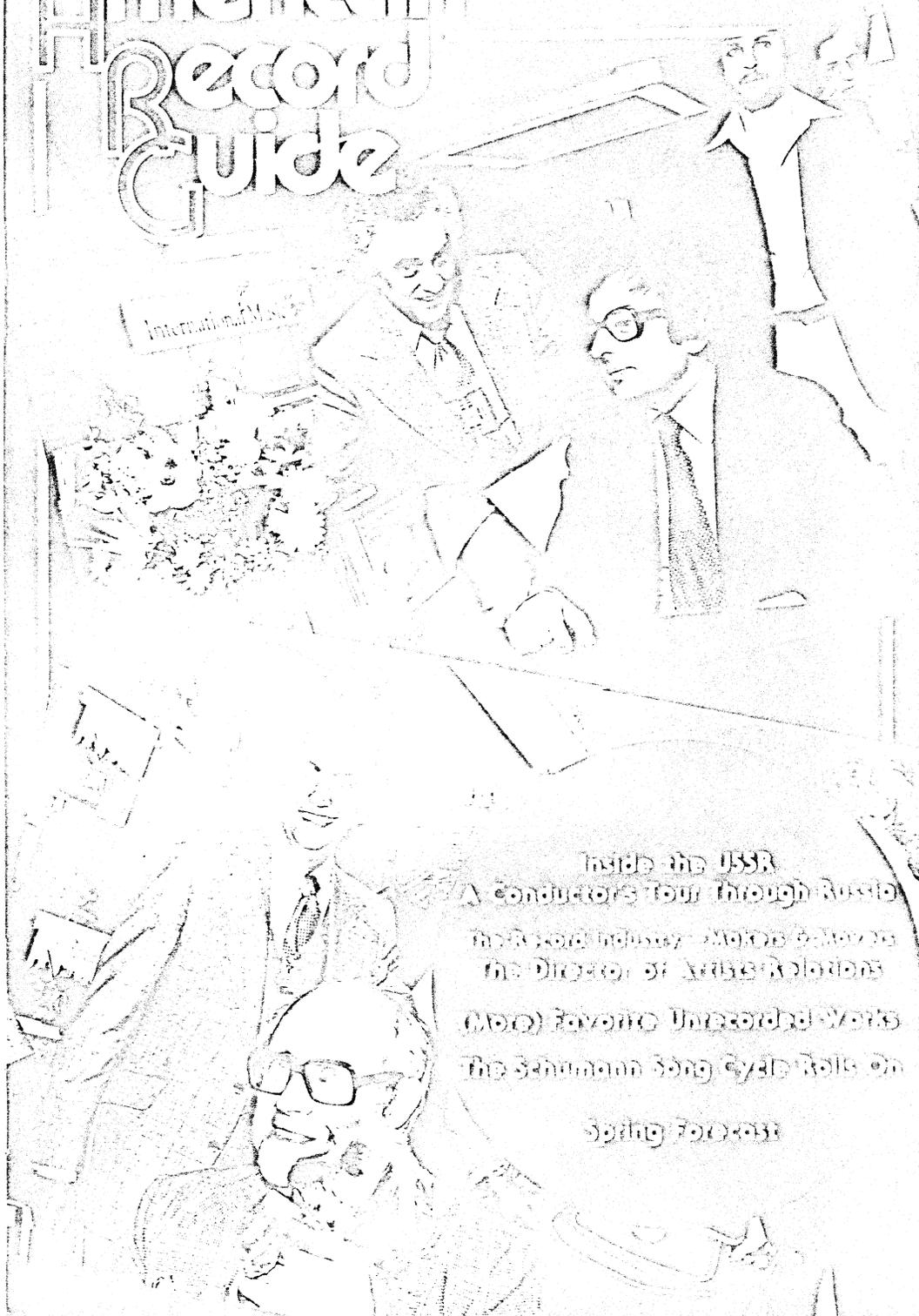


American Record Guide



Inside the USSR
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ful effectiveness. *Belsatzar* (the story of Belshazzar's Feast) was the earliest of them, in Schumann's first Heine setting. It is easy to find fault with it as too conscious an attempt to follow the details of the poem, yet it does make its point and one gets fond of it. No wonder basses and baritones love to sing it. Even more popular is *Die beiden Grenadiere*, which with its *Marseillaise* peroration is surefire in any adequate performance. If *Die feindlichen Brüder* and *Blondels Lied* do not reach this level, they will bear an occasional hearing.

There are only eight songs on this program that Fischer-Dieskau has not recorded before—*Auf dem Rhein*, *Blondels Lied*, *Loreley*, *Aufträge*, *Marienburg*, *Die wandelnde Glocke*, *Er ist's* and *Lied Lynceus des Türmers*. By my count he has done *Dichterliebe* four times with three different pianists—Demus (twice), Horowitz and now Eschenbach. He has given us three versions of the Heine *Liederkreis*, the *Kerner-Lieder*, *Die beiden Grenadiere*, *Die feindlichen Brüder*, *Der arme Peter*, *Balsatzar* and *Tragödie*, and two each of the remainder. If we compare these various performances several considerations set each one apart. The interpretations in this new album may safely be taken as definitive, for the artist, now 54, has been singing publicly for more than 30 years. While the latest versions could hardly match the vocal freshness of the first, the music has become second nature to him. And his practice of working with different pianists—never run-of-the-mill accompanists but his artistic peers—insures a new approach each time. Certain mannerisms—such as violent dynamic contrasts—were somewhat moderated in mid-career. At the present stage, when the high notes no longer come so easily, he inclines occasionally to bluster.

The new *Liederkreis* is notable for the freedom the singer and pianist allow themselves. *Rubato*, such as we find in the very first song, is unexceptionable in Schumann. But if the tempo of *Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen* seems really slow for *Ziemlich langsam*, *Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden* is unduly rushed and agitated; however, Fischer-Dieskau has his own ideas about dynamic markings. The score of *Abends am Strand* has no further directions than the opening *Ruhig, nach und nach bewegter* and a return to *Tempo* toward the end. He

builds up tremendous excitement here, more even than in his earlier recordings.

What remains to say about *Dichterliebe*? Only that we may expect the unexpected. Certain of the "firsts" on the third side take the baritone into territory usually preempted by the sopranos. In such songs as *Aufträge* and *Er ist's* I cannot lose the echo of Elisabeth Schumann's voice. An interesting study could be made of the treatment of ballads—especially *Die beiden Grenadiere* and *Belsatzar*—by various artists who have recorded them. Fischer-Dieskau presents the narrative matter-of-factly, saving his effects for the climaxes.

As noted in considering Vol. 1, the singer has found another accomplished and congenial partner in Eschenbach.

STARER: Quartet for Piano & Strings.
See *Roem*.

A Real Sleeper

J. STRAUSS, JR.: Emperor Waltz and Roses from the South (arr. Schoenberg); *Wine, Woman, and Song* (arr. Berg); *Treasure Waltz* from "The Gypsy Baron" (arr. Webern).

Boston Symphony Chamber Players: Joseph Silverstein and Max Hobart, violins; Burton Fine, viola; Jules Eskin, cello; Jerome Rosen, harmonium; Gilbert Kalish, piano; Doriot Anthony Dwyer, flute; Harold Wright, clarinet.

Deutsche Grammophon 2530 977, \$9.98; cas. 3300 997, \$9.98.

The origin of three of these arrangements is unique. In the spring of 1910 Schoenberg organized a special concert for his "Society for private music performances." The society, which had dedicated to new-music performers with the highest standards before a subscription audience only, need to raise money. Hence this concert of Strauss waltz arrangements at which guests from outside the society were allowed. It didn't really mean a lapse in standards: the arrangements were carefully rehearsed, and Strauss' music itself, irrespective of its popular style, was first-class material. It must have been quite an evening, especially with Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern also performing, and the subsequent auctioning of the manuscripts of their arrangements!

The arrangements themselves need little comment. The harmonium adds a delightful color and is used by

the three composers in different ways. None of the arrangements is really unusual, but all are skillful and well worth hearing for their clarity and sheer fun. Those who know Webern's orchestration of one of the *ricercars* from Bach's *Musical Offering* may tremble at the thought of Webern dissecting a Strauss waltz, but his work here has only a hint of his radical approach to the Bach.

The performances are like the arrangements themselves: straightforward, well balanced, clean—and with all the considerable skill we can expect from the Boston players. It's a matter of conjecture whether this no-nonsense approach would have been favored by Schoenberg on May 27, 1921. The recorded sound is bright but too full and close; dynamics are quite restricted. Surfaces are tops.

The *Emperor Waltz* is scored for slightly different forces than the others. Schoenberg arranged it in 1925, and on this record it replaces the fourth waltz of the 1921 concert, his arrangement of Strauss' *Lagoon Waltz*. It would be nice to have that one also done by this group. Regardless, the present record uniquely combines nostalgia with historical importance through music which may be light but certainly is good. One could do worse than become reacquainted with the "second Viennese" composers via this untypical but irresistible record.

—Rapoport

R. STRAUSS: Sonata in E-flat major for violin and piano, Op. 18.
SZYMANOWSKI: Romance, Op. 23; *Three Caprices of Paganini*, Op. 40.

Vincent P. Skowronski, violin; Donald Isaak, piano. Eb-Sko 1006, \$7.98.

The violin sonata is an impassioned early work by the 23 year old Richard Strauss. It was written while the composer was assistant conductor at the Munich opera and it follows *The Six Songs of 1885-6*, between *Aus Italien* and *Don Juan*. The two other works on this record were written by the Polish composer Szymanowski (1882-1937) in 1909 and 1918 respectively. *The Three Caprices* are edited settings for violin and piano of Paganini's *Caprices*, Op. 1, nos. 20, 21 and 24. This is apparently the first American recording of the *Caprices*.

Skowronski is an American violinist living in Evanston, Illinois, and his interpretations of all three works are com-

mitted and full of feeling. He is a spirited player and communicates the music with his heart on his sleeve but for the most part with little tonal subtlety. His restless interpretation of the Strauss sonata conveys the romantic emotion-



Skowronski: A spirited player.

alism of the music but has little feeling for the long view of the overall structure. In neither this work, nor the *Caprices*, is his intonation absolutely secure, lapsing occasionally in the upper positions and, especially in the *Caprices*, in double stopping. Skowronski's tone is at its sweetest and most attractive in the Szymanowski *Romance*, a lush and pleasant work interpreted with sensitivity. In all three works Donald Isaak's contribution is supportive, without calling attention to itself.

The piano is recorded more distantly than the violin which, in turn, is so closely miked that a veil of heavy breathing lies over the whole record. My copy was bedeviled by clicks, and the recorded sound can only be called aggressive.

Skowronski not only performs the works, but also produced the record and wrote the interesting liner notes. The Strauss *Sonata* and the Szymanowski *Romance* deserve to be heard more often. This record, at full price, competes with two versions of the *Sonata* currently listed in Schwann, one at a bargain price on Nonesuch and the other by Heifetz. However there are no listed versions of either of the Szymanowski works.

—Payne