

and piano diminishes the music considerably, for the poor pianist is made to strum and vamp his way through the set in the most unimaginative fashion. Renardy emerges from Paganini's severe technical examination with some credit and plays in a spirited and confident manner, though it has to be said that some passages obviously push his resources to their limits.

In the miscellaneous pieces on the second CD Renardy displays a good deal of personality and charm, particularly in the brief Saint-Saëns arrangement, but at this stage in his career his tone and technique were not quite on a par with the very best violinists of his day. Transfers have been well managed, though the sound is a little more open on the second CD than in the Paganini set. A.S.

BUSCH AND SERKIN. *Adolf Busch (vn); **Rudolf Serkin** (pf); *Adolf Busch Chamber Players / Adolf Busch. EMI mono © ⊕ CDS754374-2 (two discs: 114 minutes: ADD).

Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, "Appassionata", Op. 57 (from HMV C2879/81, 12/36). Sonata for violin and piano in E flat, Op. 12 No. 3^a (HMV DB1519/20, 7/32). **Mozart:** Sonata for keyboard and violin in F, K377/K374^e (DB3373/4, 8/41). Concerto for piano and orchestra No. 14 in E flat, K449^b (DB3690/92, 2/39). **Schumann:** Sonata for violin and piano No. 1 in A minor, Op. 105^a (DB3371/2, 6/44). **Reger:** Sonata for violin and piano No. 5 in F sharp minor, Op. 84—Allegretto^a (DB1523, 7/32). **Bach:** Sonata for violin and continuo in G, BWV1021^a (DB1434, 10/30). **Vivaldi** (arr. Busch): Sonata for violin and continuo in A, Op. 2 No. 2^a. **Geminiani** (arr. Busch): Sonata for violin and continuo in C minor, Op. 4 No. 9—Siciliano^a (both from DB1524, 7/32).

BUSCH AND SERKIN. VIOLIN SONATAS. **Adolf Busch** (vn); **Rudolf Serkin** (pf). Pearl mono © ⊕ GEMMCD9942 (66 minutes: AAD).

Bach: Partita for solo violin in D minor, BWV1004 (from HMV DB1422/4, 10/31). Sonata for violin and keyboard in G, BWV1021 (DB1434, 10/30). **Beethoven:** Sonata for violin and piano in E flat, Op. 12 No. 3 (DB1519/20, 7/32). **Brahms:** Sonata for violin and piano No. 2 in A, Op. 100 (DB1805/06, 6/33).

"Rudolf Serkin—The First Recordings", proclaims EMI's two-disc set, but in fact seven of the nine items contained therein feature the Czech-born pianist in a subsidiary role to that of the violinist Adolf Busch. The exceptions are a strong, beautifully judged account of the *Appassionata* Sonata, and a lively, elegant performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 with the Adolf Busch Chamber Players. Neither of these items is particularly well transferred: the Beethoven, already rather distantly recorded, has some curious background noises and heavy surfaces, while the Mozart has a confined, slightly muffled quality. These defects amount to little, however, when compared with the extraordinary crackling distortions which afflict all the Busch/Serkin items. I do not understand how such effects could be created on EMI's sophisticated transfer equipment, let alone tolerated and passed as suitable for public consumption.

In these circumstances I shall move on swiftly to the Pearl issue, but for those who are intrepid enough to investigate the EMI set I should add that my remarks about the Busch/Serkin performances on Pearl's disc also apply to the items on EMI. There are in fact two duplications—the Beethoven and Bach sonatas. I'm somewhat bewildered to find that the engineer who produced such poor results for EMI was also responsible for the transfers on Pearl's disc, which are clear, open and very faithful (except in the Brahms Sonata, where one or two slightly damaged originals have been used). The same gentleman has also supplied a good insert-note for Pearl, and I believe that he hits the nail on the head in the following com-

ment. "Busch had in fact no tremendous ambitions to be a virtuoso soloist. His technique was very adequate but not outstanding; many felt him to be at his best in chamber music where, unencumbered by technical considerations he could devote himself entirely to the spirit of the music."

Adolf Busch was an important teacher. He founded a great string quartet and also formed a chamber orchestra whose performances led to important reforms in the playing of baroque and classical music. But as a soloist he was clearly not in the front rank. His tone was somewhat unappealing and uneven, and difficult passages obviously placed a strain on his fingering ability and also his bowing arm. These problems are such as to affect all the performances recorded here: one feels that Busch is never sufficiently free of technical constraints to be able to let his imagination dwell on matters of interpretation. His performances are obviously worth investigating, and each item has some good features. But don't expect too much. A.S.

OSCAR NATZKE. OPERA ARIAS AND SONGS. Oscar Natzke (bass); *Hubert Greenslade (pf); orchestra / *Henry Geehl, *Warwick Braithwaite. Ode New Zealand Heritage Series mono © ⊕ CCODE1365 (69 minutes: ADD).

Handel: Samson—Honour and arms^b. W. H. Weiss. The village blacksmith^b (both from Parlophone E11402, 4/39). **Mozart:** Die Zauberflöte—O, Isis und Osiris^b (E11423, 10/39); In diesen heil'gen Hallen^c (sung in English. Australian Parlophone A4544. Recorded 1940). Don Giovanni—Madamina, il catalogo (not definitely known. A7362, 1940 or Columbia DB2291, 4/47). **Rossini:** Il barbiere di Siviglia—La calunnia^b (E11423). **Musorgsky:** Song of the flea (English. A7250, 1940 or DB2363, 2/48). **Ketèlbey:** Sanctuary of the heart^c. In a monastery garden^c (E11439, 3/40). **Beethoven:** Die Ehre Gottes aus der Natur, Op. 48 No. 4^a. Zärtliche Liebe, WoO123^a (DB2460, 11/48). **Schumann:** Die beiden Grenadiere, Op. 49 No. 1^a (A7250). **Tchaikovsky:** I bless you, forests, Op. 47 No. 5^a (all English). **Lehmann:** In a Persian garden—Myself when young^a (E11397, 3/39). **Malashkin:** Oh could I but express in song^a (English. DB2363). **Hewitt:** Out where the big ships go (DB2177, 7/45). **L. Fischer:** Der Kritikaster und der Trinker—In kühlen Kellar sitz^a (English). **M. Phillips:** Wimmen oh Wimmen^a (A7277, 1940). **Traditional:** Shenandoah. Blow the man down. Hullabaloo balay (all from DB2167, 4/45). **The Drunken Sailor.** Rio Grande. Billy boy (DB2177).

O come, all ye bassos. Ye teachers too: for here is the best singing-lesson-by-demonstration to be had in the current record lists. Here is that rarity, a true *basso profundo*; also, in the literal sense of the term, a true *basso cantante*. A sonorous, well-rounded voice of the finest texture, produced with unflawed evenness, expressively (though not subtly) used, achieving clarity of diction at minimal cost to the instrumental flow of sound, exhibiting a range of over two octaves, lightening the tone without changing its nature, intensifying without forcing: it is a most impressive performance, delightful as musical entertainment, invaluable as an object-lesson in how to sing.

Oscar Natzke was a New Zealander and a pupil, in London, of Alberto, last of the Garcias. He sang at Covent Garden in the winter of 1938, his "beautiful quality" being noted in press comments so that his career would surely have prospered there had it not been for the outbreak of war. He returned in the first season of the duly constituted Covent Garden Company in 1947, singing an admired Sarastro and Timur to Eva Turner's Turandot, but that was all. The New York City Opera became his artistic home, and in that Company he died, having suffered a stroke during a performance of *Die Meistersinger* in which he was appearing as Pogner. That was in October 1951, and if we accept 1908 as the year of his birth (some give 1905) that means he was only

43. His recordings will be remembered by older collectors, coming out on Parlophone black labels early in the war, when there was a dearth of good singing. To my own shame and confusion, I did not buy them or even make a point of listening to them. They were not HMV "celebrity" issues and therefore "couldn't be much good".

But they were, and are. "Honour and arms" (like the *Scipione* aria which represents him in "The Record Of Singing", Volume 4—EMI, 4/92) is an exemplary performance, with everything perfectly articulated yet perfectly even. Sarastro's arias combine authority with humanity, grace with power. His Leporello does not leer, and his Don Basilio does not sneer; nevertheless there is zest in both, plenty of pace and the scrupulous preservation of a true singing-style. The Beethoven songs are judiciously shaded, and the Chaliapin favourite *Oh could I but express in song* has a cello-like breadth of phrase. Ketèlbey and the rest gain in dignity from the noble timbre and unaffected manner. The shanties, sung with an ebullient chorus, can rarely have found a more rousing soloist. *The Drunken Sailor* exhibits the low Ds. *Shenandoah* the low D flat. Transfers are first-rate; documentation leaves something—names of conductors, accompanists, precise dates and sources of recording and so forth—to be desired. J.B.S.

BEETHOVEN. An die ferne Geliebte, Op. 98^a. **SCHUBERT.** Die schöne Müllerin, D795^b. **Wint-terreise**, D911^c. **Gerhard Hüsch** (bar); **Hanns Udo Müller** (pf). Preiser Lebendige Vergangenheit mono © ⊕ 89202 (two discs: 137 minutes: AAD). Item marked * from HMV DB4496/7 (3/50. Recorded 1936), *DB2429/36 (9/35), *DB2039/44 and HMV DA1344/6 (5/34).

After all these years Hüsch's performances of these three cycles remain a benchmark by which others come to be judged. Of course, in his later period, Fischer-Dieskau to an extent moved the goalposts, providing interpretations that gave a new, more interventionist cast to all three as he lived love and love's pain with an added immediacy, a more positive emphasis on the words. Now that Fischer-Dieskau himself is moving into the perspective of history, the particular verities to which Hüsch attached himself seem to have been restored to favour with a certain patrician reticence having its own validity.

What cannot be in doubt is that Hüsch owned one of the most sheerly beautiful baritone voices in the history of the gramophone; rounded, warm, easy in tone, perfectly focused without a trace of strain or wobble from top to bottom. He used it to create an ideal, seamless line on which the words were placed naturally and effortlessly. When he made these cycles he was only in his thirties, but had already established himself in opera and was resident at both the main houses in Berlin as early as 1930, the year he began his Lieder recitals. He established a reputation in that field almost at once, and was one of the first to move beyond a narrow range of songs.

In *Die schöne Müllerin* he deftly combines dramatic projection with inward musing. The false dawn of love, the unthinking adoration are contrasted with the pathos of the ensuing loss. His use of rubato throughout, within sensible, unexaggerated tempos, is exemplary. In *Song on Record 1* (Cambridge University Press: 1986), HF thought the "affective quality" of his *Winterreise* came "from the very poise of his aristocratic baritone which takes the perfect weight of each word and line, pushing out its meaning through consonants and vowels exquisitely placed in legato arches". Just so. In approaching it thus, Hüsch gradually builds to the overwhelming tragedy of the last four songs. In both works he is gratifyingly seconded by Hanns Udo Müller, whose clearly sculpted playing seems entirely in harmony with the baritone's singing. Sad that he was killed by a bomb during the war.

They are no less successful in the Beethoven cycle, recorded in 1936. Here again you have an entirely natural, classic reading that sets all sorts

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