

never find out "von" what) is awaiting a reunion with her old-time flame, Anatol, in her country mansion in a "northern country." Since parting with him years before, she has become an eccentric recluse, living with her mother, who for reasons not eminently clear refuses to speak to her, and her niece, Anatol arrives, but he is Anatol junior, come to announce his father's death and to take over where senior left off. Vanessa's niece, Erika, is seduced by him on the night of his arrival; and when he and Vanessa announce their engagement several months later, Erika runs out into the cold night in order that his child "shall not be born." She does indeed have a miscarriage and is left a lonely recluse, just as her aunt formerly was, while Vanessa and Anatol go off to Paris for their honeymoon. The implication is that the marriage will be a failure and that all the characters are fated to lead frustrated, unhappy lives. There is also a musically important but dramatically irrelevant part for an old family doctor, whom Menotti seems to have invented solely because he needed a baritone.

With such materials no composer could do very much. Barber, who is essaying his first opera with *Vanessa*, did his best. And his best is largely to be found in what is going on in the orchestra. Some of the vocal set-pieces are certainly impressive; the ensemble writing in the much praised quintet is too thick and shapeless for my taste, but the arias "Must the Winter Come?" and "For Every Love" are first-rate. It is the web of the orchestral sound, however, that is most impressive of all. Barber is in complete command here, whether in unifying the tone of a whole scene or in brilliant bits of illustrative instrumentation (note the accompaniment to Vanessa's skating narrative: the dogs barking in the chorus at the opening of Act IV). He is perhaps at his best in the virtuosic fugal introduction to Act III and the reworking of the love music in the Intermezzo before the final scene. All this is so good that it makes the tentative and often downright amateurish handling of much of the "recitative" the more painful.

But the singing per se is far too good to be ignored, even in the most arid patches of vocal writing. The cast is exactly that of the premiere performance; and although its members undoubtedly approach perfection more closely than they ever did on stage, they yet manage to impart the sense of a stage performance. Steber's English is not as clear as it should be but she handles her high-lying, coloratura-sprinkled music well. Rosalind Elias uses her big voice intelligently and amply deserves the praise she has won in the role of Erika. If Nicolai Gedda doesn't quite make sense out of the role of Anatol, the fault is hardly his; I can think of no tenor who would have done better. Giorgio Tozzi, as the superfluous but endearing doctor, the most human and believable character in the opera, sings superbly in the ballroom scene ("Doctor, dear Doctor, not quite so fast, dear Doctor").

Mitropoulos elicits from the Metropolitan Orchestra what is perhaps their most

distinguished playing on records. As to the engineering (I haven't yet heard the stereo version), it proves conclusively that homemade tapes will never replace professional LPs.

One word of protest about RCA Victor's filling up Side 8 with odds and ends from other recent complete opera sets. With so much of Samuel Barber's music unrecorded, here was an ideal opportunity to introduce one of his orchestral works to a large audience. D.J.



Tozzi: Barber's endearing doctor.

BEETHOVEN: Sonata for Piano, No. 29, in B flat, Op. 106 ("Hammerklavier")

Egon Petri, piano.

• WESTMINSTER XWN 18747. LP. \$4.98.

Although very possibly the greatest of all the Beethoven piano sonatas, the *Hammerklavier* has received only about a dozen recordings in the history of the phonograph. None of them, moreover, is so satisfactory as to eliminate hope that a better one will appear some day. For many the Schnabel version of the two middle movements is supreme, but even he found the technical and artistic demands of the opening movement and final fugue beyond his powers at the time he recorded his "Beethoven Society" edition. Few pianists have fared much better. When the technique was there, the interpretative skill often failed; when the insight was present, the fingers were unable to shape it into sound.

The new Petri edition, the seventh version presently available (along with an orchestration of the work), is a worthy assault against this pianistic Everest. It is not without faults. To name three, the pedal often slurs the bass excessively, the scherzo is lacking in grace, and the tempo of the Adagio sostenuto is too fast.

For all this, it has stature. The sense and structure of the opening and closing movements are excellently grasped and forcefully conveyed—in itself a distinction. The listener is not shown everything there is in the music, but its form, magnitude, and content are communicated on an appropriate scale.

The result is a disc to respect. R.C.M.

BERLIOZ: Overtures

Le Carnaval romain, Op. 9; *Les Francs-Juges*, Op. 3; *Bencenato Cellini*, Op. 23; *Waverly*, Op. 2 bis—on 14008. *Le Corsaire*, Op. 21; *Rob Roy*; *Béatrice et Bénédict*; *Le Roi Lear*, Op. 4—on 14009.

Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra, Sir Adrian Boult, cond.

• • WESTMINSTER 14008/9. Two SD. \$5.98 each.

It is just about a year since I reviewed these performances on monophonic discs. At that time, I remarked upon the clean sound, admirably free from distortion, but lamented the fact that the recordings were made in an acoustically dead studio. Stereo renders a vast improvement, counteracting the cramped feeling of the monophonic versions with a sense of spaciousness. Although it is not especially directional, Westminster's two-channel reproduction spreads the sound out nicely and firmly. What it cannot improve is Boult's rather routine handling of the potentially exciting music. P.A.

BERLIOZ: Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14

Cento Soli Orchestra of Paris, Louis Fourestier, cond.

• • OMEGA/OSL 9. SD. \$5.95.

Fourestier's *Fantastique* is fairly much of a surface-skimming job, one that fails to bring to aural realism the fantasies and terrors inherent in Berlioz's highly charged score. He misses fire particularly in the *Scene in the Fields*, which is taken almost at the tempo and in the mood of a barearolle. The effect of this movement is spoiled further by splitting it between two record sides (as also in the recent London disc by Argenta). The playing, however, especially of the strings, is quite good, with the Cento Soli appearing to have more cohesion and unity of purpose than might be expected from a hundred soloists. Omega's sound is clear and generally well defined, though a bit light on the bass end; and the stereo effect is considerably better than that on the aforementioned London disc, which failed to track consistently on my turntable. All this is pretty academic, however; I would advise waiting until the Munch-Boston Symphony performance is made available on stereo by RCA Victor. P.A.

BERNIER: Le Café—See Delalande: Les Fontaines de Versailles.

BIZET: Symphony in C
†Prokofiev: *Symphony No. 1, in D, Op. 25 ("Classical")*

†Weinberger: *Schwanda: Polka and Fugue*

Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, cond.

• COLUMBIA ML 5289. LP. \$3.98.

When Ormandy and the Philadelphians play the two symphonies here, the re-

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