

Rolls and Discs

By LAWRENCE JACOB ABBOTT

YEARS from now people will probably be amazed to recollect how few persons back in the 'twenties were really interested in recorded music. Since the phonograph companies have climbed out of the rut and produced machines and records which give a comparatively true reproduction of musical sound, the public has wonderful facilities right at its elbow to enjoy the world's greatest music and musicians. Yet how ridiculously small is the circle of people who are alive to the musical possibilities of the phonograph—beyond its use as mere entertainment!

It is not too fanciful to predict that in the not too distant future music will be taught in schools and colleges with the aid of phonographs; that homes will

contain phonographs for their libraries of music as much as a matter of course as to-day they contain book-shelves for libraries of literature; that the best phonographs will parallel in size, cost, and perfection of musical tone the best pianofortes of to-day.

Even now the interest in recorded music is growing rapidly enough to augur bright years to come. In response to such an interest a new magazine has been started, the "Phonograph Monthly Review," with offices at 101 Milk Street, Boston. Its October issue was its first. For those who want to delve into phonograph music thoroughly this publication should prove most useful. Its editorial contents are interesting and its reviews able; it has made an auspicious start, and I wish it every success.

Phonograph Records

SONATA IN A FOR VIOLONCELLO, Opus 69 (Beethoven). Played by Felix Salmond. In six parts, on three records. Columbia.

In two ways the phonograph is better adapted to chamber music than it is to the more pretentious forms, such as choral and orchestral music. In the first place, because the acoustics of the usual house or apartment are inadequate for the best reproduction of music which is designed to be played in a large hall. And, second, because the simpler forms of music can more nearly approach in reproduction the sound of the performances themselves. Not that I wish for a minute to disparage the almost unbelievable results attained in orchestral recording! But every addition to the library of chamber music records is most welcome—and especially one as superb as Salmond's playing of the A Major sonata.

The work itself holds interest even for those who consider most of the Beethoven sonatas dull. It is mentally stimulating music. Mr. Salmond's performance is very much alive; not only vigorous, but sensitive. The reproduction comes out clear and strong, the piano accompaniment being unusually good—true in tone and not too much in the background. This feature, as I recall, is a habit of Mr. Salmond's.

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE—PRELUDE (Wagner). Played by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Alfred Hertz. In two parts, on one record. Victor.

Following the three Wagner orchestral records made under the direction of Albert Coates and issued last month, comes another bit of Wagner—but this time played by an orchestra not three thousand miles east, but three thousand miles west of New York. The San Franciscans, by this record alone, can claim a place among the very best of the world's orchestras. Their string tone is a joy to the ear. Their wind band is pure-toned and precise. And in Mr. Hertz they have a conductor who draws out of Wagner's music all its eloquence, all its fiery passion. The climaxes are immense, sometimes too much so to reproduce clearly. Except for this the recording is flawless. Mr. Hertz has taken no liberties with the score; he ends the Prelude in mid-air, not attempting to treat it as a unit in itself, but only as an introduction to the music-drama which is to follow.

COUNTRY DANCE NO. 1; PASTORAL DANCE NO. 2; THE MERRYMAKERS' DANCE NO. 3—from "Neil Gwyn" (Edward German). Played by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Rudolph Ganz. On one record. Victor.

These charming English dances are chock-full of rhythm and melody. In playing them, the bold and brilliant violins of the St. Louis Symphony, though at times strident, manage to create a care-free rustic atmosphere. I should prefer to hear a performance with more repression on the part of the orchestra. But Mr. Ganz's performance as it stands is highly effective. Here again is an excellent piece of recording, with ample bass.

POLONAISE IN A FLAT, OPUS 53 (Chopin); **MARCHE MILITAIRE** (Schubert-Tausig). Played by Leopold Godowsky. Brunswick.

Again a milestone of progress. Here is the best pianoforte record I have yet heard. Its tone is actually the piano tone, without distortions or falseness in *timbre*. Its one drawback is that it makes the piano sound far away. But there have been so many piano records, even since the era of electrical recording, which sounded like anything but a piano that a true record is an achievement. Godowsky's performance is all one could ask for. Both selections he plays as if he reveled in them.

MADAMA BUTTERFLY—Un bel di vedremo (Puccini); **FAUST—Jewel Song** (Gounod). Sung by Edith Mason. Brunswick.

FREISCHÜTZ—Agatha's Prayer (Weber). Sung by Maria Jeritza. In two parts, on one record. Victor.

DINORAH—Shadow Song (Meyerbeer). Sung by Amelita Galli-Curci. In two parts, on one record. Victor.

SAMSON ET DALILA—Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix (Saint-Saëns); **CARMEN—Gipsy Song** (Bizet). Sung by Sigrid Onegni. Brunswick.

SAMSON ET DALILA—Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix; Printemps qui commence (Saint-Saëns). Sung by Marguerite D'Alvarez. Victor.

BOHEME—Racconto di Rodolfo (Puccini); **AIDA—Celeste Aida** (Verdi). Sung by Giovanni Martinelli. Victor.

The usual deluge of opera discs is upon us. For the most part they are vocal selections, sung as such, and not as parts of an opera. "Agatha's Prayer" comes nearest to being otherwise. Of the lot, I like best Edith Mason's interpretation of the familiar "Butterfly" aria. The "Freischütz" record is a little different from most; it would be a better record if Jeritza's high notes were of pleasanter

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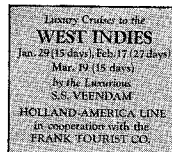
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quality. As a vehicle for the coloratura soprano voice Meyerbeer's "Shadow Song" is a cleverly wrought combination of agreeable light music with stunt passages. It is hereby recommended as a good example for devotees of Galli-Curci. Of the two renditions of Saint-Saëns's famous aria (the melody to which many a person has fox-trotted), the one by Mme. D'Alvarez has more personality and a voice of softer timbre, but her faulty intonation spoils what might otherwise be a noteworthy performance. Martinelli brings his powerful voice into action again, achieves brilliant results with "Céleste Aida," but makes a far more interesting recording of "Bohème." A good companion record to the death scene from the same opera.

MOONLIGHT SONATA—Opus 27, No. 2 (Beethoven). Played by Harold Bauer. In three parts, on two records, the fourth part being Beethoven's Gavotte in F Major. Victor.

There is one strikingly disappointing thing about these two records. Harold Bauer's playing is so fine that it is a great pity the piano tone could not have been recorded better. Most of the time it is over-resonant, as if the hammers were striking bells instead of taut wires. The calm serenity of the first movement and the surging motion of the last are equally effective in Mr. Bauer's interpretation.

WAIATA POI (HIII); MELODRAMA FROM "PICCOLINO" (Gulraud). Played by the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Henri Verbrugghen. Brunswick.

An absolutely unique record. The first number, a Maori song-dance, sounds for all the world like the noise which emanates from a cheap radio store. I cannot conceive how any recording laboratory could approve the release of such a disc. The reverse side, strangely enough, contains a superb recording of delicate effects with massed strings, free from every trace of the nasal tone in the violins which electrical recording sometimes produces.

NEGRO SPIRITUALS—Go Down, Moses—Swing Low, Sweet Chariot; IRISH CRADLE SONG (Alfred Pochon). Played by the Flonzaley Quartet. Victor.

It seems strange to hear a sophisticated string quartet play Negro spirituals. Somehow the quartet style robs the spirituals of their character. More fitting is the "Irish Cradle Song"—gentle, flowing melody. Even this does not seem quite the proper dish for the Flonzaleys to serve. But, since the dish is there, who better could serve it?

Piano Rolls

EL CONTRABANDISTA (Schumann-Tausig). Played by Josef Hofmann. Duo-Art.

FANTASIE, OPUS 17 (Schumann). Played by Ossip Gabrilowitsch. In two parts. Ampico.

It takes a Josef Hofmann to do full justice to Schumann's conception of the smuggler. Music with as much color as a Rimsky-Korsakoff orchestration—with as much incessant rhythm as Mendelssohn's "Midsummer Night's Dream Scherzo." No modern rum-runner was ever such a smuggler as this one! In Schumann's more serious style, the "Fantasie" is a magnificent piece of pleading eloquence. Gabrilowitsch plays it with breadth of tone and poetic phrasing.

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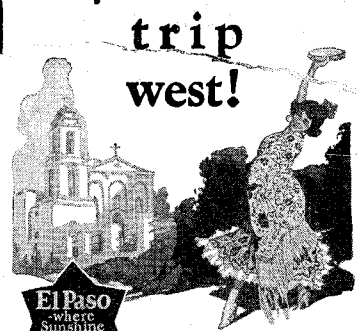
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