

NIGHTS AT THE ROUND TABLE

By W. A. CHISLETT

GERMAN. Merrie England—excerpts*. Dances from Henry VIII and Nell Gwyn. **New Symphony Orchestra of London** conducted by **Victor Olof**. *with **Patricia Baird** (soprano), **Marjorie Thomas** (contralto), **Alexander Young** (tenor) and **John Cameron** (baritone). Eclipse ECS 2006 ©ECM2006 (17s. 6d.).

This record is an admirable illustration of the strides made in transferring from tape to disc. It is taken from a early Decca LP released to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. I have the original record and although its sound is still surprisingly good—and in particular it is free from that strangled shrillness which beset so many of the earliest LPs—that of the new release is substantially clearer and richer, and of course the surface is very much better too. How much of this is due to stereo reprocessing I do not know, not having heard the new release in its mono form. Be all this as it may here is a desirable reissue which deserves to have a new and substantial lease of life. German is heard probably at his best in the two suites of dances, gentle, delicate and melodious. I cannot say that *Merrie England* is among my favourite operettas. This is in part due to having heard so many poor performances by amateurs. But I can still enjoy it in highlight form, particularly when as well done as here.

KETELBEY. In a Monastery Garden; Wedgwood Blue; In the Mystic Land of Egypt; Bells across the Meadow; In a Chinese Temple Garden; The Sanctuary of the Heart; 'Appy' Ampstead; The Phantom Melody; In a Persian Market. **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus** conducted by **Eric Rogers**. Decca PFS4170 (37s. 6d.).

Few composers of sentimental light music enjoyed so long a period of popularity and financial prosperity as Albert W. Ketelbey. This was, doubtless, in part due to the fact that he flourished in the days of silent films, for the accompaniment of which so much of his music was so well suited, and palm courts. Born in Birmingham in 1875 he was able to spend many years of his long life (he died in 1959) in virtual retirement in the Isle of Wight. At the age of 11 he wrote a piano sonata which earned the praise of Sir Edward Elgar and two years later he won a scholarship to London's Trinity School of Music, where he studied cello, clarinet, oboe and horn as well as piano and organ. This early training and his instrumental versatility stood him in good stead. His gift for orchestration was outstanding. A few of his compositions are still familiar to all, notably *In a Monastery Garden* and *In a Persian Market*. It is good to have here several of his works that are less familiar now, by name at any rate, such as *Wedgwood Blue*, *The Phantom Melody* and *In the Mystic Land of Egypt*. All are presented splendidly, avoiding the pitfall of sentimentality, and the recording is rich, spacious and clean.

LEHAR. Paganini—excerpts. **Margit Schramm**, **Dorothea Chryst** (sopranos), **Rudolf Schock**, **Ferry Gruber** (tenors), **Günther Arndt Choir**, **Berlin Symphony Orchestra** conducted by **Robert Stolz**. World Record Club SOH234 (29s. 11d.).

This is a very attractive and highly desirable disc. Unlike the records in the WRC album reviewed below, here the numbers are not separately banded but lead from one to another. Neither are all the excerpts listed on the sleeve, which is a pity. This could easily have been done and as the singing is in German the corresponding English titles would have helped those who have little or no German. *Paganini* was first produced in Vienna in 1925. It did not reach England until 1937, when having a cast headed by Tauber and Evelyn Laye it only achieved 60 performances, possibly because despite his lovely voice and charm Tauber had not the figure or appearance which we associate

with Paganini. Its success in other countries was and always has been greater than here. Despite all this I fell for it in 1937 and it remains one of my favourite Lehár operettas, partly perhaps because it is nearer to opera and further from musical comedy than many of Lehár's stage works. Here is a first-class performance and a good recording. We get off to a splendid start with the excellent playing of the violin solo in the Overture. **Margit Schramm** is a charming **Anna Elisa**, **Rudolf Schock** a rich voiced Paganini and **Dorothea Chryst** a sympathetic prima donna. That the whole is greater than the sum of the parts is mainly due to the affectionate and sympathetic conducting of the ever-young **Robert Stolz**.

MONCKTON AND TALBOT. The Arcadians—excerpts. **Cynthia Glover** (soprano), **Shirley Minty** (contralto), **John Lawrenson** (baritone), **Robert Bowman** (tenor), **Nigel Brooks Chorus** and **Gilbert Vinter and his Orchestra**. Music for Pleasure SMFPI323 (14s. 6d.).

Quite recently I welcomed wholeheartedly excerpts from *The Arcadians*, for the charm of the show itself, its presentation and its recording in Columbia's Studio Two series. This new Music for Pleasure recording is a serious rival for all who enjoy the charm and tunefulness of this sixty-year-old operetta. So serious, indeed, that many may well decide to make a substantial saving and put the difference between the two prices towards another record. The recording here has not quite the combination of spaciousness, spread and clarity of the earlier record but it is very good. The soloists make an excellent team and, as might be expected, **Gilbert Vinter** directs with authority and gets the best from his team.

TONE POEMS. Sibelius. Finlandia. **Dukas.** L'Apprenti sorcier. **Liszt.** Les Préludes. **London Philharmonic Orchestra** conducted by **Bernard Herrmann**. Decca PFS4169 (37s. 6d.).

This selection would seem to be aimed primarily at the hi-fi market, and it achieves its object. As a programme, however, it is disappointing in that all three pieces have been offered so many times before, often in fine performances and very good recordings. **Bernard Herrmann** is known here chiefly for his recordings of his own music. For some years he was conductor-in-chief of the Columbia Broadcast Symphony Orchestra and in this capacity presented many programmes of unfamiliar music on the air in America. I note, for instance, among other things that he presented the whole of the Liszt symphonic poems. It is a pity that he did not give us here one of the many that remain unrecorded instead of *Les Préludes*, of which there are already several alternatives in the current edition of THE GRAMOPHONE Classical Record Catalogue. However, anyone wanting these three particular works together, in excellent performances and fine recordings, is not likely to be disappointed. But how much more interesting a programme we might have been given.

THE WORLD'S MOST GLORIOUS MELODIES. VOL. 2. **Rubinstein.** Melody in F. **Dvořák.** Songs my Mother taught me. **Franck.** Panis Angelicus. **Raff.** Cavatina. **Offenbach.** Barcarolle from "Tales of Hoffmann". **Tchaikovsky.** Chanson triste. **Martini.** Plaisir d'amour. **Schumann.** Träumerei. **Gluck.** Che farò from "Orpheus and Euridice". **Fibich.** Poème. **Grétry.** Pantomime from "Zemire et Azor". **Chopin.** Waltz in C sharp minor. **Reginald Kilbey and his Strings.** Columbia TWO276 (37s. 5d.).

This is a bed-time record par excellence. Music very much after the heart of **Reginald Kilbey**, sympathetically arranged for strings, mostly by his old friend and colleague **Jack**

Byfield, and including a sparingly and discreetly used harp. All the pieces are long-established and well-loved favourites. Suffice it then that they have never been offered in more heart-warming style or better recorded.

SCOTS GUARDS BAND. Tchaikovsky. 1812 Overture. **Friedemann.** Slavonic Rhapsody No. 2. **Brien.** Bell A'peal. **Rossini.** Una voce poco fa. **Howe.** The Corner Flag; The Beach at San Feliu. **Scots Guards Band** conducted by **Major J. H. Howe**. Fontana LPS16264 (38s. 7d.).

My first reaction on seeing this record was to mutter "What? Another 1812?", but I forgive this for an excellent arrangement of **Friedemann's Slavonic Rhapsody No. 2** by **W. J. Duthoit** who was for long Professor of Instrumentation at **Kneller Hall** and who has made a magnificent job of it, despite slight congestion in the recorded sound. Of the shorter pieces *Bell A'peal* appeals to me more for its writing for (and playing of) the clarinets than its more obvious bell effects and **Major Howe's** two trifles are both bright and attractive. The playing is excellent throughout and the recording is good, with the qualification already mentioned. An excellent feature that other bands and record companies could copy with advantage is that the sleeve-note gives us the precise constitution of this 47 piece band.

THE GREAT IMMORTAL MUSICALS. Excerpts from *Showboat*; *Student Prince*; *Vagabond King*; *Rose Marie*; *Desert Song*; *Lilac Time*. Various artists. World Record Club SM107-112 (129s.).

These are reissues of old recordings, first published in 1961 and now put into an album. For its age the sound is reasonably good, although lacking the depth of modern recording. There is some degree of stereo spaciousness and spread but stereo is not used to suggest stage performances. *Lilac Time* first appeared in Vienna in 1916 but the substantially revised English version dates from 1922. *Showboat* was first produced in America in 1927 and came to England, with **Paul Robeson** as **Joe**, the following year. The other four made their first appearances here at intervals in between. As performances the six vary a good deal, as is inevitable with such a multiplicity of soloists, choruses and conductors. The best, I think, is *Student Prince*, for the singing of **Marion Grimaldi**, **John Wakefield**, **Robert Bowman** and **William McCue** under the direction of **John Hollingsworth**. Next to this I place *Showboat* directed by **Johnny Douglas**, although **Martin Lawrence**, as **Joe**, is far from having **Robeson's** outstanding rhythmic sense. He was able to borrow and repay from one note to another superbly. The overture to *Lilac Time* is a bit odd sounding here. I should have welcomed this album more enthusiastically had it been offered at a real bargain price. I understand that the records can be bought separately in which case *Student Prince* certainly, and perhaps *Showboat*, are reasonable if not outstanding buys.

MARCHES AND WALTZES. **Alford.** Colonel Bogey. **Safroni.** Imperial Echoes. **Rimmer.** The Cossacks. **Siebert.** Swing Along. **Schubert.** (arr. Langford). Marche Militaire. Arr. **Mortimer.** Marching with Sousa. **Ancliffe.** Nights of Gladness. **Heath.** Red Letter Day. Arr. **Seymour.** Waltzing with Gung'l. **Siebert.** Carillon Waltz. **Waldeufel.** Skaters Waltz. **Foden's Motor Works Band** conducted by **Rex Mortimer.** HMV CSD3665 (37s. 5d.).

Foden's Band is in excellent form and I hope that this indicates that conductor **Rex Mortimer**, who I gather has been ill, has returned to full health. Waltzes of the **Johann Strauss** kind are not in my view very good material for the all brass medium but the brisker waltzes here are well chosen and are tastefully directed and sensitively played. In particular I have enjoyed those by **Edrich Siebert** and **Reginald Heath**, two outstanding composers of light music for brass of the modern generation. As with the waltzes, the marches extend over many years and again I am tempted to pick out the more recent ones, by **Safroni** and **Siebert**. They are thoroughly worthy companions to those by the older genera-