

SYMPHONY CONCERT

THE American symphony orchestras seem to have developed a character of their own, or rather, each a character of its own. Dash and chromium-plated efficiency may sometimes overshadow subtlety of interpretation, but the best of them under the best conductors would rate high anywhere.

In the top bracket must certainly be placed the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Conducted by Rafael Kubelik the Chicago ensemble gives an exceptionally fine playing of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 in C Minor (Mercury MG 50007). The same nobility of approach makes the Chicago-Kubelik Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6 (Mercury MG 50006) a performance much to be admired. The richness of the orchestration and the surge of the music come off without too much sugar.

While we are listening to Tchaikovsky, we may lend an ear to his Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat Minor. Victor Schioler is the soloist. He brings off the music with clarity and strength, without an overdose of virtuosity. The Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra under Eric Tuxen seem to be entirely in sympathy with the soloist (Mercury MG 10094).

Under the Mercury label, too, comes the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra conducted by Antal Dorati. Their playing of *The Pines of Rome* and *The Fountains of Rome* by Respighi adds a glow to what is pleasant but not particularly distinguished music (Mercury MG 50011). There could be a little more of the luminous quality, however, in the Minneapolis performance of Debussy's *Three Nocturnes* (the Cecilian Singers assist in *Sirenes*) although this is a version not to be dismissed lightly. Stravinsky's *Firebird* on the reverse side is interpreted by Dorati with loving care (Mercury MG 50025).

By OWEN JENSEN

By comparison, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra sounds a little pallid; or is it that conductor Paul Paray seeks refinement of tone colour rather than brilliance? In the Beethoven Symphony No. 7 in A Major (Mercury MG50022) they seem happier than in the riper romanticism of Wagner-Lohengrin: Preludes to Act 1 and Act 3, Tannhauser Overture, The Mastersingers Prelude and the Ride of the Valkyries (Mercury MG 50021).

If you enjoy Brahms you'll like his Piano Quartet in A Major, Op. 26 as played by the Albinetti Trio with Raphael Hillyer, viola (Mercury MG 10090). This is fine, virile playing—and good recording too.

The Roth String Quartet play two quartets by Mozart, No. 4 in G Major (K.387) and No. 15 in D Minor (K.421) (Mercury MG 10108), not entirely satisfactorily. The first violin is by no means over-particular about intonation and there seems a disinclination to follow consistently Mozart's dynamic directions.

The Dumbarton Oaks Chamber Orchestra with Alexander Schneider as leader comes much nearer the letter and the spirit of Mozart in his Divertimento in D Major, K.251 (Mercury MG 10002). I have put this among the chamber music because that is the way they play it and the way it should be.

If you are interested in two-piano playing, look to Abram Chasins and Constance Keen in a performance of the Brahms Waltzes (Mercury MG 10061). To be recommended both for the quality of the ensemble and of the recording too.

A new label, "Lumen," will be circulating round these parts soon. If the

advance copies are any indication, "Lumen" should offer some interesting listening. Of French origin, both artists and some of the music too are the home-grown product.

From the bunch of discs to hand, several stand out for special mention. There's some engaging singing by Irma Kolassie in songs by Faure and Duparc (Lumen LD 2-406) and Gerard Souzay in songs by Roussel and Jacques Leguerney (Lumen LD 3-407).

Organists will know what to expect from Marcel Dupre. He plays Bach (two Chorales and Prelude and Triple Fugue in E Flat) (Lumen LD 2-113) and two Fantasies by Mozart (Lumen LD 2-112). The playing is fine and the recording is better than most. From Bach, too, comes the second Cantata of the Christmas Oratorio (Lumen LD 3-115). The soloists are Eugénie Lorentz, Dominique Weber, Lucie Rauh and Hugues Cuenod. The soprano hardly matches the rest of the team. The Chorale St. Guillaume de Strasbourg and orchestra conducted by Fritz Munch obviously know what they are about in the matter of performing Bach.

Also in this advance list of Lumen discs is some piano playing by Sigi Weissenberg. Weissenberg carries too many technical guns (and uses them too) to make the best of Haydn (Sonata in E, Flat) and Soler (Three Sonatas) which means that the Bach-Liszt Prelude and Fugue in A Minor and a curious set of variations by Czerny sound more convincing (Lumen LD 3-400). In a Liszt recital, however, Weissenberg's playing has the stamp of authority. He plays the Sonata in B Minor, Funerailles, Two Sonnets of Petrarche and Valse Improptu (Lumen LD 3-404).

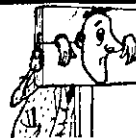
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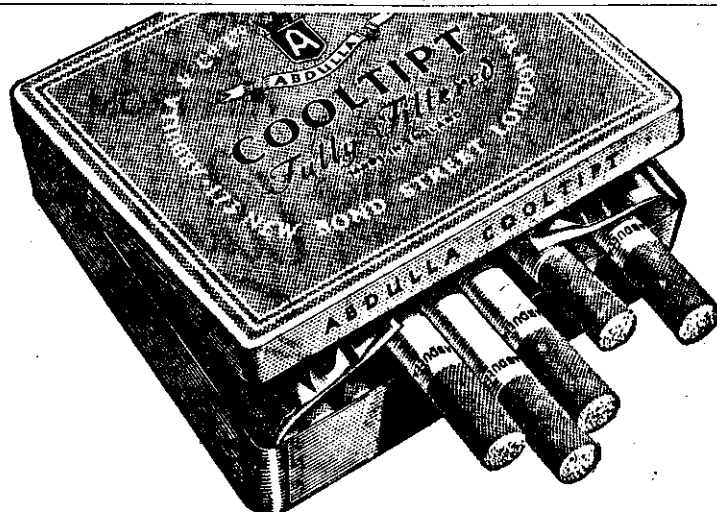
GERHARD WILLNER

IN the years following the war two well-known artists on the New Zealand concert platform were the lieder singer Dora Willner, and her pianist husband Gerhard. We have recently learnt that Gerhard Willner died in London on Christmas Eve.

The Willners first met New Zealanders during the war in Egypt. In Cairo they had played a prominent part in the city's

musical life, where for four years Gerhard had been choirmaster of All Saints' Cathedral. After the arrival of servicemen they set about organising concerts and music groups to entertain them, and in recognition of this work the New Zealand Government later granted them New Zealand citizenship. After the war they decided to come to New Zealand and for several years their concerts and broadcasts were a feature of our musical life. One of the most memorable of Gerhard's achievements was a series of Beethoven recitals at which he played the 32 sonatas from memory. A few years ago they left for Melbourne and later went on to London.

In England Gerhard became a friend of the Schubert authority Richard Capell, who on his death left him many of his books. He was engaged in writing his autobiography "My Passport is Music" and a book on zoo animals, and had also been asked by the chief music critic of *The Times* to translate some scientific treatises concerning the folk music of the Wolga Tribes. Besides stamp collecting, his main hobby was the study of zoos and zoo animals, which he photographed admirably. For his work in this field he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society, London. The many servicemen who had the tedium of life in Egypt made more bearable by the work of the Willners will hear of his death with particular regret.

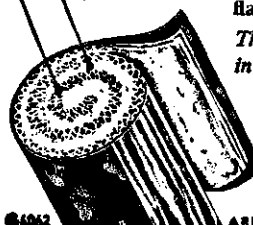


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