

and balanced, if not very pronounced in stereo effect. For a late 1950s product it is superb, where the other coupling is vintage ordinaire.

We may be getting closer, now, to reissue of another worthwhile series of chamber music recordings in which Kaufman partook as a violist--a splendidly played and decently recorded group of Columbia 78 sets of the Musical Art Quartet, comprising Sascha Jacobsen, Bernard Ocko, Kaufman, and Marie Roemaet-Rosanoff.

John D. Wiser

PUCCHINI: La Bohème (recorded February 23-April 11, 1928). Rosina Torri, soprano (Mimi); Aristodemo Giorgini, tenor (Rodolfo); Ernesto Badini, baritone (Marcello); Thea Vitulli, soprano (Musetta); Aristide Baracchi, baritone (Schaunard); Luigi Manfrini, bass (Colline); Salvatore Baccaloni, bass (Benoit, Alcindoro); Giuseppe Nessi, tenor (Parpignol); La Scala Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Carlo Sabajno. In Sync C 4131/2 (2 cassettes, mono), \$35.90.

What makes an old recording "historic"? Age matters, of course, but for me there must be other reasons as well to justify bringing a record back into circulation. I want it to tell me something significant about the past--about the artistry of notable performers no longer before the public, about bygone styles of performance, about the musical life of earlier times.

This 1928 La Bohème doesn't really qualify, though at first glance it would seem to. It is certainly old, being the second complete recording ever made of this popular work. It dates from Toscanini's second directorship of La Scala, a fabled time. All the principals except for Aristodemo Giorgini and Luigi Manfrini had sung there in La Bohème during the '20s. And Giorgini, for his part, was a tenor of major repute, while Salvatore Baccaloni soon became the leading basso buffo of the day.

But this set's apparent documentary value does not bear examination well. For one thing, there is no direct and demonstrable connection with Toscanini. The Maestro had not conducted La Bohème at La Scala since the winter of 1924-5, and the revivals since then had been led by Gabriele Santini and Antonino Votto. Doubtless many musical details were carried over from stage performances into the recording, but they can't confidently be attributed to Toscanini himself.

Indeed HMV's principals are not even those of the 1928 La Scala revival, mounted in mid-season toward the end of the recording sessions. Sabajno and his colleagues in the Milan office satisfied themselves with a Mimi who had been the third-cast Musetta from 1924 and a Marcello and Musetta who

had taken their roles in the second casts from 1926 and 1927 respectively. The Rodolfo, a more notable singer, had not appeared at La Scala for fifteen years--and never in La Bohème. The secondary singers were indeed in the 1928 revival, but who buys a La Bohème for the Schaubard and Parpignol? If you're looking for a memento of how this work actually sounded in the house, you would do better to search out the Columbia set made a few months later, featuring several of the 1928 principals (Pampanini, Vanelli, Pasero) and the same comprimarii and La Scala forces under Lorenzo Molajoli. And for Toscanini's way with the music there remains the NBC broadcast of 1946, with its remarkable extremes of vivacity and lyrical breadth.

But perhaps this La Bohème excels as a performance? It has its virtues, notably a strong whiff of the theater--everyone is much involved in their roles. The great lyric moments, however, when ensemble work cannot substitute for individual quality, gave me little pleasure.

Let's start with the most important singer, Aristodemo Giorgini, who had begun his career a quarter-century earlier and was now 49 and nearing retirement. Even in youth Giorgini's voice, as heard on some 1905 G & Ts, is neither strikingly beautiful nor very tastefully deployed. In 1928 he sometimes actually sounds better, bright- and clear-voiced (and very Italian). His best sides date from February and early March when most of Acts III and IV were recorded. But even here Giorgini sometimes likes to give his vowels an unattractive nasal quality, perhaps intending to come across as seductive or cute, but actually sounding pinched and nasty, Mime-like. In Act I, recorded later on, this becomes a persistent and tiresome mannerism. Moreover, in the takes from these last sessions Giorgini's voice also begins to sound tired. Perhaps partly because of the recording schedule, then, his Rodolfo makes an unpleasant first impression (in Act I) that is never really overcome.

Ernesto Badini, a busy recording artist for the Gramophone Company in the early days and a Toscanini favorite at La Scala, also sounds elderly (he was 52), with the thin voice placed so high that it often sounds like a tenor. La Scala's first-line Marcello at the time was Benvenuto Franci, richer- and bigger-voiced (and doubtless more expensive), if probably less animated. Manfrini, another lesser talent, has a voice of some quality, though he can't match Columbia's Tancredi Pasero. The ladies, though still in their twenties at the time of the recording, are much worse. Rosina Torri sounds pallid and provincial, though here and there she turns a phrase nicely. Thea Vitulli, tremulous and shrill, is tiring and sometimes painful to the ear.

In fact much of the best singing comes from two of the comprimarii, who (as noted earlier) also appear in the

Columbia set. Baracchi's Schaunard is the liveliest of the bohemians, and he has a more resonant baritone than his Marcello. And then there's the irrepressible Baccaloni, not yet 30 but already a dab hand at playing old fools, with the round, fat voice fully ripe. But any *Bohème* less memorable for its Mimì than for its Alcindoro is in bad trouble. HMV replaced and indeed eclipsed this version only ten years later with the far better and often-reissued set that has Albanese and Gigli now leading the forces of La Scala.

Sabajno, the Gramophone Company's Italian artistic advisor and studio conductor for nearly 30 years, secures a well-paced and generally reliable performance, though a scappily played one. It's surely he who encouraged the singers to throw themselves so enthusiastically into their roles. The HMV recording staff seems not to have caught the theatrical spirit; when Rodolfo's friends leave in Act I they still sound onstage, and Colline tumbles downstairs in dead silence. The recorded sound, balanced slightly in favor of the orchestra, keeps the ensembles of Acts II and III reasonably clear, and is still quite listenable after nearly 60 years. In Sync's honest transfers, from a sometimes noisy *Voce del Padrone* copy, are notable for the solid bass typical of HMV's recordings in the Milan Conservatorio but not of most LP transfers of those issues.

There have been complaints in this column about In Sync's preference for spliced side joins when segues would serve the music better. That's seldom a problem in this set. However, one of the side joins would defeat even the most brilliant editor: the orchestral run-up to "Che gelida manina" is in the original key, but on the next side Giorgini transposes the aria a semitone down! Why Sabajno did not make the usual and necessary orchestral modulation is a puzzlement.

The packaging is minimal, and what there is should have been better. There's no libretto, but then surely nobody needs one of this opera. More seriously, the recording date is incorrectly stated to be 1927, Vitulli is wrongly given the first name Marisa, and Baccaloni is not credited as Alcindoro. And there's not a word of commentary. Such poor documentation would be a blemish on a new release; in a "historical" reissue, and a pricy one, it's simply unacceptable. Unhappily such lapses are the norm in the Conductart/In Sync series. If Messrs. Wimble and Silver won't do the research themselves, they would do well at least to consult appropriate experts—including not a few members of ARSC.

I can't then recommend these cassettes either as a historical document or as a performance. Giorgini enthusiasts will, of course, ignore what I say, while curiosity will doubtless lead others to buy. And historic sound archives of more than minimal size, or at least those that emphasize opera, should probably obtain a copy for their reference

collections. Others who have read this far are encouraged to look for the Columbia/Molajoli set (excerpts from it are on Voce del Padrone 3M 065-17802 M), which is superior in nearly every way.

John W. N. Francis

MASTER PIANIST: The Artistry of Carl Friedberg. Carl Friedberg, piano. (recorded in 1949, 1951, and 1953) IPAM 1102/3 (4 sides, mono), \$15.00. (Available from International Piano Archives at Maryland, Hornbake 3210, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742)

WNYC broadcast, late 1930s. BRAHMS: Quintet in F Minor for piano and strings, Op. 34. with Perolé Quartet (Joseph Coleman, Max Hollander, violinists; Lillian Fuchs, violist; Ernest Silverstein, cellist).

Juilliard recital, August 2, 1949. BRAHMS: Ballade in G Minor, Op. 118, No. 3. CHOPIN: Impromptu No. 3 in G-flat, Op. 51; Nocturne in F-sharp, Op. 15, No. 2; Ballade No. 3 in A-flat, Op. 47. FRIEDBERG: Improvisation, "Remembrance."

Juilliard recital, July 24, 1951. BRAHMS: Intermezzo in C, Op. 119, No. 3. PARADIES: Sonata No. 6 in A for clavier--Toccata.

Zodiac Records session, April 28, 1953. MENDELSSOHN: Rondo capriccioso in E, Op. 14. PAUER: Old French gavotte.

Zodiac Records session, May 28, 1953. SCHUMANN: Etudes symphoniques, Op. 13; Romance in F-sharp, Op. 28, No. 2. BEETHOVEN: Sonata No. 10 in G, Op. 14, No. 2. CRAMER: Etude in C, Op. 81, No. 1.

Karl Rudolf Hermann Friedberg is one of the legendary figures of the past hundred years or so--he was born in Bingen, Germany, in 1872 and died on a visit back to Europe in 1955--who is particularly frustrating to a posterity which has lived long enough into the age of recording to prefer the actual sounds of musical history, in whatever condition, to words about that history, however vivid. Although his career as a pianist spanned more than six decades, he held out firmly against the new age until he was convinced to give high fidelity a try. By then he was 81 years old. The first issued product of several trips to the New York studios of Zodiac Records in 1953 was Zodiac 1001, which included two Brahms Intermezzi and a Scherzo, as well as Schumann's Kinderszenen and a Novelette. That was, apparently, the last of Zodiac, and it continues to be so, because those recordings are not reissued here, though several of the selections do come from the Zodiac sessions.

The history sounding in these records is rich indeed. A pupil of Clara Schumann, Friedberg turned pages for Brahms and played a pioneering all-Brahms recital with the Master