Bartok Concerto, Two Rubinstein Albums, "Elektra" Feature December Record List

As is appropriate, December record lists are rich in gift fare for music lovers. And here, synopsized to save space to credit all the fine items available these days, are some suggestions for parcels to be put under the Christmas tree —including your own!

Artur Rubinstein is represented by undeniably the two finest albums he has ever made throughout his illustrious career. One, a domestic Victor release, contains the Twenty-Four Preludes by Chopin, a revelation in how these perfect miniatures of drama and lyric poetry should be played to limn all their impressionistic beauty. The other is an English-made HMV release, and this critic must check his superlatives even when he says that in his opinion this is one of the finest reproductions of music ever presented on records — mechanically as well as artistically: the Rachmaninoff Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, with the Philharmonic Orchestra under Walter Susskind. Seldom has true piano tone been so faithfully captured on discs!

We are grateful also for Victor's brilliant recording of the final scene of Richard Strauss' masterpiece, "Elektra," as performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, soloists and chorus under Sir Thomas Beecham's gifted baton. This is tremendously stirring music, marvellously reproduced. Erna Schluter makes a convincing Elektra, and Paul Schoeffler has that brooding power so essential to the role of Orestes.

Columbia's major contribution is a remarkable interpretation of a still more remarkable masterpiece: Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, recorded by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. First performed by Koussevitzky in 1944, this work is perfectly comprehensible even to the tyro. It has a wealth of melody, logical development and brilliant scoring, and represents Bartok at the height of his genius.

Second Columbia feature is not musical, but historical, yet not to be overlooked on your gift list by any means. It's Edward R. Murrow's "I Can Hear It Now," a collection of five discs which reproduce some of the most vital moments in our history since 1932. We hear the voices of the Duke of Windsor, Roosevelt, Will Rogers, Mussolini, Churchill, Hitler, Stalin, Willkie, General MacArthur, these are excerpts from sound tracks of unforgettable speeches; we hear even the historic break-in on the New York Philharmonic broadcast on that fateful December 7, 1941. This album reminds us that we have been living through history, and preserves for us the personalities of leaders and would-be leaders.

Decca offers a number of English-made singles which are of superb quality. For example, two Berlioz works, the "Beatrice and Benedict" Overture with Malcolm Sargent and the National Symphony Orchestra, and the "Carnaval Romain," with the London Philharmonic under Victor de Sabata; Erich Leinsdorf and the London Philharmonic in Weber's Overture to "Der Freischutz"; Jeanne Demessieux in a brilliant organ solo of the mighty Bach Toccata and Fugue in D Minor; Kathleen Ferrier, the beautiful and gifted contralto with the Boyd Neel String Orchestra in a glorious reading of "Woe Unto Thee" and "O Rest in the Lord" from Mendelssohn's "Elijah"; and the talented soprano Ada Alsop, with the same group, in "Oh, Sleep! Why Dost Thou Leave Me" from Handel's "Semele" and "Come, Beloved," from the same composer's "Atalanta." Best Decca news, however, is that the Bloch Second Quartet will soon be available—don't fail to add this titanic work to your collection!

—Paul Hugo Little.