Nov. 65

The new RCA recording is, as I have said, a strong performance—convincing, exciting, idiomatic, entirely without weaknesses. Though the title role was once the property of dramatic sopranos such as Rosa Ponselle and Maria Caniglia, Anna Moffo here succeeds in creating the impression that she is perfectly cast. Her singing, unstinting in meeting the bravura demands, also has the required pathos; furthermore, it is tasteful, musical, and always expressive. As Rodolfo, Carlo Bergonzi is a perfect match for her: neither of them has a voice of overwhelming power, but both sing stirringly in the climaxes. And Bergonzi's elegantly phrased *"Quando le sere"* stops the show.

In supporting roles, this performance boasts Verdian stylists of absolute authority: Giorgio Tozzi (of Chicago), Ezio Flagello (of New York), and Cornell MacNeil (of Minneapolis). Flagello is cast as the despicable Wurm, and his emotion-packed but firmly controlled delivery sounds at times remarkably like that of the late Leonard Warren. MacNeil brings richness of tone and great expressive power to the role of Miller, the first in Verdi's great series of baritone-fathers. As Federica, Shirley Verrett does not yet possess the rare stylistic authority of the men, but her portrayal is dignified, and sung with opulence and grace as well.

Fausto Cleva's conducting is vigorous and full of romantic ardor. It comes as no surprise to learn from the accompanying notes that his association with *Luisa Miller* dates back to the last Metropolitan revival, in 1929. What *is* surprising is that such an experienced and gifted conductor is so seldom called upon for recordings.

As for the engineering, the balance between voices and orchestra is excellent, and the stereo placement brilliant. I hope RCA Victor sells at least a hundred thousand sets of *Luisa Miller,* and thereupon embarks on a long-range Verdi project, beginning with *Ernani, Nabucco,* and *I Vespri Siciliani!* *George Jellinek*

Ⓢ Ⓜ VERDI: *Luisa Miller.* Anna Moffo (soprano), Luisa; Carlo Bergonzi (tenor), Rodolfo; Cornell MacNeil (baritone), Miller; Shirley Verrett (mezzo-soprano), Federica; Giorgio Tozzi (bass), Count Walter; Ezio Flagello (bass), Wurm; Gabriella Carturan (mezzo-soprano), Laura; Piero de Palma (tenor), peasant. RCA Italiana Opera Orchestra and Chorus, Fausto Cleva cond. RCA VICTOR LSC 6168 three discs $17.37, LM 6168* $14.37.

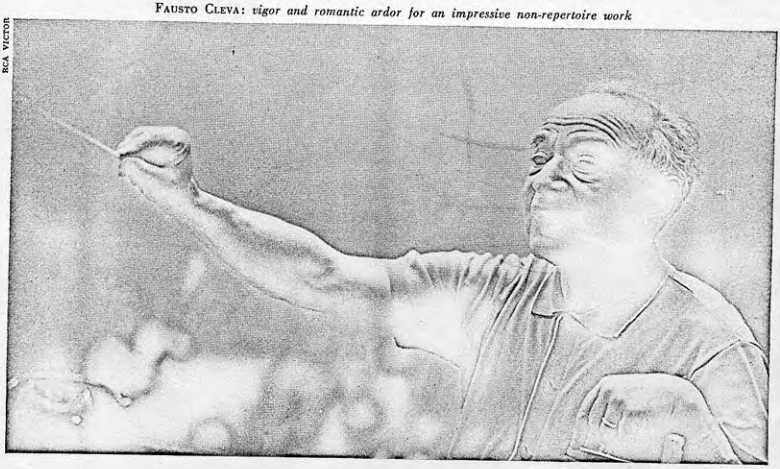
RUBINSTEIN'S CHOPIN: AGELESS ARTISTRY

New recordings of the polonaises and impromptus are fresh musical experiences

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN, like the proverbial Ol' Man River, just keeps rollin' along—and like the equally proverbial fine wine, he improves with age. Or so it

FAUSTO CLEVA: *vigor and romantic ardor for an impressive non-repertoire work*

RCA VICTOR



would seem from this new and long-awaited RCA Victor recording of the Chopin Polonaises and Impromptus. For he has duplicated here his astounding feats of five years ago with the Ballades (RCA Victor LSC/LM 2370) and the Scherzos (LSC/LM 2368)—he has turned out performances of the most demanding virtuoso fare that crackle with pianistic vitality, dynamism, and rhythmic power.

I have long treasured Rubinstein's pre-war English recordings of the major Polonaises, now transferred to LP (Odeon QIM 6326), and—although I shall certainly not dispose of the 78's—these new performance are not one whit inferior to the old. On three sides of RCA's two-disc set are all eight of Chopin's significant works in the polonaise style (the three early and posthumously published pieces are justifiably omitted). Besides the "Military" in A Major and the ubiquitous "Heroic" in A-flat, there are some less familiar but even greater masterpieces among them—the somber Op. 40, No. 2, in C Minor, and the tremendous F-sharp Minor, Op. 44. To the familiar pieces, Rubinstein brings a freshness and sweep that make me feel I am hearing them for the first time. Even the celebrated *crescendo-ostinato* episode in the A-flat Polonaise grips me anew, because of the astounding tension and control that Rubinstein brings to it. The performances of the predominantly lyrical flights of the late *"Fantaisie-Polonaise"* and the youthful Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise are just slightly less successful, but the fault would seem to lie not so much with Rubinstein as with the rather drily brilliant sound of the piano used for this recording in New York's Carnegie Hall. This is, however, a minor flaw in the context of the recording as a whole. And, to their credit, the RCA engineers have done a superb job in capturing the enormous range of dynamics that Rubinstein employs in these readings.

For some, the remaining side containing the Chopin Impromptus may seem anticlimactic after hearing the Polonaises. But for this listener, these essentially lyrical and diverting pieces came as a welcome relief from the tensions of the first sides. Again, Rubinstein is in flawless form all the way. Because he adopts a pace for the *"Fantaisie-Impromptu"* that is a shade more deliberate than the usual, and combines this with a slightly greater phrase tension, he is able to make even that much-abused work a genuinely fresh musical experience.

Dare we hope that this album presages new Rubinstein recordings of the Chopin Preludes and the F Minor Fantaisie that will do as much justice to this pianist's remarkable and seemingly ageless artistry? *David Hall*

Ⓢ ⊛ **CHOPIN:** ***Polonaises:*** *No. 1, in C-sharp Minor, Op. 26, No. 1; No. 2, in E-flat Minor, Op. 26, No. 2; No. 3, in A Major, Op. 40, No. 1 ("Military"); No. 4, in C Minor, Op. 40, No. 2; No. 5, in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44; No. 6, in A-flat, Op. 53 ("Heroic"); No. 7, in A-flat, Op. 61 ("Fantaisie-Polonaise").* ***Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise, in E-flat, Op. 22. Impromptus:*** *No. 1, in A-flat, Op. 29; No. 2, in F-sharp, Op. 36; No. 3, in G-flat, Op. 51; No. 4, in C-sharp Minor, Op. 66 ("Fantaisie-Impromptu).* Artur Rubinstein (piano). RCA VICTOR LSC 7037 two discs $11.58, LM 7037* $9.58.

RCA VICTOR

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN
Deliberate pacing for controlled tension and flawless form