



MUSIC ON RECORD

Symphony Week

by "DISCOBOLUS"

AFTER having been starved of symphonies for a long time we get four in one week and good ones at that. These records pose some interesting problems, not the least of which is the standard of recording quality we now demand as a matter of right. The other thing is the importance of approach in a recording which we are to hear over and over again, which is exemplified by Ataulfo Argenta's conducting of the Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4 with the Swiss Romande on Stereophonic SXLM 1015. I am quite prepared to have Tchaikovsky's emotion torn to pieces in the concert hall occasionally, though I don't like it, but I couldn't live with an over-emotional recording. Much rather do I prefer Argenta's approach, which allows the composer to speak for himself with a very welcome restraint in interpretation, though the recorded sound is extraordinarily vivid. This is the approach to Tchaikovsky I personally prefer.

I very much prefer, too, the approach of the central European conductor to Dvorak, who does not, to my mind, respond to over-serious "Germanic" interpretation. This is shown by Karel Ancerl, recently in New Zealand, who conducts the Wiener Symphoniker in Dvorak's "New World" Symphony and Smetana's *Vltava* ("The Moldau"). The Czech approach seems to me more consistently light-hearted and fresh, and this is nowhere better shown than in the slow movement of the "New World," where the sometimes lugubrious cor anglais tune now flows along in innocent charm. "The Moldau," too, is poetic without having the somewhat over-weighted close-up quality of some recent American versions.

Dvorak's Symphony No. 4 on MALP 1537 gets a very similar treatment. The orchestra is the London Philharmonic and the conductor Constantin Silvestri, who usually gives Tchaikovsky the "high-power" treatment which I don't personally like. Here, however, his rubato seems to me well under control and Dvorak emerges with all his unself-conscious charm, the lavish flood of melody falling gratefully on the ear. An excellent recording of his "Carnaval" overture fills up the disc. One or two moments of harshness are of little importance.

Pride of place in these symphony recordings, though, goes to Bruno Walter on KLC 673 doing the Beethoven "Pastoral" Symphony with the Columbia Symphony. It is interesting to see that the complete set of Beethoven symphonies of Walter's just released in Britain has this symphony done with the Philadelphia, a record which was issued at least before 1955. This version released here is, I understand, one of an entirely new set of records Walter has recently made, and it shows why he has such a tremendous reputation as a Beethoven conductor. The essential "rightness" of tempos in particular is a joy, though of course the Pastoral is not the most searching of the symphonies to conduct.



BEETHOVEN

I have always thought its happy charm makes a good introduction to Beethoven, and this recording can be bought with confidence.

Another fine record for the Beethoven-lover is MALP 1663 with the five great overtures, *Fidelio*, *Leonore No. 3*, *Coriolanus*, *Prometheus* and *Egmont* by the Berlin Philharmonic under Rudolf Kempe. Kempe has the massive drama of these overtures under full control and the orchestra plays splendidly. Once or twice I felt as though I would have welcomed a faster tempo, but I think it's only because I have become accustomed to a little more speed. The climax of *Leonore No. 3* in particular is magnificent. This is a definitive recording.

How you will like Gyorgy Cziffra playing his own "paraphrases, transcriptions and improvisations" on MALD 1604 will depend on whether you are a lover of piano playing or of piano music, for the incredible technique at first distracts the attention from the fact that these arrangements of such things as the *Blue Danube*, *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka*, "themes" from William Tell, and so on, are musically almost worthless. There is a photo of Cziffra on the cover which provides evidence that he has the normal number of fingers, which no one listening to his incredible technique could possibly believe.

Alan Lomax was for six years in charge of the Archive of American Folk Songs in the Library of Congress. When he left, it had 25,000 folk songs on disc, a large number of which he had collected himself. On MCLP 1192 he is recorded for the first time singing fifteen of the most famous American ballads, which no lover of folk song should miss, from "Frankie and Johnny" through "Jesse James" to the "Boll Weevil." These are songs which you must know, Lomax's voice is perfectly adequate, and his style is impeccable.

If Lomax sings songs you *must* know, Kenneth McKellar on LKM 4295 sings songs you *do* know. This record is called "Roamin' in the Gloamin'," and though it does include Harry Lauder's masterpiece it has six or seven genuine Scottish songs like "The Cockle Gatherer" and "The Road to the Isles" as well as patriotic songs like "Scotland the Brave." McKellar's singing is straightforward and manly and this is surely what songs like this need most. I could have done without the orchestral accompaniment, but of its kind it is well done.

We don't often see British light music given the full treatment of orchestral playing and recording which today seems to be the lot of Viennese light music. A pleasant exception is LW 5297 on which Anthony Collins conducts the New Symphony Orchestra in Sullivan's "Overture di Ballo," Balfour Gardiner's "Shepherd Fennel's Dance," and Percy Grainger's "Shepherd's Hey." These are all lively and engaging little works in the "swinging tune" type of music and they make for delightfully relaxed listening. The recording is splendid.

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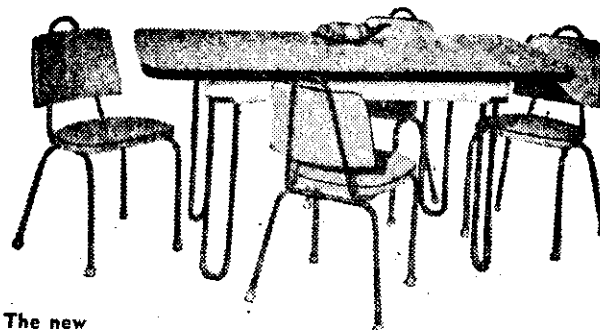
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