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NEW RECORDINGS

Four Star, Maybe Plus

A monthly review by
OWEN JENSEN

HERE is a bunch of LPs that you might well put your money on; or, for that matter, into. The fidelity of each is as good as you will hear; the playing on nearly all of them does the composer proud; and, as for the music—well, that's a matter of taste. For me, the music comes first. It must be good of its kind but, to go into the personal library, it should be something that one likes well enough to come back to time and time again. One is hardly likely to enjoy this, however, if the performer doesn't see eye to eye or ear to ear with the composer. And, if the technician blots his copybook, you have to make up your mind whether it wouldn't be better to wait for a fairer transcript. So when it comes to four star and the edge that makes the plus, a balance has to be struck between the music, the performance and the art of the recording studio. This is how it comes out.

Take Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor which, whatever your personal taste, is music not to be cavilled at. Among the most popular and perhaps the best known of all symphonies, it has received pretty rough treatment from time to time, either from the conductor, his players or from the recording people. Now comes along a version in which all of them seem to agree on what's what. Erich Kleiber with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam (Decca LXT 2851) present the genuine Beethoven. Symphony No. 5 in C Minor is given with authority, not only in regard to the text but in the spirit of the music. The Concertgebouw play in their best manner, precise, but flexible to the demands of the music.

Then there is Haydn, Symphonies No. 83 ("Hen") and 96 ("Miracle"), not the best known of the Salomon series, but a very happy addition to the listening repertoire. Sir John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra play them with that lithe, virile enthusiasm which one associates with the Hallé (H.M.V. ALP 1038).

Another item you might like to add to your library is Chabrier's *Suite Pastorale*. Chabrier, Civil Servant turned musician, occupies a much more important place in French music than that with which he is sometimes credited. The *Suite Pastorale* is just what its

name implies—nothing deep, but colourful and quietly beautiful, what the French would call "charmant." On the reverse side is the equally charming music of Bizet's suites, *Jeux d'Enfants* and *La Jolie Fille de Perth*. Both sides are played sympathetically and expertly by L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris conducted by Edouard Lindenberg (Decca LXT 2860). The recording is fine.

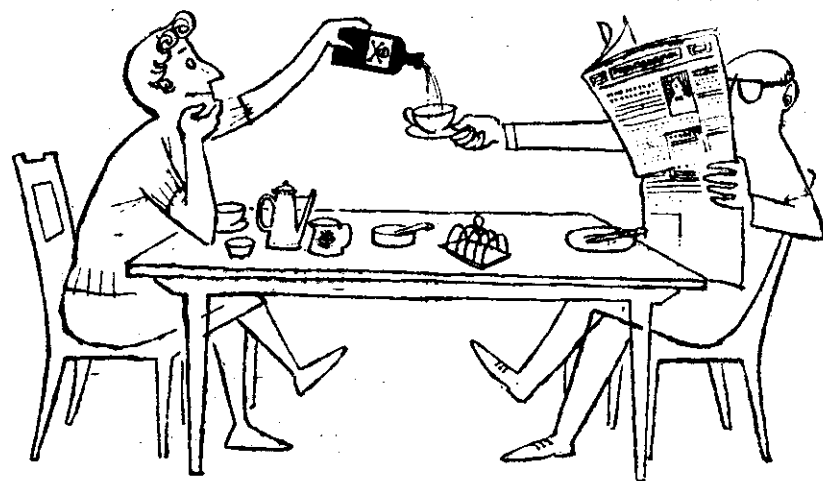
And now a little sophisticated wit: in fact, the epitome of musical good humour. Saint-Saens's *Carnival of Animals*. For good measure on this disc, Noel Coward underlines Saint-Saens's jokes with a narration of verses by Ogden Nash about the animals and their habits. It is very well done in the Coward style. Some eyebrows have been raised, I believe, at the playing of André Kostelanetz and his orchestra. Too plush and svelte for Saint-Saens, seems to be the criticism. Saint-Saens, I think, can take it. And with pianists as scintillating as Leonid Hambro and Jascha Zayde, the *Carnival of Animals* is as amusing a zoo as you might visit anywhere. The recording measures up to the interpretation (Philips NBR 6001).

Cook's Tour-de-Force

A new batch of Nixa records has the sub-label "Another Cook Sounds of Our Times Recording." This is the success story of 41-year-old Emory Cook, an American radio-engineer with bright ideas.

On radar work for Western Electric during the war, Emory Cook tinkered about with a little recording on the side. Like a lot of other people, Cook was concerned at the high degree of distortion in current commercial recordings—current in 1946, that is. He turned his inventive mind to overcoming some of these defects. Leaving out the technical details and cutting a short story into an LP, it seems that Cook came out with a disc which was already an improvement on a 78 he had exhibited at the 1949 New York Audio Fair proudly publicised as "Cook, 20,000-cycle Records." His 1951 LP exhibit was described as "making hi-fi history."

Cook, having no money to spend on Toscaninis or Boston Symphony Orches-



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Prepared for Richard Hudnut Ltd., Auckland.

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