Record Reviews:

Rubinstein in Trio Playing Beethoven's B Flat Major

BEETHOVEN, Ludwig van (1770-1827). Trio No. 7 in B Flat Major (Archduke), Opus 97. Played by Artur Rubinstein, pianist, Jascha Heifetz, violinist, Emanuel Feuermann, cellist. Victor Album 946. Five twelve-inch disks. $5.50.

Artur Rubinstein will play here Tuesday night at McFarlin for Civic Music. His latest feat on disks is not all like his somewhat flamboyant and stentorian self. It is sedate collaboration with Jascha Heifetz, the violinist, and Emanuel Feuermann, the cellist, in Beethoven's B Flat Major Trio, the third big work by these three that Victor has released. We don't know how many more there are, but there can't be many. Feuermann has died within the year.

The Beethoven Trio, composed about 1811 in the same months that evoked the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, is among the more dynamic and mobile of chamber music works. It is loaded with fresh, piquant invention and is propelled with orchestral or dramatic feeling. This is no formal workout of technical aridities but a singularly pulsating and vibrant conception by a composer who had unique faith in the piano trio combination. In addition to the fetching first theme of the first movement there is another employing Heifetz's fiddle and Feuermann's cello in pizzicato figures against warm-blooded piano part which Rubinstein plays stunningly. The second movement is the scherzo and the third is the slow movement, and one of grandeur. The theme is almost ecclesiastical; many years later it served Cesar Franck for his Panis Angelicus. It is cunningly arranged in a series of exciting variations. The finale is Beethoven in all his vigor and theatric aplomb. The three stellar virtuosi are less a chamber music society than what they are, three brilliant performers on their respective instruments. This, we believe, is what Beethoven had in mind.

The engineering is not perfect and Heifetz's violin, which is nothing to suppress, does not always have its proper strength. Otherwise the album is a treasure and a companion to the other issues of the trio, which were Brahms B Flat Major, Opus 8, and Schubert's Opus 99 in the same key. The Beethoven is also in B Flat Major and there is more than a coincidence in the fact that Brahms and Schubert wrote in the same scale.

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WEBER, Carl Maria (1786-1826)—Concertstuck in F Minor, Opus 79. Played by Robert Casadesus, pianist, and an orchestra conducted by Eugene Bigot. Columbia Album X-59, two 12-inch disks, $2.90.

After hearing the typical Beethovenism of the Beethoven Trio it is somewhat difficult to recall the fact that the romantic and programmatic Weber actually died a year earlier than Beethoven, the liaison man between classicism and romanticism. The famed Concertstueck of Weber was written but ten years after Beethoven's Trio and at the same time that the master was composing the amazing sonatas of Opus 109, 110 and 111. It now hits us like a blow between the eyes that Beethoven, only sixteen years Weber's senior, was anticipating the Twentieth Century while his junior was only anticipating the Nineteenth.

The Concertstueck has had a popularity not justified by its merits. It is short and it serves pianists for either a second number with symphony or the one number permitted by a reluctant conductor.

The Concertstueck has a program, something about a Chatelain who sits alone on her balcony while her knight goes to the Holy Land. The sections tell first of her fears, then of her revivication upon his return in pageantrylike measures, and finally of her happiness upon sinking once more into his arms. This synopsis now seems unrelated to the music which impresses one as aspiring pianism of a fustian quality that might have been written by Liszt.

Technical exactions are many and Robert Casadesus meets them brilliantly. The effortless pyrotechnics and the sound musical sense of the soloist do much to make this performance acceptable. An unnamed orchestra under Eugene Bigot is an admirable collaborator.

This is Columbia's reissue for the month. The recording was first sold in 1936. The smooth surfaces and good balance make one wonder if recording today is any improvement.

JOHN ROSENFIELD.

Editor's Note.—Due to the shortage of shellac, the release of new recordings has been sharply cut. This column will appear only when important new disks are available for review.