

B.B.C. HOME SERVICE: SUNDAY AUGUST 26th 1945

12.15-12.50 p.m.

[Announcer:]

This is the B.B.C. Home Service. NEW RECORDS. Here is Desmond Shawe-Taylor to review some recent issues of new records.

[DS-T:]

The records that have given me, personally, the most pleasure of the recent issues are two red-label Deccas containing a performance of the Mozart Horn Quintet in E flat. By "Horn Quintet" I don't mean, as you might suppose, a quintet of five horns, but a single horn playing with four strings. Mozart uses practically the same strings as those of a normal string quartet, only instead of the usual two violins and one viola he has two violas and one violin: I suppose because he felt that the deeper violas would blend better with the rich, dark tone colour of the horn. The string players are the Griller Quartet, minus one violin and plus one viola; and their playing is extremely sensitive and distinguished. But what will strike everyone at once is the simply masterly performance of the horn part. The player is young Dennis Brain, son of the well-known first horn of the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra, Aubrey Brain; and one imagines that the Brain household must be constantly resounding with friendly, neck-and-neck contests between father and son upon this delightful but difficult instrument.

The horn is an instrument which doesn't speak very easily and needs a good deal of coaxing; and even in good orchestras we are quite used to the unintentional effect commonly known as "burbling". Well, the Brains never burble – or almost never; for in the whole of this taxing part there *is* just one single note in which, for a moment, Dennis shows that he's only human. Otherwise, he gets through all those runs and trills with the most charming rustic grace, and has a particularly delicate way of just touching a note with the minimum of emphasis so as to preserve the shape of the whole phrase. And all the way through he retains the most velvety bloom of tone. In short he's a musician at the very top of his profession of whom England has good reason to feel proud.

The music is Mozart not at his greatest, but at his most endearing; but instead of wasting time in trying to describe it, I'll play you part of the slow movement.

RECORD: [Beginning of side 3](#)

[Set: Decca K 1138/9. This track: K 1139, matrix AR8744-2, 0' 0" – 1' 46"]

The pleasure of listening to the rapid last movement is rather like the pleasure of watching a trick cyclist: it seems as though he *must* come off the wire, and yet he never does.

RECORD: [End of side 4](#)

[Decca K 1139, matrix AR8745-2, final 1' 05"]

The Horn Quintet of Mozart is recorded on two Decca records: Nos. K.1138 and 1139. It strikes me as the ideal sort of music for the gramophone: seldom played on the wireless, a nice length, and recorded with so good a balance as to sound well on any gramophone and in any room.

Now we come to the largest item on our programme, which is a new recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Malcolm Sargent on four Deccas, Nos. K.1126 to 1129. Needless to say, there have been dozens of recordings already of this most famous of symphonies; and I am quite aware that what people want to know is how this new one compares with those previous ones which are still in the catalogue. This has always been a duty of the gramophone critic, and it's more important than ever now that scarcely any shops stock the complete range of recordings which are supposed to be available. But I'm afraid this is not one of those occasions when the decision is going to be obvious and clear-cut. The most that can safely be said is that, taking everything into account, the new Decca records are one of the two sets on the market which give the best value for money. Its principal rival is the Columbia set played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Weingartner, which also occupies four records and is issued at the same – *comparatively* cheap – price. His Master's Voice have no less than four versions on their list: there's a set conducted by Furtwängler and another by Koussevitsky, both of which, in addition to being in a dearer category, also manage to run to a fifth record; thus making the whole set much more expensive without any particular corresponding advantage; there's an ancient Frans Schalk – Vienna Philharmonic set; and there's a Toscanini of which I'll say more in a moment.

Both the new Decca and the older Columbia sets are very good indeed. Sargent has secured perhaps the more sonorous recording, while Weingartner got out of the London Philharmonic – then in its pre-war heyday – somewhat livelier and more incisive playing from the strings. But these are really rather fine-drawn distinctions. I'll play you a little of the first movement to show you how little there is to choose between the two versions. First the new Decca, conducted by Dr. Sargent.

RECORD: [Record Part Side 2](#)

[Set: Decca K 1138/9. This track: K 1126, mat. AR8991-2, final 2' 24"]

Now the Columbia set, conducted by Weingartner.

RECORD: [Part side 2](#)

[Set: Columbia 516/9. This track: DX 516, mat. CAX6683-2, final 2' 23"]

But I hear someone saying: what about the Toscanini? Isn't Toscanini the greatest living Beethoven conductor? Well, of course, he is; at least, I think so; especially in those odd-number symphonies of Beethoven which are so packed with explosive energy and force – the very qualities in which Toscanini excels. Unfortunately, Toscanini's recordings of the 3rd, 5th and 7th Symphonies were all made in America, and by English standards they are wretchedly recorded: extremely harsh and dry in tone, no resonance, no bass, and a

general effect in the louder passages of thumping a biscuit-tin in a vacuum. I haven't got time now to go into the international argument on this question of recording: the Americans say that the fault lies in our gramophones, and that on *theirs* this sort of recording sounds wonderful. Well, even if it's true, that's not much comfort to the English buyer. However, I noticed that when the Toscanini Eighth Symphony came out over there a year or two ago, even the American critics kicked a bit. To my mind the desperate badness of these American Toscanini recordings is the major gramophone tragedy of our time; it makes me quite angry to hear all that superlative playing and inspired conducting thrown away. For make no mistake about it, Toscanini's actual performance of this Fifth Symphony makes both the Sargent and the Weingartner performances sound quite pale and polite by comparison; and I can fully understand anyone being so thrilled with the passion and fury of the Toscanini reading as to prefer it to all others, regardless of the recording. Just listen.

RECORD: [Part of side 2](#)

[Set: HMV DB 3822/5. This track: DB 3822, mat. 2A 032807, final 2' 08"]

If you can put up with the physical shindy, the *conception* is truly marvellous. To return to Weingartner and Sargent: I'll give you one more sample of each to compare: this time the Trio and the repeat of the Scherzo leading into the last movement. On the gramophone I used, the famous drum-beats in this transition passage came out much better in the Weingartner than in the Sargent set; but I don't like to be dogmatic on a point like that which may turn out quite differently on another instrument. Here is the Decca Sargent set.

RECORD: [3rd movement](#)

[Set: Decca K 1126/9. This track: K 1128, AR8995-2]

And here is the Columbia Weingartner

RECORD: [Same as previous record](#)

[Set: Columbia DX 516/9. This track: DX 518, CAX6687-2]

Now for something quieter. I've only one vocal record this week. Isobel Baillie singing Delius's setting of Shelley's "Love's Philosophy" and a song by Hamilton Harty called "Lane o' the Thrushes"; they are on a ten-inch Columbia No. DB. 2178. In spite of the eminence of their composers, both these songs have a touch of the shop ballad about them, and frankly I don't care for the Delius. But the little Harty song is pleasing, and has a very pretty accompaniment faultlessly played by Gerald Moore.

RECORD: [first verse only](#)

[Columbia DB 2178, CA19421-3, 0' 0" – 0' 55"]

Gerald Moore is again the accompanist in a very impressive first record by a young Belgian violinist recently discovered by ENSA: Arthur Grumiaux. He's had the courage to choose for his *début* (on Columbia DX 1199) an unfamiliar Nocturne and Tarantella by

the Polish composer Szymanowski who died shortly before the war. At first I thought I didn't care for this piece; but on repetition I found myself increasingly fascinated by the Oriental mystery of the Nocturne (though still a little bored by the Tarantella). About the performance there can be no question: it is that of a very considerable master of the violin; technically brilliant, and full of fire, expressive power and variety of colour. And the recording is outstandingly good. I'll play you the opening of the Nocturne.

RECORD: [Beginning of side](#)

[Columbia DX 1199, CAX9321-1, 0' 0" – 1' 29"]

The remainder of my time today must go to a group of piano records which have been accumulating on my desk. First Eileen Joyce playing Mendelssohn's "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso" on a ten-inch dark blue Columbia No. DB.12179. This isn't a good record, and I find it very hard to see why, when there's such a shortage of shellac, Columbia put it out. They already have the same piece on their catalogue at the same price, but better played and recorded by Ania Dorfmann: that on DB.1776.

The remaining records are well-known pieces by Chopin, and they've all been recorded so often before that I can't possibly enter into exhaustive comparisons. There are two ten-inch red-label HMVs by a pianist better known in the United States than here: he is Jose Iturbi, and I'm told he was the unseen pianist in the Chopin film called "A Song to Remember" – which many people think was a film to forget. On one of these records he plays the Fantasy Impromptu and the tiny, very famous D flat major Waltz: and that's on HMV.DA.1848. On the other he plays the C sharp minor Waltz and the early Mazurka in B flat major; that's DA.1849. He's certainly a very brilliant and exciting sort of pianist, and if his grasp of the poetic content of the music seems sometimes not quite on a par with his finger work, this impression may be partly due to the dry American recording which allows the soft sustained notes to die away too rapidly. Here's a little of the Fantasy Impromptu.

RECORD: [End of side 1](#)

[HMV DA 1848, mat. D4-RB-461, last 2' 14"]

That was Jose Iturbi. Now, as I've just been rather rude to Miss Joyce, it gives me particular pleasure to play, for comparison, her own delicately beautiful performance of the same piece, on Parlophone E 11432.

RECORD: [Middle of record](#)

[Parlophone E 11432, CXE_10213-1, extract 2' 21"]

My last record is of two pieces played by Solomon, and recorded on a twelve-inch plum-label HMV (number C 3433). One is the study in E major, which has become so tremendously popular in all sorts of vocal and other perversions; and the other is the Waltz in A flat major – the well-known one. The recording is particularly rich and luminous in tone, and together with the admirable performance makes this the most

desirable of the piano records which I've mentioned today. Listen to the feathery clarity of the treble and the warm, natural bass in the Waltz.

RECORD: [Beginning of record](#)
[HMV C 3433, mat. 2EA10496-5, 0' 0" – 1' 53"]

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