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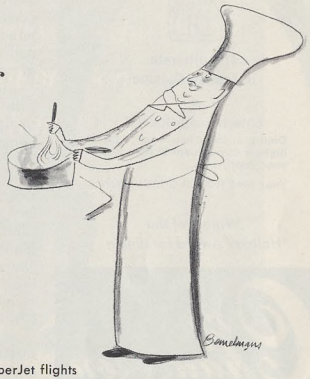

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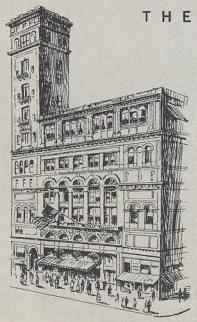

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The Schola Cantorum returns to the Hall on Tuesday evening, March 27, with a program which will include the first New York performance of Carlisle Floyd's song cycle, *The Pilgrimage*. To our mind, an appearance of the Schola is always a special occasion, and we think a brief recapitulation of the history of this esteemed group may be of interest to our readers.

The original Schola Cantorum, organized in Rome during the fifth century, set the loftiest standards for choral singing known to that time. The twentieth-century New York group, assuming the name of the prototype to whose ideals it aspired, had its beginnings in 1909, when Gustav Mahler, conductor of the New York Philharmonic Society, needed a women's chorus for a performance of Debussy's *Sirenes*. Learning that Kurt Schindler had just organized a group of forty voices from the membership of the MacDowell Club, he engaged that chorus, and found it eminently satisfactory. Mahler immediately began to think in terms of the many great choral-symphonic works waiting to be heard—works which, however, called for a much larger body of voices. With Mahler's plans in mind, Schindler gathered together in a few months a chorus of two hundred mixed voices, and the Schola was born.

At its first public concert on March 3, 1911, the group presented no less than three American premières: excerpts from Borodin's *Prince Igor*, Chabrier's *Briseis*, and Mussorgsky's cantata, *Joshua*. In those early days, there were few professional singers in the ranks of the Schola; most members regarded their association with the chorus as purely avocational—many, in fact, were drawn from the ranks of the Social Register.

In 1927, Schindler resigned as conductor to pursue research, and he was followed for a year by Margaret Dessoff as guest conductor. In the meantime, the Schola's directors were investigating the glowing reports they heard of the young English conductor, Hugh Ross. In 1929, Ross became the permanent conductor of the group, and he is its guiding light to this day.

To follow Kurt Schindler was both an honor and a challenge. It was he who had introduced New York to the glories of Russian opera and Spanish folk music. However, other new horizons in choral music were opening up when Ross took over, and he was keenly aware of them. He at once set about exploring the new literature and training the group in the techniques necessary to cope with such works as Villa-Lobos' *Choros No. 10* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*.

At that time other changes were taking place, too. During Ross' second year with the chorus, Toscanini began to engage the group with regularity and the singers, though of amateur standing, had to have professional capabilities. In the years that followed, the Schola sang under almost every famous conductor who appeared in New York. Then came World War II, and the group had its problems when many of the male voices went into service. But as the war drew to a close, the Schola gathered its forces once again and since 1945 has presented some of the most striking works New York has heard: Vaughan William's *Tudor Portraits*, Poulenc's *La Figure Humaine*, Britten's *Spring Symphony*, and the first New York performance of Copland's *In the Beginning*, to name a few.

When the demand for its services became so great that one Good Friday a few years ago it presented three different performances, the Schola Cantorum departmentalized itself into four performing categories—oratorio, recital, television, and opera. Today, its activities continue to grow, and there is no doubt that the Schola's place on the New York concert scene is unique. —B.R.

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PROGRAM

I.

Sonata No. 1 in C Major, Opus 34 ..... *Muzio Clementi*

Allegro con spirito
Un poco andante quasi allegretto
Finale: allegro

PROGRAM CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

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Sonata in F Minor, Opus 57, "Appassionata"
Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro assai
Andante con moto
Allegro ma non troppo

Intermission

PROGRAM CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

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Allegro con fuoco
Andante
Scherzo — allegro vivo — adagio
Allegro vivo

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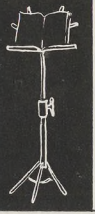

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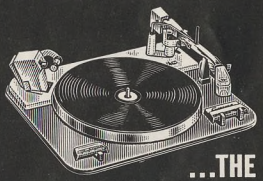

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RECORDINGS: FROM TRISTAN TO BAEZ

In "Le Vin Herbé" the Swiss-born composer, Frank Martin trespassed in a grove sacred to the memory of Richard Wagner. He drew his text from the medieval legend of Tristan and Isolde, more specifically from three chapters of the novel, *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseut* by Joseph Bédier, and wove it musically into an oratorio far different in character from Wagner's celebrated opera but well-deserving of the highest critical praise. "Le Vin Herbé" was first performed in Zurich in 1942; it was February 1961 before it was given in New York by the Schola Cantorum, Hugh Ross conducting. Now, thanks to Westminster, it can be heard in a definite recording supervised by the composer (XWN22232). Sensitive to the creative unrest of our century's music, Martin has molded his own distinctive style, highly chromatic, rhythmically inventive and, in "Le Vin Herbé," beautifully modeled to the emotional lines of the story of the ill-starred lovers. The score calls for twelve solo voices and an instrumental ensemble of seven strings plus piano (the composer presiding at the keyboard). The singers are drawn from the professional musical life of Switzerland and acquit themselves here with noteworthy results. The ensemble consists of first-desk men of the Winterthur Symphony Orchestra. The conductor is Victor Desarzens, director of the Winterthur Symphony as well as of the Chamber Orchestra of Lausanne. The recording was made in Lausanne over a period of two weeks in September 1961.

We hear news about Wagner as well. The first stereo "Tannhäuser" (together with a monaural companion) has been issued in an Angel album (DL/DLS-3620). It happens also to be the second on microgroove and the third in the entire history of recordings (excluding, of course, the many excerpts from the opera that have been issued over the years). Though well-conceived and well-performed, the new album does not quite scale the heights for this reviewer. The title role is rather heavily handled by Hans Hopf, and the Venus of Marianne Schech lacks the aural allure called for in this role. In compensation, however, Elisabeth Grümmer sines an exquisite Elisabeth, Gottlob Frick does full justice to the Landgrave with his rich bass, and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau is ever the immaculate vocal stylist as Wolfram von Eschenbach. The orchestra and chorus are from the German State Opera, Berlin, conducted by Franz Konwitschny. The familiar Dresden version of the opera is used. . . . London adds to its extensive catalogue of operas with a spirited "Ballo in Maschera" (which Verdi, beset by censors, finally decided to set in Boston). The women have the edge over the men in the leading parts: Birgit Nilsson and Giulietta Simionato excelling as Amelia and Ulrica. This does not deprecate Carlo Bergonzi and Cornell MacNeil as Riccardo and Renato, both of whom sing with taste and, as the opera dictates, with fervor. Georg Solti conducts the orchestra and chorus of L'Accademia di Santa Cecilia of Rome.

Now that he has been dead some fifteen years, the vogue for Béla Bartók continues to ride ever-higher crests—reflected among other ways in the steady outpouring of new discs. Westminster contributes two recordings by the composer's countrymen: Janos Ferencsik conducting the Hungarian State Orchestra in the Piano Concertos No. 1, Kornel Zempleny soloist, and No. 2, Tibor Wehner soloist (XWN-19003/WST-17003); György Lehel conducting the Budapest Radio Orchestra and Choir in "Three Village Scenes" and Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta (XWN-19004/WST-17004). On the whole, these are certainly worth hearing; they suffer only in comparison with the exceedingly high standards of Bartók performance we have become accustomed to in New York. The composer's suite to "The Miraculous Mandarin" is given an exciting reading by Robert Irving and the Philharmonia Orchestra (Capitol P/SP-8576). On the reverse side, the same forces do Shostakovitch's suite to "The Age of Gold" to a turn. We must confess that its overtly anti-capitalist music sounds banal in contrast to Bartók's lurid tale of the sins of a city. Let us close this paragraph with a paean to Ernest Ansermet, that indefatigable man of the podium, for what he has done for another Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky. He is back on London (CM-9288/CS-6219) with an enchanting "Les Noces," sung in French, and the taut Symphony of Psalms with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and the choruses of Les Jeunes de Lausanne and of Radio-Lausanne.

For the musical connoisseur, Vanguard has been providing a de-luxe repertoire through its continuous series of recordings under the Bach Guild imprint. One of the instrumental ensembles that graces its list is the Wiener Solisten, directed by Wilfried Böttcher. It plays the masters of the Baroque and Rococo with élan and yet with a tight discipline which captures the styles and spirit of these classical periods. With Fritz Neumeyer at the harpsichord, the Wiener Solisten offers three concertos for that instrument by sons of Bach—D Major and G Major by Johann Christian, and D Minor by Carl Philip Emanuel (BG-616/BGS-5040). Each is a gem. With Karl Scheit, distinguished teacher and guitarist, it provides the orchestral background for what should become a collector's item, "The Virtuoso Guitar" (BG-618/BGS-5043), consisting of concertos by Vivaldi, Torelli and Carulli, and two Galliards by Dowland . . . Better known to us through its American tours, the Solisti di Zagreb, conducted by Antonio Janigro, helps accomplish a tour de force with "The Virtuoso Trumpet" (BG-617/BGS-5041) in music by Vivaldi, Torelli, Purcell and others of the period for one, two and four soloists, principally Helmut Wobisch. . . . The ever-intriguing art of Jean-Philippe Rameau is revealed in a number of short works for the harpsichord played by Anton Heiller, also known for his command of the organ. The recording (BG-614) is the first of a series, "The Virtuoso Harpsichord."

Vanguard has also been regaling us with some remarkable recordings of folk singers, not the least popular of which is a second disc by Joan Baez (VRS-9094/VSD-2097). Fourteen songs, most of them American, reveal once again the purity of her singing, her quiet expressivity which heightens rather than conceals emotion. Another star on the Vanguard list is the thrilling Israeli singer, Shoshana Damari, who almost overwhelms the listener with songs of her people both traditional and contemporary (VRS-9097/VSD-2103). Martha Schlamme may not possess quite the same vocal finesse of the two artists just mentioned, but she does convey a deep involvement with passion and sentiment in songs drawn from various countries and sung in the original languages. The disc (VRS-9091) was recorded during an actual performance at the Gate of Horn, the Chicago nightclub which caters to aficionados of folk song . . . In the space remaining, may we recommend some agreeable folk offerings on other labels: "Cuadro Flamenco" (Capitol T/ST-10301), featuring Los Macarenos in an uninhibited display of the Gypsy art; Robin Hall and Jimmie MacGregor (Monitor MF/MFS-365), those singing idols of British television, in folk and novelty songs of Scotland, with a dash of Ireland for good measure; Jo Stafford, better known for her work in the "popular" field, in rather throaty but appealing folk songs of our country with lush orchestral background (Capitol T/ST-1653); Rakhel, sweet of voice, assisted by an instrumental ensemble of six top men, in "Songs of Israel" (Monitor MF/MFS-364), all by contemporary composers but many in folk vein.

—J.B.

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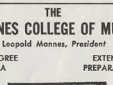

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