

BLACKFRIARS

tor's *Douanes*. It will be interesting to see whether this work will conjure up vivid memories to all who have suffered the indignities, cold, and discomfort of those draughty sheds and endless passages at Calais, Boulogne and Dieppe.

We are to have our annual visit from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under Herr Furtwangler. They are giving two concerts at the Queen's Hall, on February 13th and 14th, and one at the Albert Hall on the 19th. Save for the inevitable all-Beethoven programme on the first date, the works chosen for performance do not make very inspiring reading. This German orchestra is still as fine an instrument as ever, but mere virtuosity can never overcome the handicap of ill-chosen programmes. We have an orchestra or two of our own nowadays that can play interesting music brilliantly.

The B.B.C. are presenting a fine series of eight subscription concerts of chamber music in the new Concert Hall at Broadcasting House, beginning on February 6th. Such great artists as Carl Flesch and Lamond, and such well-known ensembles as the Brosa, Kutcher, and Pro Arte Quartets are taking part.

PATRICK GEOGHEGAN.

GRAMOPHONE NOTES.

With the memory of recent concerts in honour of Sir Edward Elgar's seventy-fifth birthday still fresh in our minds, it may be interesting to see just how much our gramophone companies have done to preserve, for all time, the true spirit and authentic interpretation of his works. Between them, the H.M.V. and Columbia companies have recorded nearly all the major works and a large number of the minor ones. Two notable exceptions are *The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Kingdom*, H.M.V. having only four extracts from the former, while no records of the latter work are available. A not too abridged version of these works would be very welcome. Most certainly, *The Dream of Gerontius* would make very ready sales. Another crying need is a new recording of the Second Symphony. Admittedly the early H.M.V. electric recording was considered highly satisfactory, nevertheless we now judge these productions by a far stricter standard. The recent issue, by the same company, of a magnificent recording and performance of the First Symphony has shown the big strides that have been made in the knowledge of microphone-balancing, and the consequent improvement in instrumental detail.

The same plea for a new recording might also be made on behalf of that great favourite, the Enigma Variations. One

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very good reason for demanding these new recordings, and without any great delay, is that we may be able to avail ourselves of the composer's services as the conductor of the performances. Whatever may be said against the idea of composer-conductors as a general rule cannot, with any fairness, be employed against Sir Edward's skill as an interpreter of his own music.

Both H.M.V. and Columbia have made excellent recordings of the 'Cello Concerto, but it would take great daring to declare one to be more satisfactory than the other. Each has its own good qualities to recommend it. The fact that the composer is conducting the H.M.V. production and that the soloist is in very special sympathy with the mood of the work may count for a good deal with some people. On the other hand, the Columbia version is slightly superior in its orchestral quality, but this is most probably due to a superiority in recording rather than in performance.

The two latest works to be added to the H.M.V. catalogue are completely satisfying, the recording and playing of both the soloist and the orchestras being really magnificent. In order of their issue these two works are—the Symphonic Study *Falstaff*, and the Violin Concerto. The composer conducts the London Symphony Orchestra in both cases, the soloist in the Concerto being Yehudi Menuhin. This boy's technically flawless playing and amazingly thoughtful interpretation, combined with the composer's fine leadership of the orchestra, give the whole performance a glorious air of easy authority.

Although Menuhin's contribution to the performance is outstanding he never allows the mere perfection of his fiddling to interfere with the conception of the work as a whole; the surest sign of a great artist.

The other work, the *Falstaff* Study, is, in its own way, just as remarkable an achievement as the Concerto. In this work we find the nearest approach to biographical appreciation that music is ever likely to produce. In many ways it is even more perfect than the written word owing to the wonderful subtlety of its medium. Here we have, not merely the cross-sectional glimpse of the life of the great Shakespearean character that has been afforded us by sundry other composers, but a panoramic view of the whole brave, lusty, comic, tragic, and pitiful pageant that was the career of that strangely lovable and complex man. The notes supplied with the complete album-set of this work are the composer's own. They are neatly arranged, not too technical, and full use is made of quotations from the score.

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