

Records



Mr. Humphreys

MUSICUS—F. W. Humphreys—retired from Shell International Chemical Company Ltd. at the end of 1960, and the article below will therefore be his last in these columns. Mr. Humphreys first wrote for this magazine in 1929, and since then has reviewed many hundreds of records. He has witnessed the enormous development of the record industry, from pre-electric days to stereo and hi-fi.

Although interested in a wide variety of music, he has always been particularly fond of opera, and for his farewell present from the staff of this magazine he not surprisingly chose Joan Sutherland's much-praised set of records entitled *The Art of the Prima Donna*.

We wish him health and happiness in retirement, and much pleasant listening. 'DISCUS'

Der Fliegende Holländer (Wagner) on three H.M.V. records in presentation box (mono ALP 1806-8, stereo ASD 385-7). The principal roles in this powerful and vivid recording are taken by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (baritone), The Dutchman; Daland, the Norwegian sea-captain, Gottlob Frick (bass); Senta, his daughter, Marianne Schech (soprano); Erik, her suitor, Rudolf Schock (tenor); and the Pilot, Fritz Wunderlich (tenor). With the chorus and orchestra of the German State Opera, Berlin, under Franz Konwitschny, Fischer-Dieskau gives a superb performance as the lonely, sinister Dutchman; Frick has a magnificent voice, and the two tenor roles are well taken. Marianne Schech also has a beautiful voice which she uses with simple sincerity in the second act and with considerable dramatic intensity in the last act. There is some really fine work from the orchestra, and the recording is spacious, with plenty of atmosphere.

There are some well-chosen items on the Record Society disc entitled *Sons of Bach*. It opens with the Symphonies in D (Op. 18, No. 4) and G Minor (Op. 6, No. 6) by Johann Christian; Carl Philipp Emanuel's contribution is his Symphony No. 5 in B Minor, and finally comes Symphony in D Minor for two flutes and strings and a Lament in D Minor for Wilhelm Friedemann. A wealth of music, admirably played and excellently recorded; Peter Branscombe provides some scholarly programme notes.

Classics Club, under the happy title 'Heritage Records', have produced a 7-inch record of **Melba** singing *Porgi Amor* (from *La Nozze di Figaro*), *Si mes Vers* (Hahn), *Lo, Hear the Gentle Lark* (Bishop) and *Donde Lieta Usci* (from *La Bohème*), recorded between 1903 and 1907. Her style and distinctive beauty and childlike simplicity of tone are all here, but allowances must, of course, be made for the limitations of the early acoustical recording (HER 506).

An equally interesting record for collectors of 'Golden Age' artists is HER 406, containing, on a 12-inch l.p., excerpts from *La Bohème* sung by Caruso, Melba, Zenatello, Farrar, Scotti and Sammarco. What a galaxy of great stars! The transfers, from recordings made between 1904 and 1910, are extremely well done, and include the famous Melba-Caruso duet *O Soave Fanciulla*. Here is some of the most perfect singing one could ever hope to hear; one can easily forget the limitations imposed by the early recording.

After the many recordings recently of Gilbert and Sullivan

operas we at last have a complete recording of Edward German's light opera *Merrie England*, with a cast largely recruited from Sadler's Wells: William McAlpine is Raleigh; Peter Glossop, Essex; Monica Sinclair, Queen Elizabeth; June Bronhill, Bessie Throgmorton; and Patricia Kern a somewhat heavy Jill-all-alone. This work has much to commend it, with its fresh, melodious songs and concerted numbers; it is only in some of the patter songs that it falls short of G. and S. Basil Hunt's libretto has a few unfortunate phrases, particularly in the patriotic moments, but, fortunately, we are spared embarrassment on this recording, which excludes the dialogue. The work is extremely well sung, and the orchestra make much of the score; the recording is vividly alive (H.M.V. CLP 1376/7, or stereo CSD 1311/2).

For the first time a live recording of **St. Patrick's Day** celebrations at the Irish Club in Parnell Square, Dublin, has been issued, on H.M.V. CLP 1331. Brendan Hogan and the Ballinakill Celi Band are responsible, together with members of the club, for the 19 numbers—jigs, waltzes, barn-dances, and ending with the Irish National Anthem sung in Gaelic. This record disappointed me: if the intention was purely to provide music for Irish dancing, then it serves its purpose; but the sleeve suggests that it is a hilarious Irish party, and I cannot imagine a more sober and sedate affair than this.

Two new records of Beethoven's music can be recommended. On Columbia 33CX 1696, Claudio Arrau gives a masterly performance of the **Piano Concerto No. 2** and the **Piano Sonata in D, Opus 10 No. 3**, accompanied in the concerto by the Philharmonia Orchestra under Galliera. The piano tone is rich and sonorous, and the recording excellent.

Beethoven's **String Quartet in B flat, Opus 130**, and **Grosse Fuge, Opus 133**, are played by the Schaffner Quartet on the Record Society disc RS 44. Originally written in six movements, the monumental last movement was so taxing for the players—and perhaps the audience—that Beethoven substituted another last movement, and the *Grosse Fuge* (which takes up nearly the whole of the second side) thus became a separate work. Opus 130 is typical of Beethoven's introspective last-period music; the *Fuge*, while not by any means easy, is a masterpiece that repays the listener's efforts. Both works are well played and cleanly recorded.

'Highlights' from the complete Sargent-Huddersfield Choral Society recording of **Messiah** issued about a year ago are now available on Columbia 33CX 1713; this is extraordinarily good value. The excellent soloists are Richard Lewis (tenor), Elsie Morison (soprano) and Marjorie Thomas (contralto). Among the items included are the great *Amen* and *Hallelujah* choruses. 'MUSICUS'

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as 'The Flying Dutchman'

