

What is it that brings on a session of playing your records at home - to yourself! Is it out of habit, mood swing or other mystical-supernatural causes? Your editor tries some self analysis on this topic and comes up with some very indeterminate and inconclusive results!

I wonder how many collectors in our scratchy record group, have had occasion to stop and think what is it that motivates us into playing records from our collection? Is it because there is nothing on the radio that appeals as we go about our daily routine, or a sudden desire to express a personal mood swing? Or is it an irresistible urge to recall a tune or musical phrase which has previously given pleasure and enjoyment.

I don't know if all this has got anything to do with old age, but I seem to have developed a penchant for immediately indulging in a record playing session every time a *Record Collector* magazine turns up in my letter box. The arrival of this sees me making a beeline for any records I might have by the artist who is featured in the latest issue. Then again, hearing a record at one of our scratchy record gatherings will see me scurrying home to pull out and play items which have

been triggered off by listening to a fellow collector's presentation. These are just two things which are bound to set me off into playing my 78s these days. In this respect, I think my listening is more analytical than it used to be. I am now more receptive to subtleties of interpretation than I used to be. In my early days as a record collector, my record playing sessions were more inclined to be what you might call wall-to-wall background music while I was doing other things. An apprenticeship period served me well as I established a background knowledge and began to discern good from bad when it came to evaluating performances.

All this was brought to a head recently when I visited Des Wilson and he played me a Polydor recording he'd just acquired of Heinrich Schlusnus singing arias from *Faust* and *Mignon*. In the next few days it led me to getting out all my recordings by this marvellous German baritone and playing them until 'the cows came home'. I have about 60 titles by Schlusnus in my record collection, a figure incidentally which only accounts for about a tenth of his commercial recordings. A colossal number when its compared to others of his generation.

This surge of interest in a baritone whose career was evenly divided between the operatic stage and the concert platform covered a period when the political world was topsy-turvy in Europe. My enthusiasm for rediscovering this singer was given an additional surge by Roger Hart's presentation during which he played a very interesting version of Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*. I could hardly wait to get home to put on my Schlusnus rendering to see how he interpreted the three characters which feature in Schubert's song .

In case there are those of you who have no idea of whom I'm writing about, here is what Michael Scott said about Schlusnus in *The Record of Singing*, Volume Three.

"The career of Heinrich Schlusnus (1888 - 1952) alternated between the opera house and the concert hall: he was as famous as a lieder singer as he was in opera. His was a high baritone, of the most beautiful quality, and his tones were produced effortlessly at almost any dynamic level through the entire voice. We should have to go back to

Battistini to find a baritone in his sixties whose art was so perfectly preserved. He made his first appearance in 1915 at Hamburg as the Herald in *Lohengrin*; after two years spent at Nürnberg he arrived in Berlin, as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*. He was the leading Verdi baritone in Berlin throughout his career with roles like Germont, di Luna, Rigoletto, and Monterone in the German premiere of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*. At the same time he achieved an enviable reputation as a lieder singer in programmes ranging from Mozart to Marx, as he gave numerous concerts all over the world. Yet apart from a fleeting visit to Chicago in 1927, as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*, he never sang in opera in America or in England: a great loss, because he was the last in a line of noble German baritones."

Of the 212 singers in this boxed set of *The Record of Singing* only 6 get the privilege of two selections in this 13 LP set, one of them being Schlusnus! Is this significant, or is it just a statistic which some might regard as trivial, denoting as it does someone who is slightly mad, likening it to those who wallow in cricket statistics!

On a scale of 78rpm rarity stakes, I would place Schlusnus's records as being relatively easy to find and not over priced.

Schlusnus began making records for the Deutsche Grammophon A.G. (DGG) in October 1917, the company which emerged virtually unscathed with matrixes and masters from its parent body (HMV) after the end of the First World War. Schlusnus stayed with this company until he switched over to Decca in July 1948. We in New Zealand saw his late acoustic and early electric recordings on the Polydor label (the export division of DGG) and its Brunswick equivalent. In the mid to late 1930s his 78s also appeared in New Zealand on the Decca/Polydor label which came to us from English sources. When LPs appeared in the early 1950s, DGG and Decca quickly transferred his records over to vinyl.

When Schlusnus died in 1952, DGG brought out several *In Memoriam LP Albums* including some on EPL (extended play 45rpm). Anyone interested in getting examples of Schlusnus's records for their collection, might run across something from this period; or failing that,

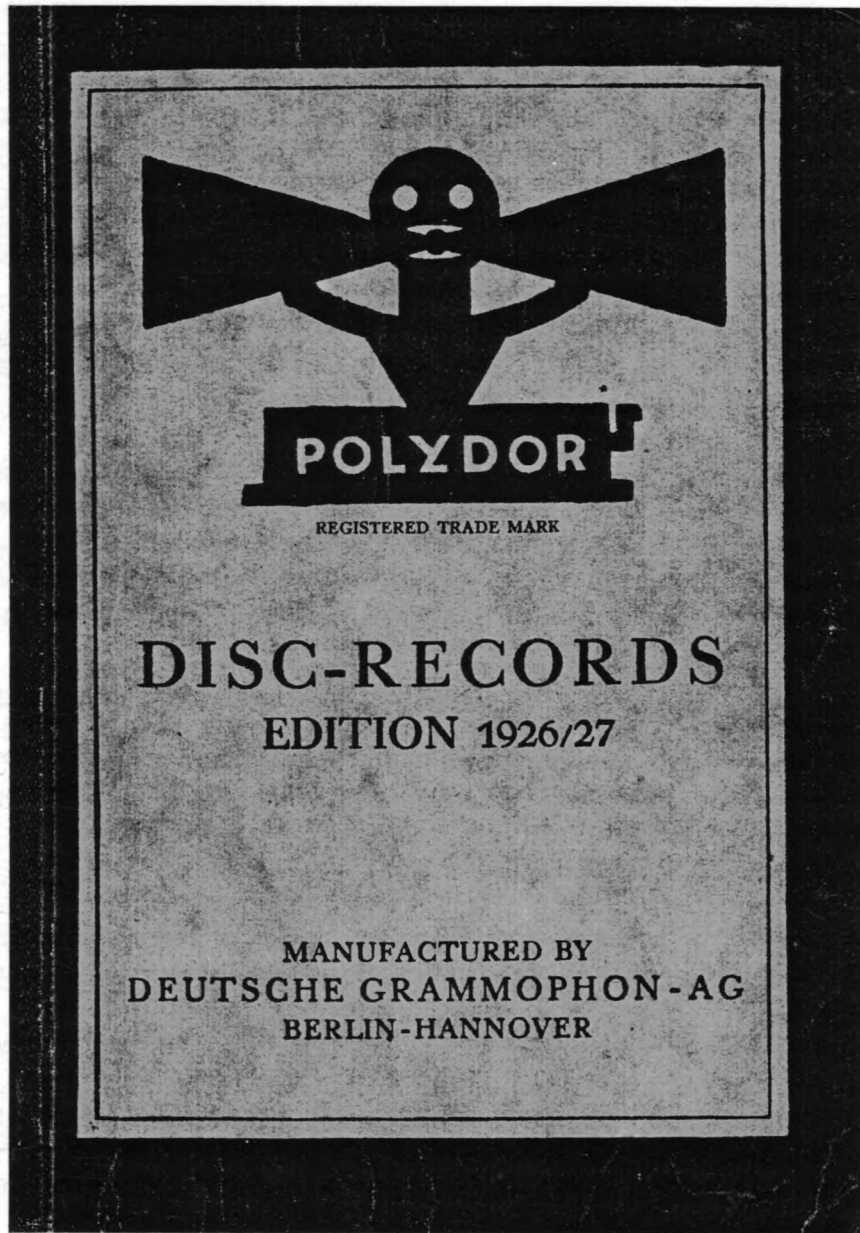
Preiser, DGG, Decca and Heliodor seem to have a monopoly on his CD reissues.

When it comes to my collecting preferences, I have always preferred German pressings over those that have come out of England because of their smoother surfaces. The last point was often commented on by that doyen of record reviewers P. G. Hurst, who it seems took a delight in reviewing Schlusnus's records for the *Gramophone*. Here are three of his reviews, the first in 1926 when he reviewed a couple of operatic duets by Lotte Lehman (soprano) and Heinrich Schlusnus - Reich mein die hand - *Don Giovanni* and So lang hab ich geschmachtet - *Le Nozze di Figaro* Polydor 72933.

"Two delightful Mozart duets . . . given in German. This does not really affect their charm, because they are sung here with admirable refinement, grace, and sense of their dramatic significance. The voices blend well, too, and the diction of both singers is irreproachable. For the careful recording praise is due, and the accompaniments, when they are distinguishable, sound excellent."

Advancing onto 1932, this is what he had to say about Schlusnus's penchant for recording songs written by Hugo Wolf. *Dass doch gemalt all' deine Reize waren* and *An die Geliebte* (Hugo Wolf). In German, piano acc. Polydor 91079, 10 in., 4s.

"It is customary in these enlightened days to eulogise Hugo Wolf at the expense of other accepted masters of the art of lieder-writing, but I fail to see why this should be altogether necessary. Surely one can perceive the extraordinary genius for truthful and felicitous musical expression that Hugo Wolf possessed, without derogating by means of doubtful comparisons from the work of composers who were at least equally gifted. On the other hand, it is eminently desirable that Wolf's songs should be more widely known and appreciated than they are in this country, and for that reason I have cordially welcomed the good news that the newly-formed Hugo Wolf Society is practically what they call in the City "oversubscribed "-that is, if it ever really can be where adherence to a good cause is in question. That cause, in the meantime, can only be helped by the issue of splendid examples



I have two 78rpm Polydor record catalogues in my collection. The above originally belonged to Mr A. MacDonald, an Invercargill lawyer. It has 31 Schlusnus records listed within.



The second Polydor record catalogue in my collection was issued in July 1938. According to Dennis Brew of Auckland, Polydor records were imported in New Zealand by a group of music lovers who operated out of Dunedin. By 1938, the number of records listed under Schlusnus's name had risen to 75 discs.

such as Heinrich Schlusnus has here furnished through Polydor. Both are lovely songs and worthy of the same attentive thought and study on the part of the listener that they have obviously received from the interpreter. The first is notable for its energy and depth of feeling; the second reveals moments of greater tenderness and yearning, but also of power, together with fine contrasts of tone-colour. I would note that the piano accompaniments, excellently played by Franz Rupp, are rendered precisely as the composer wrote them, without the meddlesome co-operation of violin or other tiresome obligati".

Finally, I have chosen a review of two Brahms songs which were published in 1933. *Minnelied*, Op. 71, NO. 5, and *Ständchen*, Op. 106, No. 1 (Brahms). In German. Piano acc. Decca-Polydor DE7022, 2s. 6d.

"Never was Brahms so much in request, never were his works of every description so highly prized as in this, the year which marks the centenary of his birth. The actual date is the seventh of this very merry month of May, and I am bound to say that our musical entrepreneurs in most parts of the country are doing their best between them to furnish a fitting national tribute to the genius of the Hamburg master. If more of his instrumental than of his vocal compositions are claiming gramophonic attention, there are probably good reasons for it. The songs in particular have enjoyed their full share during the past decade-at any rate, from German singers; and now here is Herr Schlusnus with a couple of them that I do not remember to have heard from him before. I love the *Minnelied* sung by a baritone with his warmth of tone, his earnestness and depth of expression, his purity of diction. The metallic quality caused by over amplification can be reduced by using a fibre needle, and the record as it stands certainly needs the softening influence. In the *Standchen* the same fault is less perceptible; only this is a song that I somehow like better in a woman's voice, though the present singer very nearly succeeds in imparting to it the requisite measure of light and mischievous humour.

The quotations above were taken from a book called *Herman Klein and the Gramophone*, Edited and with a Biographical Sketch by William R. Moran.

These contemporary reviews give a wonderful picture of how Schlusnus's records were regarded when they were published. Therefore it is encouraging to see how they continue to be valued to this day and by occupying a valued position in the history of recorded music. No better barometer of this can be found than *The Record Collector*, which devoted Volume 42 No.2 almost entirely to Schlusnus. The authors responsible for the article and discography were Michael Seil and Christian Zwarg. While I was somewhat disappointed when I studied his recorded repertoire to see that he only recorded four Carl Loewe songs, I was also taken aback to see that the authors attributed a total of over 600 titles for his discography. Apart from my gripe over insufficient Loewe titles, a situation which can be simply attributed to the musical world's apathy at the time towards this wonderful ballad writer, his recorded repertoire contains many gems of the highest order.

My favourites are his duet with Helge Roswaenge from *I Vespri Siciliani* and all his Italian opera solos and duets. While the 60 odd titles I have cover both opera and lieder on 78 rpm discs, I do not have more than two or three compilations on vinyl, an omission I am attempting to rectify by contemplating purchasing his entire repertoire on 18 cds, which *Truesound Transfers* have issued. A German company which is owned by Christian Zwarg, one of the authors responsible for his *Record Collector* article and discography. These contain all his surviving commercial recordings, with many of them transferred from Schlusnus's own collection in the form of sample recordings - including several unpublished titles.

There is one very heart warming passage in the *Record Collector* article which draws attention to his second wife's interest and involvement in her husbands records. Annemarie attended all his recording sessions in the capacity as advisor. It was a fascinating story to see how they met and married one another after each had obtained divorces from their original spouses in 1933. This bond between them is lovingly illustrated in a record I have which features them singing two German folk songs which were recorded in 1938. They are *In einem kühlen Grunde* and *Ach, wie ist's möglich dann*. I have every intention of playing these at my next presentation in 2007.

Before I wrap up what must surely read like a lovers billet-doux, I would like to point out that all this activity and appreciation in the cause of drawing attention to him as a singer is not merely a current fancy or passing phase with me. My interest in him goes back to my earliest days in record collecting.

In the early 1960s, I somehow acquired a publication which came from the British Institute of Recorded Sound (Bulletin No.14 Autumn 1959). This 32 page cyclostyled journal contains an 18 page discography of Schlusnus by Steven Smolian. As far as I can remember it was given to me by Jack Henderson who in turn I think might have got it from John Gray, a collector many of us will remember who died a few years ago. John it seems, worked at the BIRS for a period and may have had access to their publications.

While the Smolian discography is one which I seldom refer to because of the more recent *Record Collector* article and discography, I find it fascinating to go through it again and read the pencilled remarks I made as I landed all my Schlusnus records. Although it lacks in the bulk of the unpublished titles which Schlusnus made (and are listed in the *Record Collector*), it is still a favourite of mine because of its larger format (quarto). This allows nearly every entry to be listed in one line, instead of the irritation of having to read down a compressed listing, line by line. It also has a much better section on LP and 45rpm transfers, noting all the original 78rpm items for each reissue.

Finally, if there are any doubts about Schlusnus's being included in a hypothetical Parthenon of Great Singers, I'd like to end by reprinting a paragraph by J.B. Steane, a distinguished author and commentator on music who concludes his entry on Schlusnus in a book called *The Grand Tradition*, a 1974 Duckworth publication, whom I gratefully acknowledge. This valuable addition to the written history of recorded music also contains a lovely signed postcard of Schlusnus in the role of di Luna in Verdi's *Trovatore*. This adorns the cover of this issue of the G&T Times. Those who value and enjoy intelligent comment on the art of writing record reviews, will no doubt note the huge difference of style when it comes to discussing records between Steane's comments and those of Herman Klein!

"Comparisons (of various recordings by other singers) will nearly always favour Schlusnus. If one wants, for instance, to hear how Rigoletto's monologue, 'Pari siamo', can be beautiful to listen to as well as dramatic, then again one goes to an early recording (in Italian) by Schlusnus. There is plenty of spirit and a good deal of attention to crescendo and diminuendo markings, but all is done on the primary principle that the voice is a musical instrument and that it must be used with respect for its beauty. This is so in much Italian music where one is quite accustomed to a barnstorming style, and an overflowing, vibrating tone. The duet from Act IV of *Il Trovatore*, with Frida Leider, has di Luna's music finely pointed, sonorous and energetic, but never over-pressed or throaty. His weakness certainly lay in the lower part of the voice: it is slightly comical in Strauss's 'Zueignung' to hear the high note taken with such freedom to be followed by an almost unvoiced low one at the end of the phrase. And stylistically he shared the general liking at that time for more portamento than is in favour today. But he represents a very high point of achievement in this history of singing, and particularly of German singing: a measure of the response, perhaps, to Wagner's demand half-a-century earlier for singers trained in the lyrical style that was then thought of as essentially Italian".

A MYSTERY!

Those of you who helped me dispose of Ray Hedges record collection a few years ago by making purchases, will remember not only the great mass of 78s, but an equally huge pile of LPs. These were rich in Preiser LP reissues. When I did a check some time ago to make a list of these, I noticed that there were no Heinrich Schlusnus recordings left amongst the LPs. Did anyone in our group buy these en masse? If so, I'd like to hear from them with a view of sharing our mutual interest in this great singer.

This issue of the G&T Gazette has been proof read by Des Wilson.



The Polydor record illustrated on this page which features a trio from Verdi's *Trovatore*, came from the Ray Hedges collection. There were many records in Ray's collection with a prefix VS number written in ink on the label. I have often wondered who this may have been. The small portrait of Schlussnus taken towards the close of his life, was published in the *Record Collector* as a supplementary image to the main article.



The *G&T Gazette* is published quarterly and distributed gratis to friends and associates who attend or share in the interest of a group known as the "Scratchy Record Group". Opinions expressed in the *Gazette* are those of the authors and do not represent the philosophies and beliefs of the SRG. Unsolicited material is welcome. Care with submissions for publication will be exercised, but no responsibility for loss or damage in transit will be accepted. Advertising rates are negotiable. The *G&T Gazette* is produced on a Macintosh G3 and Canon Film Scan. All material is copyrighted. Permission to use anything appearing in the *Gazette* must be cleared in the first instance with the editor William (Bill) Main 93 Burma Road, Wellington - 6004 New Zealand. Telephone (04)971-3535, e-mail <wmain@paradise.net.nz>