at the words "a diletti" can this be the maestro himself?

Mr. Peerce seems to be unacquainted with the significance of *ppp* in "Dei miei bollenti spiriti" and all the singers fail to use a truly conversational style in what follows. Kohnstamm, as *Peppe*, demonstrates his sonority and sonorousness by singing "(Pura siccome un angelo)" in booming tones that are the reverse of dolceissimo, cantabile, and he merely makes the old man more of a bore than ever.

His voice reminds me of what is called ruby port wine, a beverage that soon palls, and his rapid note groups in the duet with Violetta are roughly done. Albanese gives us some expressive singing in "Dile alla giovine," disturbed by Merrill's explosive repetitions of "piang, piang" and I had to turn back to the Galli Curci-De Luca recording to expunge the memory of this unpleasant sound. But Albanese really began to move me in her cry "Alfredo tu m'ami" and she makes the great outburst following very poignant.

I shall pass over Merrill's "Di Provenza il mar" without comment and note with pleasure the lively singing of the two genre choruses in the second act. The singers are driven along by Toscanini from the sinfunitesque in the orchestra marked allegro agitato to the end of the act and it is a matter of regret but we are not to have some of his music deserved, but there were special reasons for this. Leaving Russia in 1921, his life was more or less nomadic up to 1936, when he settled in England, so that it is true that we could not have heard more of his music. Furthermore, famous pianists are very unenterprising, and do not readily learn new works, while audiences prefer the old ones. Add the fact that somebody had christened Medtner the "Russian Brahms," and you begin to understand the comparative neglect of a composer whose name is known to all, but whose music is known by few. The first thing that I did was to get hold of the last book of Medtner's piano sonatas, and I found that the work is a rich one, but not one of the greatest. Medtner is a composer who is not getting the recognition he deserves.

Albanese forgets the studio completely in the last act, and now is completely inside her part (coughs and all), she reads the letter from Alfredo's father with genuine emotion, and she sings "Addio del passato" movingly. From here to the end, indeed, the three principals are excellent.

I have deliberately made little allusion until now to the conductor, but of course the opera is Toscanini's. The Preludes to the first and third acts are as might be predicted, superbly done and when Verdi writes, as in the introduction to the first act, Allegro brillantissimo e molto vivace, that, and just that, is what we get. One of the intentions of which the main object is is to be a long crescendo, in the chorus after the waltz in this act, from *pp* to *ff*, a matter of eight pages of vocal score, and an example of magnificent control of chorus and orchestra.

Equally fine is the brilliant introduction to the second finale of the second act and the playing of the all-pervading figure in *F minor* as Alfredo gambles. At times a slight, and heretical, doubt arises as to whether the score is not somewhat overplayed for its significance: and certainly one wonders how a conductor who articulates every note with such care, can tolerate anything but the most distinguished singers. My impression is that he is not getting the orchestra that he needs.

The recording, as I have said, has to deal with sound that falls dead at once and it is the orchestra that suffers most from this disadvantage, but the real point of this issue is that here for the first time we have a complete recording of an opera made by one of the greatest of living conductors: and it is for that we welcome and value it. For this reason no comparison need be made with the excellent Columbia set, which I reviewed in *The Gramophone* of February 1947.

Two matters by way of postscript. A reader kindly points out that the Valkyries sang solo lines in unison at Bayreuth, so that no blame attaches to the engineers or recording for increase of tone. Finally, since a gremlin attacks me whenever I write about *Così fan tutte*, I shall review no more recordings from this opera. Having prematurely married the lovers and unscrambled them, I took great pains to avoid error in reviewing Fiordiligi's *Rondo-Aria*, but the gremlin removed the word "sister" in the phrase "her (sister) husband in disguise," and I was in the soup again!

**NICOLAS MEDTNER (1880-1951)**

*By RICHARD HOLT*

**THIS great musician, born in Moscow in 1880, and the last of the Russian "Old Guard," passed away at his Golders Green home on November 13th, after two years of ill-health, during most of which he was unable to hear his music deserved, but there were special reasons for this. Leaving Russia in 1921, his life was more or less nomadic up to 1936, when he settled in England, so that it is true that we could not have heard more of the musical life of any particular country. With no "C sharp minor Prelude" to spread his fame, his music, while he lived in Russia, where it was highly honoured, did not reach the musical fringes. Furthermore, famous pianists are very unenterprising, and do not readily learn new works, while audiences prefer the old ones. Add the fact that somebody had christened Medtner the "Russian Brahms," and you begin to understand the comparative neglect of a composer whose name is known to all, but whose music is known by few. The first thing that I did was to get hold of the last book of Medtner's piano sonatas, and I found that the work is a rich one, but not one of the greatest. Medtner is a composer who is not getting the recognition he deserves.

Perhaps, another fact that has militated against his recognition is his supposed antagonism to anything modern in music. I say supposed, because he was not against any works in which the basic principles of art and music were anachronistically outraged, and the legacy of the masters treated as useless; music of "senseless modulations"; and "not a centre of tonal gravity and no inter-related use of consonance and dissonance." His views on this vexed question are to be found in his book, *Music and Mode*, which, as yet, is untranslated. In Russia, Medtner was regarded by most famous musicians as a front-rank fighter against modern extravagance and iconoclasm of the art, and on his wall hung a portrait of Alexander Glazounov, with the latter's inscription: "To a loyal defender of the sacred cause of true Art." Naturally, a composer who indulges in polemics will arouse opposition, and, in attacking the excesses of modernism, incur the risk of being labelled reactionary. It is enough to say that I have listened on the radio with Medtner to works by Britten, Vaughan Williams and others, and that he found much to praise in them, to refute such a charge.

Medtner was a man of rare intellectual

**Majestic and Moving**

Lord, hear my prayer (Archangel'sky)

*Creed (Gretchaninoff)*

**RUSSIAN CHURCH CHOIR**

HMV C2206
gifs, but a warm heart and a keen wit prevented his intellect from dominating his art, in which emotion plays a dominant part. There are scores of passages in his compositions which are overwhelming by their poignant and depth of feeling. Simultaneous with my study of his music was the ever-deepening friendship I was privileged to contract with him. We spent many evenings together; with Mrs. Medtner, a wonder of faithful devotion and helpfulness to him, now present, then preparing a genuine Russian supper. Afterwards, we would repair to the music-room, and there we would talk vivaciously of the music and other things (for his active mind was interested in life as a whole), and perhaps, listening to records or the wireless. Some of his quietly ironic comments were highly entertaining. Referring to a modern composer, he declared that he orchestrated his music first and composed it afterwards. One comment, on the music of Chopin, was, "few composers to-day, I recall," when I was a young man, be declared, "there was a mere handful of composers, to-day there appears to be a whole telephone-directory of them."

After his death, he could only live downstairs, and piano-playing (which was the breath of life to him) and even listening to music were barred. Sometimes, when some improvement manifested itself, he would send by a servant to a sailor, about a hundred yards distant from his house, and wait for me, waving his stick as I came into sight. We would sit for a while, and then he would take my arm and we would return, and I would not talk to him, his only way, I knew, was to try to be without music, a man who was music in himself. Now he is gone, and I feel something precious has passed from my world. But something precious remains, his wonderful music, of which, thanks to the great gesture of a cultured music lover in far-off India, four whole albums, and two separate issues, remain for the delight of those who have learned the quality of it.

Medtner's art is original in the truest sense (witness the ever-delightful Fairy-Tale). He used to say the "greatest originality was to create a new atmosphere by familiar materials," and that he has done. As Ernest Newman wrote in the '20s, "In a day when 'alities' of every kind seem to be running mad, Medtner calmly goes on demonstrating the nonsensel of the theory that the resources of the old tonality are exhausted." Medtner was not a Russian Brahms; he was essentially Russian, and I recall how delighted he was, when, after I had become familiar with his music, I spoke of what I considered its emphatic Russian quality. "You understand that," he said, "very well;" he said.

Medtner wrote sixty-one works (or Opus numbers) and in every one the piano is used. His name will live, therefore, primarily, as a composer for that instrument. The orchestras, in his concertos, however, is employed skilfully and expressively. His songs, exhibiting an impeccable regard for the text, are masterly, and he must take a high place in this respect. The rhythmic element in his music is outstanding, but, set apart from technical considerations, it is its spiritual and human attributes which make it so significant.

If I end by stating that I consider Beechoven's to be the greatest mind in music (as particularly exemplified by the last quartets), and that my favourite composers are Rachmaninov, Haydn, Mozart, Mahler, Bruckner, Elgar, Verdi, Ravel, Liszt and a few others, it is merely with the hope of gaining the reader's confidence in my claim to possess pointed out innumerable, and so, perhaps, to make him attach some value to my considered opinion, that the music of Nicolas Medtner deserves to rank amongst the richest treasures of the art. Thanks to the generosity of H.H. the Maharaja of Mysore, and to the work of H.M.V. and Columbia much of his music is now available for us to enjoy.

The H.M.V. Archive series has naturally created a considerable stir in the collecting world, and I have received a great deal of correspondence on the subject. Generally speaking, the reaction of the majority of collectors seems to be one of gratitude to the company concerned for making these "pieces" available. However, many correspondents have pointed out innumerable, and so, perhaps, to make him attach some value to my considered opinion, that the music of Nicolas Medtner deserves to rank amongst the richest treasures of the art. Thanks to the generosity of H.H. the Maharaja of Mysore, and to the work of H.M.V. and Columbia much of his music is now available for us to enjoy.

LECTORS' CORNER
Conducted By JOHN FREESTONE

December, 1951

Recorded Works of Nicolas Medtner
Albion of His Piano Works, played by the Composer. 12-inch, 78s. DB39909-8.

Mysore Foundation of Music Records
Album I:

Album II:

Album III:

Selection of Songs, sung by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf (soprano) with Medtner (piano). Columbia L.X1423-6.

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Calvé—Ma Lisette and Le Printemps, No. 093954; "Carmen"—Les tringles des carquois intendant, No. 090598; Lilli Lehmann—Twoarias from "Il Seraglio" (These are Odeon masters, but they are, I believe, still available, and there seems to be no reason why they should not be issued, under the appropriate label.)

Maurel—Any, but particularly the "Otylo" by Robert de Viron; excerpts. (As with Lehmann, the records would presumably be issued with Odeon labels. The masters, I believe, are still preserved.)

Of course the list could be expanded almost indefinitely, but I have mentioned just a few recordings which would almost certainly meet with wide approval. However, at the moment, most of us no doubt have earmarked far more of the new H.M.V. issues for our own personal "archives" than our purses can cope with. As a collector of originals, I would much prefer a red G. & T. of Boronat to one of the new white label pressings, but as the former are becoming rarer and rarer, the latter form a very welcome means of hearing some of the great voices of the past. Meanwhile the owners of original records must be congratulated on having been proved over and over again that the reissue of great rarities does not materially affect the value of the originals.

CREATOR'S DISCS
By GORDON WHELAN

Most readers of "Collectors' Corner" are in possession of a copy of "Historical Records," various reasons, sung by such famous singers at Melba, Caruso, Tamagno, Maurel, etc. Most of these discs are too well known by all collectors for me to bring them to your notice again in this article. However, I think it would be of great interest to you all to mention other important creators' recordings, which, for various reasons, are mentioned in the Bauer "Historical Records." That list stops at recordings, after 1911-12, and does not