

SPOKEN WORD FOR THE JUVENILE CONNOISSEUR. Eva Le Gallienne reads Hans Christian Andersen: L504 The Emperor's New Clothes & The Princess and the Pea/L505 The Tinderbox/L506 The Happy Family & It's Absolutely True/L507 Thumbelina/L508 The Steadfast Tin Soldier/L509 The Ugly Duckling/L510-511 The Snow Queen/L512 The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams. SOUNDSTAGE CLASSICS: L513-514 Love Game, A Shakespearean Entertainment/TM 102-104 Hedda Gabler/MW 1501-2 Romeo and Juliet. The Singing Lady Storytime Cassette Library performed by Irene Wicker: MB 901-A Thumbelina/MB 901-B Sleeping Beauty/MB 901-C Cinderella/MB 901-D Rumpelstiltskin/MB 901-E Baby Bear and Goldilocks & Little Red Riding Hood/MB 901-F The Fisherman and his Wife/MB 901-G The Butterfly and the Maiden & The Ugly Duckling/MB 901-H Jack and the Beanstalk & Red Shoes/MB 902-A Alladin and his Lamp & The Shoemaker and his Elves/MB 902-B Hansel and Gretel & Snow White & Rose Red/MB 902-C Bremen town Musicians/MB 902-D Goldilocks and the Three Bears & The Magic Fishbone & The Selfish Giant/MB 902-E Rapunzel & A Christmas Carol/MB 902-F The Three Little Pigs & The Frog Prince/MB 903-A The Princess Who Could Not Dance/MB 903-B The Emperor's New Clothes & The White Cat/MB 903-C The Emperor and the Nightingale/MB 903-D The Magic Shawl & The Tinderbox/MB 903-E The Twelve Dancing Princesses & The Chinese Lantern/MB 903-F King Thrushbeard.

Children's records are sometimes difficult to listen to without choking on the over-simplification of classic tales. The three collections from Miller-Brody Productions suffer in many differing ways. Let me begin with the cassette collections featuring Irene Wicker. These versions of famous stories have been aimed at the pre-school kids and fall far short of pleasing even such young and untrained ears. Her style of narration would make the most illiterate and unread of immigrant grandmothers cringe. She insists upon pausing at the end of each third or fourth word and dropping her voice, indicating the end of a sentence or key phrase whether or not she has actually reached one, which is often confusing even to an adult listener. She is billed as the singing lady although her voice is unpleasant, raspy and as unmusical as possible. She is accompanied by Samuel Sanders, an excellent accompanist; the source of the music goes uncredited.

To be completely fair to Miss Wicker she is at her best in the many many dialogue sequences which punctuate her stories. She assumes a different voice for each character and each is easily discernible. This is a help to children ... and adults. Such stories as Bremen town Musicians is helped mightily by her becoming, in turn, a donkey, a dog, a cat, a thief and others. She almost overcomes, in the heavy dialogue tales, her inability to tell a story.

However, her versions of Thumbelina and The Emperor's New Clothes and The Tinderbox fall far short of the Eva Le Gallienne renditions. Again, as in the music, the translations or adaptations are uncredited. Miss Le Gallienne's Andersen tales are her own translations, but more on those in a moment. The Wicker cassettes carry a 1973 copyright date

and their style copies the early 1950's television feeling. They try hard and they might amuse a child the first time heard, but beyond that, I sincerely doubt their merit.

Miss Le Gallienne is aiming her tales at an older audience. She has done the translations, and has read them in a straightforward manner for an audience she has determined will sit and listen, without allowing their attention to waver. I wish her luck and the same to the teachers or parents who hold the same hopes. Each of her albums carries with it a series of questions and related activities: one for each tale, with the same information reproduced over and over from jacket to jacket. As an actress Miss Le Gallienne is superb. She reads with clarity and intelligence; she knows the material so well and she seems to honestly enjoy Andersen's work. She does not pretend to be a young girl or an old man or a witch or anything but what she is, a storyteller. Yet she is compelling.

The language of her versions is much more adult than Miss Wicker's. Her pronunciations are decidedly theatrical and English, so some words may have to be explained to the children. My own personal favorite is her rendition of The Snow Queen, one of Andersen's longer, more expressive novellas. This one, the kids should listen to a bit at a time, but their parents may sneak the record out later and play it straight through for themselves. The story of Kay and Gerda and the people whom Gerda meets on her quest is one of the finest pieces of juvenile fiction in the history of the form and this translation is excellent. It would seem that Miss Le Gallienne has a special feeling for it. This also shows in The Ugly Duckling and The Tinderbox.

The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams is another matter. This semi-classic story doesn't work for me, either in print or on the record. The tale is just too British and too precious. The illustration on the record jacket is bland and uninteresting and the related activities suggested on the back seem superfluous and overdrawn for such a slender piece of fluff.

All in all, these records are superior to those featuring Irene Wicker. Buy them for your first and second graders and listen to them yourself.

The final three sets should be set aside until the kids reach junior high age or, again, listen to them yourself. LOVE GAME is a charming compilation of scenes from the plays of William Shakespeare, with an emphasis on his varying views on love. Assembled, directed and featuring Arnold Moss, the album spotlights such topflight actors as Kim Hunter, Joyce Ebert, Robert Stattel, Robert Geringer and Annette Hunt. Daniel Elliott sings ballads from the plays, and sings them nicely. The quality of the acting is uniformly superb and the arrangement of the material leads the listener gently and logically from one thought to another. Especially delightful is Joyce Ebert's Titania making love to the ass-head-crowned Bottom, and Kim Hunter

displaying her versatility in two scenes from *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The recording of *Romeo and Juliet* is a re-issue featuring Eva Le Gallienne, Dennis King, Richard Waring and the Margaret Webster Shakespeare Company, directed by Miss Webster. Tchaikovsky's overture fantasia has been adapted by George Cory for background and bridge music and the play is rather faithful to the text, Shakespeare's long suit being his non-stop dialogue rather than lengthy sections of visual theatrics. Miss Webster herself speaks a prologue which only makes one wish she had taken a role in the play itself. Her manner, her voice combine to bring an instant picture of a fine and talented lady to mind.

Richard Waring's Romeo is a bit difficult to believe at times. He seems less boyish than boy-sterous and Dennis King's voice does not lend itself to that picture of impetuous youth called Mercutio. But then, even Miss Le Gallienne does not fare so very well as Juliet. The illusion of youth is dispelled by the quality of her voice which shouts "older, older" at the ear. Their acting is fine. They deliver the poetic lines with clarity and sincerity and you wish they had all recorded more Shakespeare, a *Macbeth* or a *Much Ado*, or anything within their own age ranges. As a document of their work it stands superbly realized but it isn't a youthful recording, which makes it a trifle silly at times.

On the other hand, Miss Le Gallienne's Hedda Gabler is superb. Acting her own translation and directing herself and her company she brings this difficult work to life. This is also a re-issue and it features Richard Waring as Lovborg, David Lewis as Tesman and Carmen Mathews as Mrs. Elvsted. The entire cast is admirable, in fact, and the play is as compelling to hear as it always is to see. Requiring three discs and almost as many hours, it is a must for any library of recorded literature. It is certainly the pick of the crop from Miller-Brody Productions.

J. Peter Bergman