Current Recordings

Pianists and Piano Concerti Straddling the Iron Curtain

CHOPIN—Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise. RCA Victor, one 12" LP, LM-2265.

By JACOB SISKIND

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN'S Chopin playing, like some wines, improves with age. Though he is now over 70 he has rarely performed these works with equal facility and sympathy. This is Chopin playing in the grand manner, and there are not very many players alive today who could approach, let alone equal, his style and authority. Alfred Wallenstein and the Symphony of the Air provide suitable accompaniment. The recording is one of RCA's best.

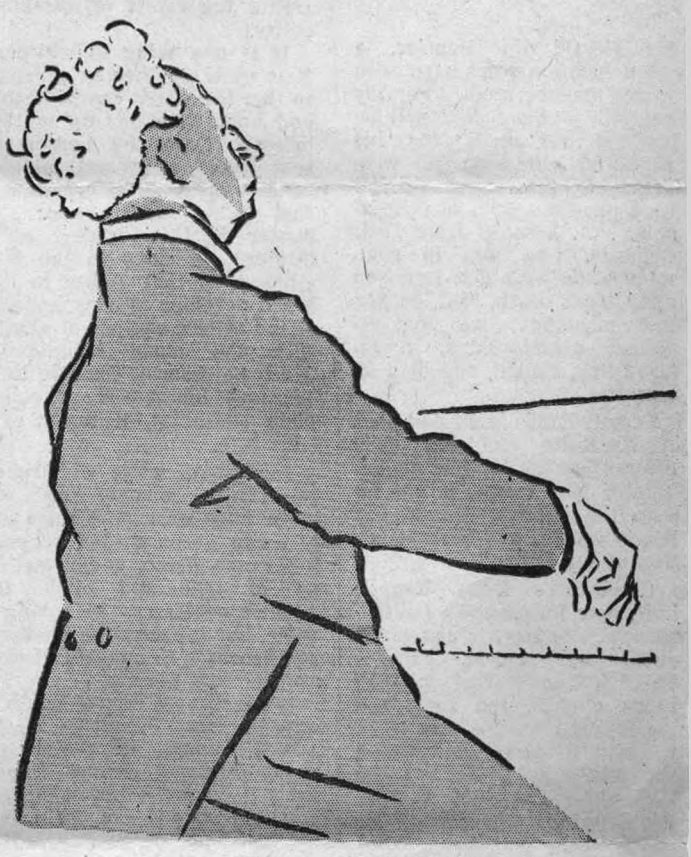
BEETHOVEN—Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Opus 19. Urania, one 12" LP, UX-136.

ROBERT GOLDSAND is probably one of the world's most under-rated pianists. For some inexplicable reason he has never attained the popular acceptance that his mastery of the keyboard and musical insight merit. His performance on this record, with Carl Bamberger and the Frankfort Opera Orchestra, surpasses every recording of this work I know. The tempi are wonderfully relaxed, yet never flabby, the piano playing impeccable and imaginative. This record can be recommended to any pianist without reservations.

SCHUMANN—Concerto in A minor, Fantasiestuecke Opus 12 (selections) Monitor, one 12" LP, MC-2026.

SCHUMANN—Humoresque, Opus 20; FRANCK—Prelude, Chorale and Fugue. Monitor, one 12" LP, MC-2022.

IN spite of the dim Russian-style recording, these two records show without question that Sviatoslav Richter is one of the finest, if not the very best, pianist performing in public anywhere today. The technique is impeccable, the tone colour varied and rich, the sounds warm and resonant, and the interpretation a delight to any pianist. Richter recorded the Fantasiestuecke some time after this present disc for a Western European company, and it is interesting to make comparisons between the two versions. The slight differences show the man's flexibility, intelligence and command of the keyboard. The Schumann work is not complete—of the eight pieces Grillen and Fabel are missing. But I have not heard as exciting a performance of the Trauemeswirren as this since the old Brailowsky recording of 1928.



ARTUR RUBINSTEIN

LISZT—Mephisto Valse, Rhapsodie Espagnol, Variations on a Theme by Bach, Pater Noster, Sursum Corda. Erato, one 12" LP, LDE 3067.

THE Hungarian pianist Gyorgy Sebok is another in the group of young virtuosi who emerged from behind the Iron Curtain in recent months. In this selection he reveals himself to be a well trained pianist, with a flair for Liszt, although his performance of the more familiar works did not completely efface memories of other recordings. He has taken the trouble to include the Pater Noster and Sursum Corda, two works in the Liszt repertoire that attracted the attenion of Bela Barok. Composed during Liszt's religious period, the music in both foreshadows the harmonic developments in the twentieth century.

RACHMANINOFF—Concerto no. 3; Paganini-Liszt Etudes, nos. 3, 4 and 5. Monitor, one 12" LP, MC-2012.

BRAHMS—Variations on a theme of Paganini; Scriabin Sonata no. 5; 4 Etudes. Monitor, one 12" LP, MC-2013.

Richter. The recordings listed here reveal a brilliant technique and an amazing natural facility that is especially helpful in the music of Liszt and in the more Lisztian variations of the Brahms work. There are moments, however, when the pianist's technique threatens to run away with him, and there is never the same feeling of assurance one has with, for example, the Richter performances above.

The Rachmaninoff Concerto is being issued as a "sampler" at a considerably reduced price, and is worth while careful study. The performance compares favourably with the recent Gilels and Cliburn versions.

SCARLATTI—5 Sonatas; BRAHMS—Trio, Opus no 40, for horn. Played by Gilels, Kogan and Shapiro. Bruno, one 12" LP, RR-14010.

THIS Bruno record is a re-release of recordings issued earlier under the Colosseum label. The performances are identical—in fact if you look at the record closely you will find the Colosseum master numbers stamped into the material. But no matter what the label, the Emil Gilels performance of the Scarlatti sonatas in particular is one that no pianist should miss. Stylistically, the playing is dated—the conception of Scarlatti is more closely allied with the 19th Century than the era in which the composer was born—but what piano playing! Colour, rhythmic vitality, tone, tone and more tone! No one else plays Scarlatti this way any more, at least not on this side of the Iron Curtain, but it matters little.