

THE ART OF JUSSI BJÖRLING: The early Swedish records, 1929-1936: di CURTIS: Torna a Surriento; SJÖGREN: I drömmen du är mig nära; KÖRLING: Vita rosor; GEEHL: For you alone; GOUNOD: Roméo et Juliette --Ah! lève-toi, soleil; VERDI: Rigoletto--Questa o quella; TOSELLI: Serenata, Op. 6, No. 1; ARTHUR: Today; KÁLMÁN: Das Veilchen von Montmartre--Du Veilchen von Montmartre; Die Czardasfürstin--Heut' Nacht hab' ich geträumt von dir; LAPARRA: L'illustre Fregona--Mélancolique tombe le soir; BORODIN: Prince Igor--Vladimir's cavatina; PUCCINI: Tosca--Recondita armonia; Tosca--E lucevan le stelle; VERDI: Rigoletto--La donna è mobile; LEONCAVALLO: Pagliacci--Vesti la giubba; SJÖBERG: Tonerna; RANDEL (arr.): Ack Värmeland, du sköna; TRAD: Allt under himmelens faste; SCHRADER: I de lyse naetter; Italian Opera: VERDI: Rigoletto--La donna è mobile; Trovatore--Di quella pira; Trovatore--Ah si, ben mio; Aida--Celeste Aida; MASCAGNI: Cavalleria rusticana--O Lola bianca; Cavalleria rusticana--Mamma, quel vino é generoso; LEONCAVALLO: Pagliacci--Vesti la giubba; CILÉA: L'Arlesiana--E la solita storia; PUCCINI: Manon Lescaut--Donna non vidi mai; Bohème--Che gelida manina; Bohème--O soave fanciullo (with Anna-Lisa Björling, soprano); Tosca--Recondita armonia; Tosca--E luceban le stella; Fanciulla del West--Ch'ella mi creda libero; Turandot--Nessun dorma; GIORDANO: Andrea Chenier--Come un bel di di maggio; Fedora--Amor ti vieta; French Opera and Operatta: GOUNOD: Faust--Salut, demeure; Roméo et Juliette--Ah! lève-toi, soleil; BIZET: Pêcheurs de perles--Jo crois entendre encore; OFFENBACH: La belle Helene--Au mont Ida; J. STRAUSS: Zigeunerbaron--Wer uns getraut (with Hjordis Schymberg, soprano); MILLOÜCKER: Bettelstudent--Ich setz' den Fall (with Schymberg); Bettelstudent--Ich hab' kein Geld; FRIML: Vagabond king--Only a rose; Popular Songs and Encores: RACHMANINOFF: In the silence of the night, Op. 4, No. 3; Lilacs, Op. 21, No. 5; LEONCAVALLO: Mattinata; TOSTI: Ideale; di CAPUA: O sole mio; CARUSO: Dreams of long ago; GEEHL: For you alone; FOSTER: Jeanie with the light brown hair; D'HARDELLOT: Because. Jussi Bjorling tenor. EMI RLS 715 3 discs.

I well remember my first impression of the Björling voice. Irving Kolodin had just come from the Gramophone Shop with a discovery he wanted to share. I think the first record was Celeste Aida and Che gelida manina. Naturally when Bjorling made his New York debut in a Town Hall recital, 4 January 1938, I was there. So was Edward Johnson. Bjorling sang, I think for his final encore, Ch'ella mi creda, which as an old collector I had always associated with Johnson. I was hardly surprised when I heard that Jussi was signed up for the Met. He made his debut there in Bohème, 24 November 1938. As everyone knows, he remained with the company until 1957, though he was absent for four war years when he was not permitted to cross Germany, and he missed the 1954-55 season. He died of a heart condition 8 September 1960, at age 49.

One's reaction to Björling was conditioned by one's taste in operatic tenors. His repertory, at least outside Sweden, was all in Italian and French operas. If one expects juicy emotionalism in Puccini and Verdi one may prefer a real Italian temperament. But to

those of us who respond to clean and musical singing Bjorling came as a refreshing novelty. There was never any question about his voice, probably the most beautiful tenor since the young Gigli. It did take him some time to establish himself as a popular favorite at the Met, but in the post-war years he was in a class by himself.

This six-sided set tells only part of the story. The approach is very loosely chronological, beginning with his first published records as a tenor. As most of my readers must know, there exist six sides of pre-history. Jussi, with his tenor father and his two brothers, toured the States in 1920 as the Björling Male Voice Quartet, and at that time they made a few records for Columbia. But by 1929, at age 18, his voice had changed, and already he was singing at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm. The first side in this set contains 10 selections made between 1929 and 1932. Side two carries us up to 1936. So far everything is sung in Swedish. The voice from the first is unmistakable but immature. From this point on chronology is abandoned; we skip around between 1936 and 1949. The second disc is devoted to Italian opera, the third to French opera, operetta and songs. The two by Rachmaninoff, sung in English with orchestra, seem a little out of place with what follows. There have been differing opinions about Bjorling as a lieder singer, but it is unfortunate that so extensive a program should neglect this phase of his art entirely. Indeed, there is little musical substance in the non-operatic portions of the set.

Collectors will find some old favorites among the arias. Bjorling's Nessun dorma in its day was considered by many the best of that aria. Turiddu's farewell to his mother certainly shows the tenor at his most dramatic, and bits from Manon Lescaut and La fanciulla del West are still exciting. The Faust and Roméo numbers are admirable, and the piece from La belle Hélele (in Swedish) is an old favorite. Ah si ban mio has rarely been sung so lyrically, but why on this program it follows Di quella pira would be hard to explain. Taken one by one the standard of all these recordings is very high, but after listening to a whole side one begins to wish for more nuance. All made in Sweden, mostly with conductor Nils Grevillius, they give the impression that power was the important consideration, and that Jussi enters into the spirit by pouring out his golden tones without stint. This is not quite the way we remember him at the Met, nor indeed is it the way one hears him in the various opera sets he made in the fifties. And later recital recordings show the voice as a much more sensitive instrument.

Matrix numbers and dates are given in the accompanying brochure.

BORIS CHRISTOFF in seinen frühen Arien--und Lied-Aufnahmen: MOZART: Don Giovanni--Madamina; VERDI: Ernani--Infelice; Don Carlo--Ella giammai m'amo; BOITO: Mefistofele--Ave Signor; Mefistofele--Son lo spirito che nega; MUSORGSKI: Boris Godounow--Pimen's monolog; In the town of Kazan; I have attained the highest power; Farewell, Prayer and

Death of Boris (with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano); TCHAIKOVSKI: Eugen Onegin--Prince Gremin's aria; MUSORGSKI: Khovantchina--Dositheus' aria; BORODIN: Prince Igor--Galitzky's aria; How goes it, prince? RIMSKI-KORSAKOV: Sadko--Song of the Viking guest; The legend of the invisible city of Kitesch--Prince Youri's aria; TRAD: Song of the Volga boatmen; MUSORGSKI: Song of the flea; The grave; TRAD: Siberian prisoner's song; MUSORGSKI: Softly the spirit flew up to heaven; Fieldmarshall death; LISHIN: She laughed; CALDARA: Come raggio di sol. Boris Christoff, basso; Wilhelm Schüchter, Anatole Fistoulari, Herbert von Karajan, Issay Dobrowen, Nicolai Malko, conductors; Gerald Moore, piano. EMI Electrola 1C 147-03 336/7, 2 discs

It is hard to think of Boris Christoff as having "passed into the more recent history of singing," an Jurgen Kesting puts it in his jacket notes. He was born, says Kesting, on 18th May 1918 (according to Kutsch/Riemens; other sources give 1919) in the Bulgarian town of Plovdiv." Still another source, the brand new Baker-Slonimsky, says 1914. However that may be, he made his debut in Rome in 1946. What I had not known was that his career, "after a long interruption due to illness, was resumed some time ago." The present retrospective is made up of early recordings, dating between 1949 and 1952. Inevitably Keatings' notes are titled The Successor to Feodor Chaliapin. The resemblance is unmistakable.

I first heard Christoff as Boris Godounow in Paris, I think in 1953. The production was shabby, and I have no recollection of the other members of the cast. But my impression of Christoff was as a smaller-scale Chaliapin. Bear in mind that something like a quarter of a century had passed since I heard the great Russian (three times as Boris among other things) and that at the time I was young and impressionable. But the sense of an overwhelming presence was stronger in Chaliapin than in any other singer in my experience. That Christoff's voice was smaller is hard to believe as one listens to these recordings, but as we know, at least since the invention of the microphone, it is never safe to judge a voice's size by records. However, my impression is confirmed by a friend who heard him frequently in the early years. In other ways the two singers are different. Chaliapin was completely unpredictable. For evidence of this only listen to some of the songs and arias he recorded more than once. He was a law unto himself, and he was Russian in whatever language he sang. Christoff is Bulgarian, and he studied in Rome with Riccardo Stracciari, which may account for a stricter discipline.

Christoff's opening number provides a good contrast. Chaliapin's Leporello must have been a model of all things unallowable in Mozart. With him on the stage one wonders where there was room for Don Giovanni. His recording of Madamina tells us all we need to know. I am not sure that Leporello is one of Christoff's roles, but at least his singing of the aria is kept within bounds. I am not convinced that he had a very strong sense of humor, but he enjoys playing with the words. Infelice, complete with recitative and cabaletta, finds him more at

home. The opening is very dramatic, the cantabile smooth and flowing, the cabaletta fast and furious. As Kesting suggests, the great monolog from Don Carlo may be a little over-emotional, but for the soft opening we can forgive a lot. With two selections from Mefistofele he is back in Chaliapin territory, and here indeed he sounds like his great predecessor.

Having naturally inherited the role of Boris, Christoff recorded most of the music several times. Again, taking a page from Chaliapin's book, he appropriated the roles of Pimen and Varlaam in the process. These first recordings - except for Pimen's monolog - were once issued in this country by RCA Victor. In 1953 they were superceded by the complete opera, in which Christoff sings the three roles. In 1963 Angel issued another performance in stereo. It is interesting to compare these various versions, for not only is the recording balance successively improved, but with so many performances added to his experience the singer is progressively more at one with his characterization. Even so, these early recordings are remarkable. A point of interest is the singing of the brief lines of the Tzarevich by no less a person than Elisabeth Schwarzkopf.

One side of other Russian opera arias brings us relative novelties from Khovantchina and The legend of the invisible city of Kitesch. In Prince Gremin's aria from Eugen Onegin it is amusing to compare Christoff with another great Russian, Alexander Kipnis, the richness of whose voice was incomparable. Stylistically Christoff stands up well. In Prince Igor and Sadko he is again haunted by the shade of Chaliapin, not greatly to his disadvantage.

For those who enjoy comparisons as I do, the various Musorgski songs on the last side may be played beside Christoff's own complete recording, which appeared in 1958. The grave perhaps better known as The leaves were sadly rustling, and Softly the spirit flew up to heaven, called The spirit of heaven in the complete set, are a bit more atmospheric in the later version. The first, to a poem of Pletscheev, describes a burial at night; the second, with words by Alexis Tolstoy, tells of a soul arriving in heaven and asking that it may return to help alleviate the sufferings on earth. Fieldmarshall Death (from Songs and dances of death) is done in the complete set in Rimski-Korsakov's orchestration. The Volga boat song is here sung in the familiar manner - coming from the distance, passing by and receding - in the arrangement made for Chaliapin by Feodor Koenemann, who used to accompany him. It is done here with orchestra, as is The song of the flee, conducted by Dobrowen. The rest of the songs have Gerald Moore at the piano. She laughed, a bitter picture of the lover whose mistress did not take his misery seriously, was another specialty of the old master. And once more Christoff takes it in stride. Less in stride is the Caldara air that concludes the program. Here the basso is working too hard for his effects, when what the music calls for is an even vocal line.

I said something above about the size of the voice and the impression we get from these recordings. Chaliapin's whisper carried to the

top of the family circle; I doubt that would be true of Christoff. Nor does he have Chaliapin's range of vocal colors. But in these recordings the voice sounds huge. Another point; I realize that the emphasis in these retrospectives is on the singer rather than the music, some background for the unfamiliar songs and arias would be helpful. As usual original catalog and matrix numbers with dates are given on the jacket. The titles are all given in German; I have translated them above into their familiar forms. And the jacket is handsome.

KARL ERB SINGT OPERNARIEN: GLUCK: Iphigénie en Tauride--Nur ein Wunsch, nur ein Verlangen; MOZART: Zauberflöte--Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön; Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton; Entführung aus dem Serail--Welch ein Geschick (with Maria Ivogün, soprano); BEETHOVEN: Fidelio--Gott! welch Dunkel hier...In des Lebens Frühlingstagen; WEBER: Euryanthe--Wehen mir Lüfte Ruh'; FLOTOW: Martha--Darum pflückt ich, o Rose.. . Ach, so fromm; WAGNER: Tannhäuser--Inbrunst im Herzen; Lohengrin--Hochstes Vertrau'n; In fernem Land; Mein lieber Schwann; Meistersinger--Am stillen Herd; Morgenlich leuchtend; Rheingold--Immer ist Undank Log-es Lohn; Jetzt fand ich's... Hört, was euch fehlt'; DONIZETTI: Don Pasquale--Lass es, o lass es horen (with Ivogün); VERDI: Rigoletto--Freundlich blick' ich; O wie so trügerisch; Traviata--O lass uns fliehen (with Ivogün); Falstaff--Die Liebe soll der Lippe Lied beschwingen; PUCCINI: Bohème--Wie eiskalt ist dies Händchen; Leb wohl denn (with Ivogün); KIENZL: Evangelimann--Selig sind, die Verfolgung leiden; THOMAS: Mignon--Froh und frei will ich eilen; Ach, das die Seele dein meiner Seele sich eine; CORNELIUS: Barbier von Bagdad--O holdes Bild in Engelschöne (with Ivogün); OFFENBACH: Contes d'Hoffmann--Nur Mut und festes Vertrauen; GOLDMARK: Königin von Saba--Da plätschert eine Silberquelle; Magische Töne; WEINGARTNER: Dame Kobald--Wie voll das weisse Mondlicht. Karl Erb, tenor, with orchestra. EMI Electrola 1C 147-30771/72, 2 discs

Karl Erb is best known to most of us as a lieder singer. In his later years he devoted much time to recording songs, many of which have been transferred to LP. The voice was never a sensuous one, but it retained its distinctive quality - and a Swabian accent - until the end. He was also a famous Evangelist in the Bach Passions, and took part in two recordings of the Saint Matthew, with Ramin and with Mengelberg. But his first fame came to him in opera. Born in Ravensburg, 13 July 1877, he worked as a city clerk and taught himself to sing. Coming to the attention of the director of the Stuttgart Opera, he made his debut there in 1907. In 1912 he went to Munich, where his career was centered until a serious accident forced his retirement from the stage in 1930. He continued to sing in concert until he was 70. In 1914 Bruno Walter came to Munich, and under his direction Erb enjoyed his greatest successes, most notably in the title role at the world premiere of Pfitzner's Palestrina. From 1921 until 1931 he was married to Maria Ivogün. He died in Ravensburg, 13 July 1958.

The recordings on these two discs were made between 1911 and 1917, and they give a sampling of his varied repertoire in Munich. They all have the familiar shortcomings of German opera records of their time. The orchestra, especially on side 1, is pretty terrible, but the sound improves somewhat on the third and fourth sides.

One does not get the impression that Erb took the business of recording very seriously - as did Caruso and McCormack - for not only are the tempi inclined to be brisk, but the style sometimes seems a little perfunctory. Several arias end abruptly - for example Tamino's Bildnis aria, otherwise one of the better performances. The duets with Ivogun have lovely moments, but the lighter texture of her voice is often overpowered by his robust tones. For all that the Don Pasquale "notturmo" has considerable charm; it has enjoyed more currency than the rest, even appearing for a while on the American Okeh label. The best of the duets, to my taste, is the one from Cornelius' Barbier von Bagdad, for the music is attractive as it is unhackneyed (it was coupled with the Don Pasquale on IRCC 3081, a 78 rpm dubbing).

Needless to say, everything is sung in German. The noble Iphigenie aria loses some of its dignity in translation, and though the singing is healthy and solid the tempo is on the fast side. One misses the eloquent delivery of Georges Thill. As already indicated, the Mozart arias come through better, for the language is right and Erb's delivery makes every word understandable. The Fidelio scene begins with a well delivered recitative and runs through the first section of the aria. One senses that he must have been an impressive Florestan, though he has to hurry a bit for the recording. The Martha aria (better known as M'aappari, though the German is the original) begins with a reprise of The last rose of summer, which again necessitates hurrying the aria, even though the grooves of the original 78 disc are dangerously crowded toward the center. Comparing the sound of the original, I find the dubbing has lost something of its brightness.

The Wagner selections, on the whole, show the tenor to better advantage. Still, Tannhauser's narration seems more like a runthrough than a performance. He really comes to life only when he remembers Venus. The Lohengrin pieces are more convincing, and in Meistersinger the singer wins out over a particularly sluggish orchestra. Best of all are the two samples of Loge's music. The voice quality is wonderfully in character and for once he loses himself in the part.

Rigoletto in German is never likely to sound natural, but La donne è mobile stands up better than Questa o quella. The voice in both is full and strong. The heavy odds were against success in the delectable bit from Falstaff, what with the clumsy German text and the anything but atmospheric orchestra. The second Bohème number remained unpublished until now, and for quite obvious reasons. Beginning with Mimi's farewell, sung with melting tone but at an unheard of speed, the two singers take their parts in the quartet without benefit of Musetta and Marcello, and mostly sprinting, though they broaden for the more poignant moments.

Predictably the Evangelimann aria is fine, and the two bits from Mignon - Qui, je veux par le monde and Ah! que ton ame enfin - are given virile performances, with splendid ringing high B-flats and a B, if one is not bothered by the language. Much the same may be said of Hoffmann's C'est elle! Two arias from Goldmark's once popular Queen of Sheba are among Erb's best, though he does not quite match Leo Slezak at the end of Magische Tone. The totally unfamiliar piece from Weingartner's Die Dame Kobald would undoubtedly be stunning in a better recording. The sustained singing is admirable, but one would like to hear the real orchestration. There is a curious effect at the end. After Erb's falsetto high B one might almost believe he is still singing it over the orchestral postlude.

In sum, the value of this release is in documenting Erb's early career. The transfer from 78rpm must have been especially difficult, for the results leave much to be desired. But though there are no great recordings here, there is evidence of an impressive singer. If one wants a full appraisal of the artist, one will still turn to the later lieder recordings and to Erb's superb delivery of the Evangelist's part in the Ramin Saint Matthew Passion. Original catalog and matrix numbers are given on the jacket, also the year of recording.

MILIZA KORJUS, Virtuoso des Koloraturgesanges: MOZART: Entführung aus dem Serail--Mertern aller Arten; Zauberflöte--Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen; ROSSINI: Barbiere di Siviglia--Frag' ich mein beklom-mines Herz; DONIZETTI: Lucia--Il dolce suono; Die Zigeunerin (La zingare); ADAM: Le toréador--Ach, mama, ich sag' es dir (Variations); VERDI: Ernani--Ernani, rette mich; Rigoletto--Liebe ist Seligkeit (with Helge Roswaenge, tenor); Teurer Name, dessen Klang; Vespri siciliani--Wie soll ich euch, ihr Frauen, danken; MEYERBEER: Dinorah--Du leichter Schatten, folgst meinen Schritten; GOUNOD: Mireille--Holde Nachtigall, deiner Stimme Schall; OFFENBACH: Contes d'Hoffmann--Phöbus stolz in Sonnenwagen; DELIBES: Lakmé--Candida Durga; Woher kommst du? (with Marcel Wittrisch, tenor); Dov'è l'Indiana bruna; RIMSKI-KORSAKOV: Sadko--Die Südsee birgt in tiefen Felsenhöhlen; Czar's bride--In Nowgorod wir wohnten; Coq d'or--Ein milder Strahl der Morgensonne; MULLER: Die Mädle von Biberach (Jetzt gang i ans Brünnele) (Variations on Drei Röslein); DELIBES: Die Mädchen von Cadiz; MOSZKOWSKI: Serenade, Op. 15, no. 1; WEBER: Aufforderung zum Tanze, Op. 65; PROCHL: Variations; STRAUSS: Tausend und eine Nacht, Op. 346; Frühlingsstimme, Op. 410; DELL'ACQUA: La villenella; ALIABIEV: Die Nachtigall; MACKEBEN: Warum? Miliza Korjus, soprano; Franz Schönbaumsfeld, Johannes Müller, Edmund Nick, Bruno Seidler-Winkler, Ludwig Rühth and Theo Mackeben, conductors. EMI Electrola 1C 147-30 819/20, 2 discs.

It sometimes seems there must have been two sopranos named Miliza Korjus. The first Miliza was a brilliant comet, sighted in 1935 and continuously dazzling until 1939 when it was eclipsed (if that can happen to a comet) by the popular Hollywood star of The great waltz. (Korjus rhymes with gorgeous, the American publicity had it). There was

always an element of mystery about this soprano. Clemens Hoslinger, in the notes provided with this set, questions the official date and place of her birth - 18 August 1912 in Warsaw, Poland, Kutsch and Riemens also follow the date with a question mark and recall an unlikely rumor that the actual place was somewhere in Wisconsin. It seems agreed that her father was a Swedish military attaché and her mother a Polish-Russian countess. The family moved continuously from place to place, with the result that Miliza mastered a variety of languages, and she is said to have studied in no less than sixteen conservatories. Her first reported public appearance was as a church soloist in Kiev at age 10.

Wilhelm Furtwangler, Clemens Krauss and Max von Schillings were impressed by her talents, and Schillings is credited with arranging for guest appearances at the Berlin State Opera in 1934. She made her debut as Gilda in Rigoletto. She gave recitals and appeared in opera in Berlin, Dresden and other capitals. Then she was discovered by the filmmakers. She was brought to Hollywood for The great waltz and found time for a few concert and radio appearances on the West coast. Her American debut was with the San Francisco Orchestra under Albert Coates, 28 September 1938. In 1940 she went to Mexico and South America, where she sang in concerts and opera. Arriving in New York in 1944, she appeared on the radio program Invitation to Music under Bernard Herrmann on 11 October, and on 22 October she gave a recital in Carnegie Hall, assisted by 58 members of the Philharmonic led by Paul Breisach. After 1946 she seems to have made no public appearances. I understand she was injured in a serious accident, but I do not know the circumstances or the date. By the mid-sixties she must have felt the urge to sing again. Two recital records were issued on her own Venus label in 1967 and 1969. She made it known at the time that she did not wish to "come back" in concerts and opera, but she felt she still had something to give by way of records.

A story<sup>1</sup> given out with her publicity in the forties is significant. When Miliza was six years old someone played her a record by Tetrizzini. The child was so carried away that she begged to be given the disc, thus starting a collection. Appropriately, her favorite singers were Patti, Tetrizzini and Galli-Curci. Her own singing was brilliant in their tradition. Höslinger, more critical than is usual in jacket notes, stresses her limitations. He praises her "stupendous virtuosity in coloratura and (particularly) staccato singing," but (because of the brevity of her opera career) "Her artistic terrain must be termed small in every respect." He finds that "her high tones sometimes revealed a certain stiffness in tonal character. In this point her German colleague Erna Sack, whose voice maintained its natural vibrations even on the uppermost part of her range, was superior to her." She could not, he feels, be compared with Tetrizzini, Barrientos or Capsir. On the other hand, the aging Lilli Lehmann, hearing the young Korjus voice, compared her to Jenny Lind. Her early records reveal a breathtaking accuracy of intonation; Hoslinger speaks of her "uniquely machine-like security." Oscar Thompson, reviewing the 1944 Carnegie Hall concert, described her as "a large woman with a commanding presence." He complained that many high tones were off pitch, "But Miss

Korjus has a voice and she has facility, at its best, the voice shames the two-penny pipes that we have been hearing in opera here in recent seasons."

I very well remember the sensation caused among my friends when her first records were imported. Outstanding was the first we heard, the Adam variations on Ah, vous dirai-je, maman? It remains a stunning performance. One is impressed not only by the dazzling coloratura, but also the quality of her lower voice. The production is definitely Italian, white but fascinating, with a haunting appeal. In this register no one would think of comparing Erna Sack with her. She rather recalls Toti Del Monte or Lina Pagliughi. If there is not so strongly personal a charm in her variations as in the old Hempel recording, but there is even more electricity.

The two Mozart arias are still electrifying. None of her contemporaries could match them. Both are dramatic numbers, and she treats them as such. Coming back to Martern aller Arten today, I am aware of some clipped phrases and the pitch of the final high note is a shade off. But the flashing coloratura passages have meaning. The same is true of the hellish staccato flights of the Queen of the Night. Hoslinger speaks of the liberties she allowed herself, blaming them not quite accurately on the traditions of her time. The high note with which she finishes the Queen's tirade is a case in point. But actually the time of such liberties was past; even an appoggiatura was forbidden by the best conductors.

Una voce poco fa, sung in German, again reveals the Italian quality of her lower voice and there are some delightfully feathery passages. She is plainly a scheming Rosina. The Lucia mad scene is sung in Italian, complete with chorus but not including the caballetta. It is a stylish performance and the voice sounds big. As a kind of encore she gives us La zingara in German. This is made into another spectacular, with her voice rising easily over the chorus with joyous abandon. I am less happy with the Ernani cavatina, in German with recitative but no cabaletta. She is inclined to hold on to the high notes and stretch the shape of the music. In the Rigoletto duet she is not helped by Roswaenge, who overpronounces and misses the musical line. But her Caro nome is neat and notable for the way she has of leaning on notes. Here she is more concerned with musical line than with the text, but even so the words do not get lost. The bolero from I vespri siciliani is tossed off with great ease and at an exciting speed, ending with a staccato cadenza.

Less appropriate is the fast tempo of the Dinorah piece, which seems rushed rather than characterized. She ends by hitting her highest tone - A-flat above high C - providing an example of what Hoslinger said about the top register. Speed is again the hallmark of her Mireille waltz - though in this she does not match Maria Kurenko - and again she supplies a cadenza. Perhaps the recording is to some extent responsible for the unevenness here between her top and medium voice. And we may raise the question of intonation. Incidentally, in the

German translation the swallows become nightingales. Offenbach's doll is impersonated with mechanical precision, but she does not run down and have to be wound up as in the opera. Italian is the language for two of her Lakmé selections, but here she offers a challenge to the later French Mado Robin. The invocation to Durga is surely one of the finest Korjus performances, though as I hear it now I realize that the recording is seriously lacking in atmosphere. Lakmé's voice is supposed to be heard at first from within the temple, but here she dominates the chorus from the start. Nevertheless, the tone quality is at its most haunting. The duet with Wittrisch is in German; here again she outshines her partner, putting real meaning into the words and maintaining a straighter line. Needless to say, the Bell song is a natural for her.

The three Rimski-Korsakov selections, again in German, are lovely in their special way. The Song of India is langorous, quiet and reserved, darker in tone than we might expect. In the higher flying Czar's bride narrative she is concerned primarily with vocal line. And it goes without saying that the Hymn to the sun is tossed off with the greatest of ease.

The variations which conductor Johannes Müller seems to have devised for her on the German folksong Drei Röslein is sheer display, at most a pleasant novelty. And elaborate embroidery characterizes her spirited Les filles de Cadiz, the Moszkowski Serenade, her own very personal version of Laliabiev's Nightingale and Weber's Invitation to the dance. In the last named there is an upward chromatic run to make your hair stand up. Something similar happens, too, in Dell'Acqua's Vallanelle. The Proch Variations take me back to the early Galli-Curci, for like her predecessor Korjus somehow suggests the bubbling of a well. Anyone who remembers her American recordings of Strauss waltzes will find the two included here particularly refreshing. And to end the program there is an example of her work in German films before she came to Hollywood.

These recordings, all dating from her pre-Hollywood days, are the foundation upon which her reputation was made and will endure. Certainly in her short prime she had few rivals. One wonders about the size of the voice; in recordings it comes through perhaps too strongly and too forward. But this no doubt added to the excitement when the records were new. A goodly number of them were pressed by RCA Victor in this country, and in the early days of LP there was a Camden recital. However, the transfers in this new set are decidedly superior.

GEORGES THILL: Album du 80e Anniversaire: VERDI: Otello--Dans cette nuit profonde; Credo; Desdemone coupable; Que Dieu te tienne en joie; Dieu, tu pouvais m'infliger; Chanson du saule; Que nul ne craigne (with Jeanne Segala, soprano, José Beckmans, baritone, Madeleine Sibille, soprano; Francois Ruhlmann, conductor); MASSENET: Werther--O nature, pleine de grace (Fernand Heurteur, cond.); J'aurais sur ma poitrine (Maurice Frigara, cond.); PUCCINI: Turandot--Ne pleure pas; Nul ne dort (Georges Truc, cond.); BERLIOZ: La damnation de Faust--Invocation

à la nature (Heuteur, cond.); WAGNER: Lohengrin--Deja se perd leur voix (with Marise Beaujean, soprano); SAINT-SAENS: Samson et Dalila--Mon coeur s'ouvre à te voix (with Germanie Cernay, mezzo--soprano; Eugene Bigot, cond.); MASSENET: Manon--Et je sais votre nom; Oui! je fus cruelle et coupable (with Mary McCormick, soprano; Frigara, cond.); TOSTI: La mia canzone; R. DE FAËZ: Dans la forêt; NERINI: Les anes de Caire (Georges Van Parys, piano); FAURE: Après un rêve; STRAUSS: Sérénade; Prière secrète (Maurice Faure, piano); LETOREY: La fontaine de Caraouet (Henry Defosse, piano); LAZZARI: Le cavalier d'Olmedo; GOUNOD: O ma belle rebelle; BIZET: Guitare; SAINT-SAËNS: Marquise, vous souvenez-vous (Joseph Benvenuti, piano); SCHUBERT: Le tittuel (Defosse, piano); STRAUSS: Aimer, boire et chanter (Maurice Cariven, cond.); LEHAR: Frasquita--Ne t'aurais-je qu'une fois (Elie Cohen, cond.); ROBERT: Quand Madelon; GANNE: Marche Lorraine (Cariven, cond.); DUPONT: Hymne en l'honneur de la gendarmerie (Musique de la Garde Republicaine; Pierre Dupont, cond.); TAYOUX: Alsace et Lorraine; KRIER: Il ne la gagneront pas; SIMONS: Sur le flot berceur (Jeunes filles à marier); BARTHÉLÉMY: El pamero (Cariven, cond.); BETOVE: Tout mon coeur s'e'ance vers toi; CLOUZOT-VEBER: Ninon ... quant tu me souris (Tout pour l'amour) (Bigot, cond.); YVAIN: Chansons de Paris (La chanson de Paris) (J. E. Szyfer, cond.); YVAIN: Aux portes de Paris (Aux portes de Paris); Le logis du rêve (Aus portes de Paris) (Cariven, cond.). Georges Thill, baritone, in all. French EMI 2C 153-16211/4, 4 discs. Imported by Peters International, 619 West 54th Street, New York City 10019.

After his obituary appeared in the January 1978 Gramophone Georges Thill, like Mark Twain, could announce that the reports were grossly exaggerated. The tenor is alive and well. This retrospective, therefore, remains as intended, an observance of his eightieth birthday, not a memorial. One of its attractions is a brochure containing an interview with the singer, who speaks of his career and contrasts his own day in the opera house with the present. Since the album was planned for his compatriots, no texts are given - hardly needed considering the clarity of Thill's diction - nor is there any background information about the songs and their composers. The program listing, however, gives original catalog and matrix numbers, recording dates, etc.

Thill was born 14 December 1897 in Paris. His father was a publisher, and according to tradition it was expected that the son would carry on after him. But even before he was called for army service young Georges had decided to become a singer. According to Leo Riemens, in the notes accompanying a Rococo LP, he entered the Conservatoire in 1918, and although he had trouble with his high notes, he was engaged by the Opéra Comique in his first year, making his debut as Don José. Apparently Thill himself would prefer to forget his early experience, for he does not mention it in discussing his career. At any rate, in 1921 he took himself to Italy and study with Fernando de Lucia. Riemens concurs with Thill in that after his studies with the old master he was rather an Italian than a French tenor; but to grasp this it is necessary to hear him sing in Italian. Our only example here is La mia canzone; the two pieces from Turandot are sung in French (though he also recorded

a splendid Italian Nessun dorma). It is certainly true, on the other hand, that singing in his own language Thill had the virtues of the best French artists, notably the union of crystal clear enunciation with an even musical line.

He returned to make his debut at the Opéra 24 February 1924, as Nicias in Thais. After a big success as the Duke in Rigoletto in September of that year, Thill rose rapidly to take his place as the leading tenor at the Opéra, and to embark on his international career. His two seasons at the Metropolitan (1930-32) were unhappy, perhaps because of the climate. But back in Paris his triumphs continued. After the interruption of the war he sang a few more seasons before retiring. He was not only the favorite Faust, Roméo and Don José in Paris, but the foremost Verdi and Wagner tenor. On the side he found time to make a number of films, including the famous Louise with Grace Moore.

Thill was a straight singer, at his best secure and forthright, pouring out his voice with eloquence if not with too much nuance. John Steane in his book The Grand Tradition praises him for his "steady competence... so reliable that he ceases to surprise one at all..." But sometimes he was below his best. At his New York debut the critics attributed to nervousness a lack of control and difficulties with the pitch, in the latter abetted by Grace Moore, who sang Juliette to his Romeo. He did, however, find himself in the last act, to the delight of the audience. There are a few uncertain high notes in these recordings, especially the early ones.

As the leading French tenor of his time Thill recorded prolifically, and he has not been overlooked in the later days of LP reissues. I have in my own collection no less than five recitals made in France (one on a 10" disc) and one from Canada. There may have been more. The present selection has been made with an effort to avoid duplications, for only two of the songs - Après un rêve and Le cavalier d'Olmedo - overlap with the French LP's. That part of the Otello series has been reissued in Canada would not have been considered. Unfortunately so many of the best Thill performances having already been done, the general level here is a little lower.

The contents of the album have been systematically arranged, fitting neatly onto four discs. The first two sides amount to a potted Otello, sung in French. The second is given over to Opéra, the third to Melodies, the fourth to Hymnes et chansons.

Thill confesses in the interview that there were two roles he always wanted to sing - Otello and Tristan - but having studied Otello he knew it was not for him. The recording, made in 1943, more or less coincided with a production at the Opéra with Luccioni as the Moor, Geori Boué Desdemona and Beckmans Iago. (Segala was to sing Desdemona in 1953). Perhaps this was Thill's way of getting Otello out of his system. Not entirely comfortable - some high notes don't quite reach, and his voice is inclined to nasality - I am not quite sure I would recognize him. Segala is more in character, and her voice is attractive.

Beckmans is especially effective in the Credo, but the "vengeance duet" has its quota of thrills. The music seems strange in French, but every word comes through. Perhaps the voices are too close - the orchestra could be stronger. But aside from a tendency to hurry - characteristic of so many 78's - the performance is convincing.

The two selections from Werther on the second disc, and the one from La damnation de Faust, date from 1927; the two from Turandot from 1928 and the Lohengrin duet from 1929. Their interest, then, is as early Thill. The later complete Werther profits by a better orchestra and more poised singing. The Italian Nessun dorma mentioned above is even finer than this Nul ne dort. And the Lohengrin was later done complete with Germaine Martinelli (here we have only the first part). Beaujean, rather a Marguerite than an Elsa, sings too energetically. In every way Martinelli is superior.

Reviewing the Samson et Dalila scene (here a duet, as in the opera) in the August 1936 American Record Guide, I remarked that "other Dalilas have sung more seductively" than the admirable Gernay, and that Thill "suggests the strong man rather than the lover." On rehearing the recording, I am willing to stand on that judgement. Mary McCormick, from Belleville, Arkansas, was a protégée of Mary Garden who sang with success in Chicago as well as Paris. Obviously she was not French, though her voice had some of the acidity that spoils so many French voices. I do not find her a convincing Manon, but Thill, for his part, is magnificent.

The discful of Mémoires is a mixed bag. In the charming Tosti song we can recognize the de Lucia pupil, though Thill never indulged in the kind of liberties his master used to take. Of the composer R. de Faez I know only that his Dans la forêt shows the voice admirably. Omer Letorey's La fontaine de Caracouet is another effective novelty though not so well recorded. Les anes de Cairo is more famous, and with good reason. The Armand Silvestre poem is a memory of the Paris Exposition of 1889. Émile Nérini, a pupil of Massenet and a friend of Hahn, gives it a touch of local color. Le cavalier d'Olmedo is also well known in France. The text is from the Spanish of Lope de Vega by Camille Le Senne and Guillot de Saix; the melody is an adaptation of a Spanish folksong. If it has a familiar ring it may be because Ravel used it in a very different way for his Chanson espagnole, the first of his Chants populaires. Sylvio Lazzari, a disciple of César Franck, has made of it a little cloak and dagger episode.

Most curious of the songs is Guitare, a setting of Victor Hugo. The poem has variously served other composers, most notably Liszt, who called it after its first line - Comment disaient-ils? Bizet, in one of his Spanish moods, seems little concerned with meanings. The melodic line is jumpy and florid, and for once Thill seems to be working. For François Coppée's text, Marquise, vous souvenez-vous? Saint Saens has devised a most attractive menuet chantée. O ma belle rebelle is one of Gounod's finest mémoires, an antique-style setting of a poem by Antoine

de Baif. Thill's performance of Après un rêve is open and outgoing.

The two Strauss lieder, sung in German, are rather interesting than satisfactory. Singing Ständchen, a German will allow himself a certain elasticity playing with text and melody, but Thill sounds rather stiff. The climactic high note is at best questionable. More of the same may be said of Heimliche Aufforderung. Le tilleul will be recognized as Der Lindenbaum in the French translation of Louis Porney. It is hardly one of Thill's happier efforts, for there is little graduation in the singing. And the ending, without the postlude, is quite abrupt.

The final disc does not call for detailed comment. The first side opens with Viennese music - a rather tame transcription of a famous waltz (with the vocal range accommodated by occasional octave skips) and the well known Frasquita serenade (alias My little nest of heavenly blue). Suffice it to say that Thill was not to the manner born, no dangerous rival for Richard Tauber. But to those who take pleasure in sheer vocal quality these may be among his best offerings. There follows a stream of patriotic numbers, all dated 1940 but one - the hymn to the gendarmerie, which was recorded in 1947. Quand Madelon and Marche Lorraine are reminders of World War I. In all these stirring numbers the singer's fervor is matched by the quality of his singing.

Finally a side mostly of film music. I am not sure that all the titles are from Thill pictures, but he sings them in the easy style they call for. In Paris, we remember, opera singers have never been above singing popular music. There are thrills to be had from a great voice in chansons like these. But for my own taste the two final sides of this set, taken all at a sitting, prove to be a little much.

To sum up: this is by far the most generous and varied sampling we have had of the art of Georges Thill, yet there is not a single selection that I would class among his really great performances. For that reason, if I were looking for a program to remember him by I would not choose this one. Whether it is possible today to get the older LP's even in France I am by no means sure, but for what my own preferences are worth, here they are. Pathé FCX 50017 contains arias from Alceste, Huguenots, La Juive, Les Troyans à Carthage, Le Cid and Roméo et Juliette (the last a duet from Act 5 with Germaine Feraldy). This is all vintage Thill: The Alceste and Troyans are perhaps his masterpieces. Pathé FCX 754 shows him at his best as a song singer. And if one wants Wagner in French, Pathé FCX 50005 is a generous portion. The only source I know for the two opera arias in Italian - Andrea Chenier and Turandot - is Rococo 5243.

There are still some stunning performances on 78 which so far as I know have never been reissued. The aria from Iphigénie en Tauride is one of the very finest, also the famous one from Méhul's Joseph, from Reyer's Sigurd and Cherubini's Les Abencérages. Two pieces from Rabaud's Marouf are also delightful.

HISTORICAL REISSUES - WIENERISCH

LEHÁR: Die lustige Witwe. Anton Niessner, baritone (Baron Mirko Zeta); Emmy Loose, soprano (Valencienne); Erich Kunz, baritone (Graf Danilo Denilowitsch); Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano (Hanna Glawari); Nicolai Gedda, tenor (Camille de Rossillon); Otakar Kraus, tenor (Vicomte Cascada); Josef Schmidinger, tenor (Raoul de Saint-Brioche); Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra; Otto Ackermann, conductor (16-18 & 21 April 1953). EMI Electrola 1C 149-03 116/17, 2 discs

LEHÁR: Das Land Des Lächelns. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano (Lisa); Erich Kunz, baritone (Gustav); Nicolai Gedda, tenor (Prinz Sou-Chong); Emmy Loose, soprano (Mi); Otakar Kraus, baritone (Tschang); Felix Kanz, André Mattoni, speakers (Servants); Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra; Otto Ackermann, conductor (17, 19-20 April, 28 June 1953). EMI Electrola 1C 149-03 047/48, 2 discs

STRAUSS: Wiener Blut. Karl Dönch, baritone (Fürst Ypsheim-Gindelbach); Nicolai Gedda, tenor (Balduin Graf Zedlau); Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano (Gabriela); Karel Stepanek, speaker (Graf Bitowski); Erika Koth, soprano (Demoiselle Franziska Caligari); Alois Pernerstorfer, speaker (Kagler); Emmy Loose, soprano (Pepi Pleininger); Erich Kunz, baritone (Josef); Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra; Otto Ackermann, conductor (21-22, 26, 28 & 31 May 1954). EMI Electrola 1C 149-03 180S/81M, 2 discs

STRAUSS: Eine Nacht in Venedig. Nicolai Gedda, tenor (Guido, Herzog von Urbino); Erich Kunz, baritone (Caramello); Karl Dönch, baritone (Delacqua); Peter Klein, tenor (Pappacoda); Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano (Annina); Emmy Loose, soprano (Ciboleтта); Hanna Ludwig, contralto (Agricola; Barbara); Hanna Norbert, speaker (Barbara); Karel Stepanek, speaker (Barbarussio); Anton Diffing, speaker (Enrico); Lea Seidl, speaker (Agricola); Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra; Otto Ackermann, conductor (25-28, 31 May & 25 September 1954). EMI Electrola 1C 149-03 171/72, 2 discs

STRAUSS: Der Zigeunerbaron. Hermann Prey, baritone (Graf Peter Homonay); Willy Ferenz, basso (Conte Carnero); Nicolai Gedda, tenor (Sandor Barinkay); Erich Kunz, baritone (Kálmán Zsupán); Erika Köth, soprano (Arsena); Monica Sinclair, mezzo-soprano (Mirabella); Lea Seidl, speaker (Mirabella); Josef Schmidinger, tenor (Ottokar); Gertrud Burgstaller-Schuster, contralto (Saffi); Erich Paulik, basso (Pali); Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra; Otto Ackermann, conductor (18-21, 26, 28, 31 May 1954). EMI Electrola 1C 149-03 051/52, 2 discs

STRAUSS: Die Fledermaus. Nicolai Gedda, tenor (Gabriel von Eisenstein); Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano (Rosalinde); Rita Streich, soprano (Adele); Louise Martini, soprano (Ida); Helmut Krebs, tenor (Alfred); Karl Dönch, baritone (Frank); Erich Kunz, baritone (Falke); Rudolf Christ, tenor (Prince Orlofsky); Erich Majkut, tenor (Blind); Franz Böheim, baritone (Frosch); Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra; Herbert von Karajan, conductor (26-30 April 1955). EMI Electrola 1C 149-00 427/28, 2 discs

This series of Viennese operettas was one of Walter Legge's early LP projects. A distinguished company was formed under the direction of Otto Ackermann, centering around Schwarzkopf, Gedda and Kunz. Other well known singers were brought in for the supporting casts, while the London Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra provided the perfect background. Ackermann, though noted as a Wagnerian conductor, had a real affinity for the Viennese style, and no effort or expense was spared to make these the definitive recordings of the Strauss and Lehár masterpieces. Their reissue is more than welcome. The recording, considered brilliant in its time, may sometimes have a slightly tubby sound today, but is quite acceptable. The singers were all in their prime, except perhaps young Gedda (who had made his debut in 1951); he was to develop further in the next two decades. But he was already master of many styles, including the Viennese.

The new editions have notes, mostly signed by Karl Schumann (translations by Jürgen Dohm) chiefly concerned with the background of the operettas - only two. Eine Nacht in Venedig and Der Zigeunerbaron give synopses of the plots. But surely, with the possible exception of Fledermaus, we cannot assume that the listener is familiar with the stories. In the case of The merry widow it would also be of interest, especially for the younger generation of Americans, to be told something of the tremendous impact this piece had in our country. Mr. Schumann concerns himself only with its European career.

Lehár was no ordinary light opera composer. He was a highly trained and skilled musician as well as the source of endless memorable melodies. His stage works, with their colorful orchestration, occupy a place of their own, somewhere between light and grand opera. Listening to The merry widow I was struck by the fact that, aside from some premonitions in the overture (composed for a revival in 1940) we never hear the most famous melody until the capitulation scene at the end, and then only once through. But though it is followed by another of the catchiest tunes for a rousing finale, it is this most insinuating of waltzes that remains in the memory after the curtain. Das Land des Lächelns inevitably recalls Richard Tauber, and it is to Gedda's credit that he does not attempt a reincarnation. Dein ist mein ganzes Herz is still irresistible and ear-filling.

The four Strauss operettas are of varying quality, yet all have the Waltz King's magic touch. Wiener Blut is a pasticcio, featuring the famous waltz of the same title. The composer, 74 years old in 1899, feeling himself unable to produce a new operetta on commission, farmed out the work to one Adolf Müller, jr, who put it together drawing on the vast treasury of Strauss melodies and waltzes. Eine Nacht in Venedig suffers from a "childish" libretto, which underwent a number of revisions before the more or less definitive version was produced by Erich Wolfgang Korngold. This recording is based on that edition.

Needless to say, Zigeunerbaron and Fledermaus are another story. The former, though crammed full of delightful music, has been eclipsed

by the latter. Unfortunately, however, we are so used to Broadway-type productions with adaptations passing for translation, that a genuine idiomatic performance will come as a revelation to many. Rarely has Fledermaus been so strongly cast. And everyone has a ball (in all senses of the word) from Schwarzkopf's Rosalinde and Streich's Adele to Majkut's Blind and Boheim's Frosch. A feature is the tenor Prince Orlofsky, portrayed with convincing Russian boredom by Rudolf Christ. For this one operetta von Karajan takes over as the dynamic guest conductor.

I am happy to say that the spoken dialogue in these performances is kept on a conversational level and fits neatly in with the music. Some of the parts have actors doubling in these lines, but the principals carry their full assignment. The role of the senator Barbaruccio in Eine Nacht in Venedig, who does not sing, is portrayed with unctiousness by Karel Stepanek. It would be a pleasure to go on singling out individual performances, but after all these are ensemble operettas.

Philip Lieson Miller