick's new plan of getting more music on to an ordinary twelve-inch disc. The new methods of reproducing will bring the necessarily smaller volume up to normal, and thus a very helpful step will have been taken.

PARLOPHONE.

E.10516, 10517, 10518, 10519 (12in., 18s.).—Orchestra of the State Opera House, Berlin, conducted by E. Moerike: *Casse Noisette Suite* (Tchaikovsky).

E.10520 (12in., 4s. 6d.).—Orchestra of the State Opera House, Berlin, conducted by E. Moerike: *Overture to The Bartered Bride* (Smetana).

E. 10521 (12in., 4s. 6d.).—Dajos Bela's Orchestra: *Selection from Andrea Chénier* (Giordano).

E.10522 (12in., 4s. 6d.).—Edith Lorand Orchestra: *La Serenade (Spanish Valse)* (Metra), and *Venetian Barcarolle* (Leoncavallo).

Of the *Nutcracker* set, the first record contains the *Miniature Overture* and the *March*; the second, the *Sugar-Plum Fairy* and the Russian *Trepak*; the third, the *Arab Dance* and the *Chinese Dance*; and the last, the *Reed-Pipe Dance* and the *Flower Valse*.

As I write I lack two of the dances. The others are mostly well recorded, one or two very well. The *March* is happy, but the *Overture* is a little thin-toned, and there is a hint of a fiddle scramble near the end. Detail is good in most of the pieces; there is a precision and neatness about this that Tchaikovsky's pellucid orchestration ought to receive if it is to tell as he meant it to. There is an enjoyable air of fantasy about the playing; it is of the right calibre for a fairy play. The *Trepak* has not before been recorded in better style. Even here I feel that the tone is not quite as rich and absolutely dead in tune as it might be. The latter point may, of course, be referable to the recording method or to the placing of the orchestra. The *Reed-Pipe Dance* is played with plenty of attention to its points—perhaps slightly too much, but it is of the rather mannered type and can stand such treatment pretty well. Altogether, the items to hand of this set are well set off and will give a great deal of pleasure. Since writing this I have received the remaining Dances, and like them very much. In sonority and serenity they come out most effectively.

The *Bartered Bride* has not, apparently, been heard in this country—at any rate, for many years—though it is still popular over the water and has held the boards very well in the country of its birth. Smetana was a little piqued after his first opera, imagining that some people would think him a mere imitator of Wagner, and so he wrote the *Bride*, to show that he could do a light thing in good native style. As far as one can judge without hearing it, the body of the opera is not so good as the overture leads one to expect it will be. But the overture is certainly good fun—one of the best pieces on a fugal basis. It ranks, indeed, with the *Magic Flute* overture as a capital example of fugal treatment. Here it is thrown off with admirable spirit. The speed of the upper strings gives one a momentary anxiety as to whether the lower will keep up. This they do very well, though one cannot expect to hear their part perfectly distinctly; at the pace this is next to impossible. The fiddles are, as in the Tchaikovsky overture, the least bit thin near the end, and the last few chords have a touch of shrillness which would possibly not be noticed on a machine such as (it is hoped) will shortly do still fuller justice to the interesting new products now coming our way.

The *Selection* from *Andrea Chénier* by Dajos Bela's Orchestra is a quite captivating bit of work, with some tasty orchestral trimmings. The slight thinness now and again in the strings is similar to that which I noticed in other Parlophones this month, so it seems likely that either the recording or the instrument will account for it. It is not sufficient to annoy. Those who like a little sentiment, laid on with discretion, will enjoy this music.

The two Lorand pieces are both graceful café items, played in irreproachable style and recorded as large as life.

K. K.

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Blurb

How inadequate our bulletins seem when we glance through those of American companies! Listen to this, which is headed "Aileen's New Crush":—Aileen Stanley, at least in the world of song, is seeing things just now in a sweet pink light. You have heard her, on past records, yearn for a mate, Sass the iceman, or make a date for a chowder-club dance with some young citizen of the toughest make nature produces. But this time she is in special luck, for she has fallen in love with a new papa, who is six feet tall and likely to be a rough kisser. Victor 10-in. record, No. 20198.