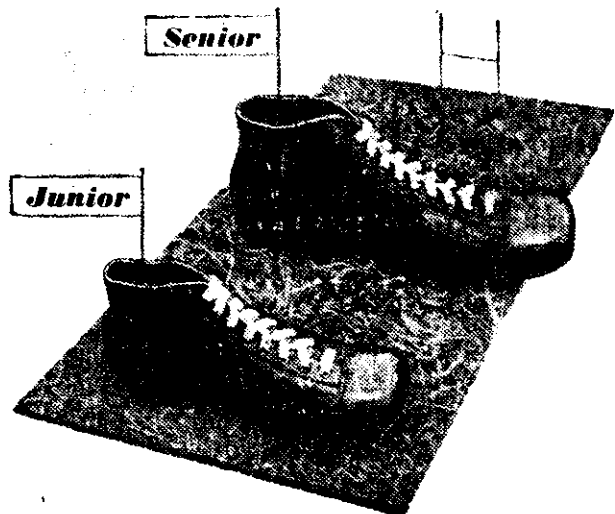


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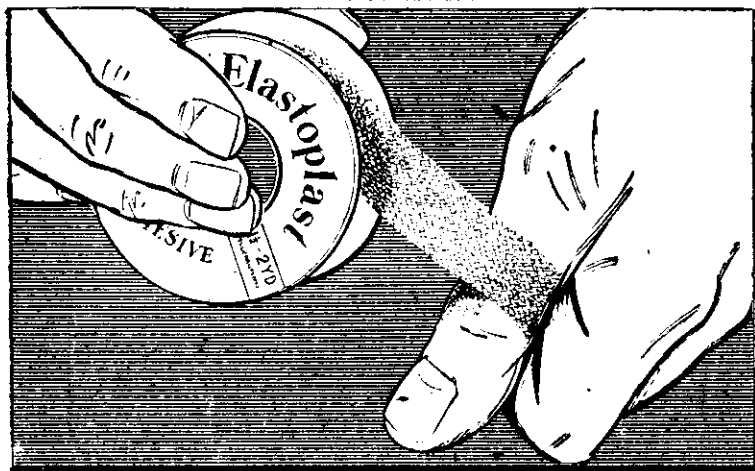
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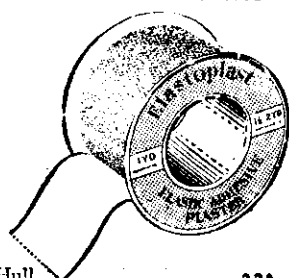
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NEW RECORDINGS

From B to B

WHAT magic there is in the letter "B" I do not know, but if you stop to think about it you may be prepared to admit that there are more composers to admire in this part of the alphabet than anywhere else from A to Z. There is, for instance, John Sebastian Bach, who scores full marks again with a recording of his *Ascension Oratorio*, otherwise known as Cantata No. 11: Praise Our God (Nixa LLP 8034). Listening to this as performed by the Swabian Choral Singers and the Stuttgart Bach Orchestra, with Claire Fassbender-Luzy (soprano), Ruth Michaelis (alto), Werner Hohmann (tenor), Bruno Muller (bass) and Hans Grishkat as conductor, one is torn between wishing to be in Leipzig in the early 18th Century when music like this was to be heard at St. Thomas's every Sunday, and wishing Bach were with us today to hear his music so wonderfully sung and played. Remembering something about the troubles Bach had with his singers, one imagines that he would probably have taken this disc home to show them how it should be done. As you may gather, the performance and the recording are fine.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said so unreservedly about the *Magnificat* (Nixa CLP 60), in which Bach at times gets a raw deal. This work was recorded from a performance at the 1950 International Bach Festival at Schaffhausen, the performers being the Reinhardt Chorus, the Winterthur Chorus, the Winterthur Orchestra and soloists under Walter Reinhardt. The interpretation is, in general, pedantic; the soloists have their off moments and so, too, do the recording engineers. Nevertheless, if you take your Bach in the spirit in which it was written, you still may wish to possess this disc.

Bach's musical output was so enormous and, within the limits of his style, his ideas so varied and so continually original, that it seems a considerable understatement that he should call a set of little keyboard studies "Inventions." These short two-part pieces will be familiar to most pianists—or should be—either as the quiet delights which they are, or as recollections of tiresome examination assignments. The so-called *Three-Part Inventions* were actually called "Sinfonias" by Bach, but as this name has acquired a different meaning these days, it seems easier to put these small pieces along with the *Two-Part Inventions*, and let them take the same name which they grace very well. As played by Lukas Foss (Brunswick AXTL 1027) these *Fifteen Three-Part Inventions* become much more than studies and are a long way from the examination room. In fact, they are as satisfying music as any Bach ever invented. If you are a pianist, borrow the disc, listen to Lukas Foss and then go away and endeavour to do likewise; if your bent is the voice, the violin, the piccolo, the double B Flat bass, or just the listening, you had better acquire the disc and meditate on what fun pianists have.

I cannot feel so happy about or with Wilhelm Kempff's *A Bach Recital*



(C) Pouch

(Decca LXT 2820). Wilhelm Kempff is a fine pianist—there can be no two minds about that; and he presents Bach with an immaculate and flexible technique. Yet, somehow or other, one feels that sometimes there is too much *mein Kempff* and not enough *mein Bach*. In other words, Kempff seems too much concerned with turning on good piano playing, which is not always compatible with good Bach interpretation. His *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*, clearly and carefully unfolded, seems not quite to reach what should be its ultimate conclusions. It misses out a bit on the climaxes. This far more than tolerable playing would be acceptable, however, were it not for the rest of the programme, which comprises six chorales or chorale-preludes and a movement from the *Flute Sonata in E Flat* all

arranged—transcribed, pardon me—by Wilhelm Kempff, no other. The result is uneven in quality and in the well-known *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring* the pianist so far forgets himself as to permit himself an unbecoming and old-fashioned slow-up in his last phrase. In fact, Wilhelm Kempff's polish chips off a bit in places.

Moving on among the *Bs* brings us to Beethoven—String Quintet in C Major, Op. 29, played by the Pascal Quartet with Walter Gerhardt, second viola (Nixa CLP 1214). The Pascal Quartet have now recorded all the Beethoven String Quartets with, in addition, the Piano Quartet, Op. 16 (with Artur Balsam), and the String Quintet, altogether a notable achievement. In such an undertaking, occasional lapses from the impeccable—and there are some—can be understood and readily excused. The String Quintet, Op. 29, however, needs no excuse, being right on the beam—remarkable music, intelligently played and carefully recorded. Another highlight in the same series is the Op. 18, No. 1 (Nixa CLP 1201), with the Piano Quartet, Op. 16, on the reverse side. Artur Balsam's piano playing is first rate.

Peter Rybar (violin) and the West Austrian Radio Orchestra conducted by Hans Moltkau play Brahms's Concerto in D Major, Op. 77 (Nixa CLP 1113). Peter Rybar is no mean fiddler and he attacks the Brahms with assurance, with the orchestra backing him up solidly; but somehow—maybe because of too

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 12, 1954.