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*I have never known a man
less like the popular idea of
a successful singer than . . .*

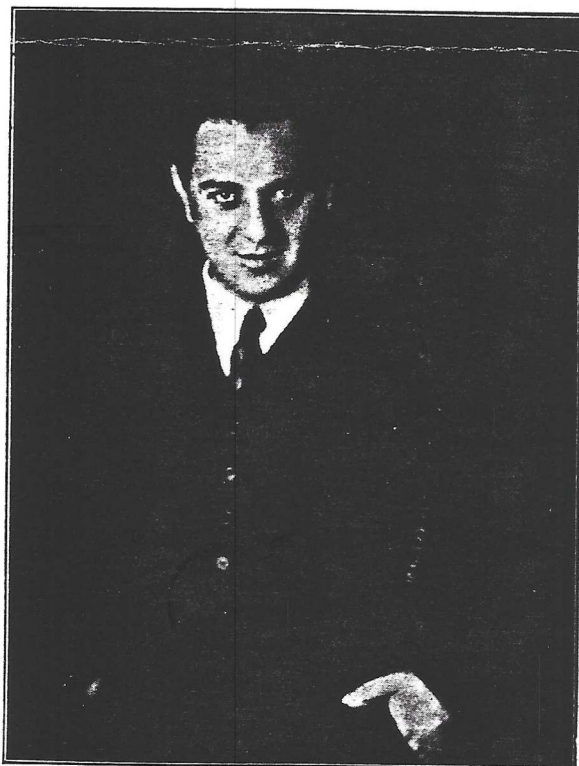
ALEXANDER KIPNIS

says Walter Legge

HE doesn't look like a singer and he doesn't behave like one. Nearly all successful singers are . . . we dare not use the word in *THE VOICE* because so many singers read it . . . but Kipnis is *slim*. There have been cases of famous sopranos losing their voices as soon as they had got slender enough to see their feet. Kipnis is so normal in chest and waist measurements that he has to pad himself out when he sings opera so that

he shall not look frail in company with his naturally upholstered colleagues. In private life he looks like a keen business man, and if it were not for his sallow complexion and the extraordinary lustre of his very dark, penetrating, deep-set eyes you might well mistake him for an Englishman, for he speaks English—as well as German, French, Italian and his native Russian—without a trace of accent.

First meeting him you are struck by his quietness—of speech, manner and movement. He talks, seriously or wittily—and he can do both extremely well—in a voice that, while it magnetises your attention, seems to suggest that its owner regrets disturbing the silence, and his conversation is pointed with gestures that, for all their expressiveness, seem modestly to apologise for occupying your attention. His walk, too, has this same reserve, for although he walks quickly and with a springy step, his movement suggests the quiet latent power of a cat. It is all part of the man's modesty. Unlike most singers, he never tells you how good he is or how bad the other fellow is, and he hates talking about himself. When he does talk of himself he has a romantic life story to unfold, the story of a Russian-Jewish child, born in a village in the Ukraine, who had his first lessons in music as a treble in the choir of a synagogue. At fourteen he had never even seen a piano, but he had learned to read music and to love it. His ambition in those pre-war days was to be a bandmaster. To pay for his lessons and to help contribute to the upkeep of his parents, brothers and sisters he continued to sing in choirs and worked in a factory bending the wood for the manufacturers of chairs. At nineteen he had taken his degree as a bandmaster at the College of Music in Warsaw and accidentally discovered that he had a good bass voice. But the chances of developing his talents as a singer in Russia, a country in which the Jewish race was oppressed, were few and far between. So young Kipnis took his few worldly belongings to a railway station and looked



Alexander Kipnis records exclusively for "His Master's Voice."

for the first train to take him out of Russia. It happened that the first train leaving the station went to Berlin, so he bought a ticket to Berlin. Life there was anything but easy, but his voice soon got him a job in the choir of a Berlin synagogue. A fellow chorister was at the time taking lessons from a famous German singing teacher, Ernst Grenzebach, who was so impressed by his pupil's praise of Kipnis's voice that he gave him an audition and offered to give him lessons. For three years Kipnis studied with Grenzebach and lived on his meagre earnings as a chorister, but at the end of that time he was a fully fledged singer, and his first operatic audition brought him an engagement in Hamburg. His fame spread quickly, and during the early days of the war he was engaged as principal baritone at Wiesbaden, where he received heartening encouragement from the man he was soon to succeed as the greatest German singing bass, Paul Knüpfen, an "H.M.V." star of pre-war days. After the war Kipnis became a member of the Berlin State Opera, but an astute American impresario quickly snapped him up for the Chicago Opera, and since then Kipnis's operatic history has been a series of triumphs in England, North and South America, Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Holland.

Unlike most opera singers, Kipnis is a great concert singer, and on his first concert appearance in England he won such high praise that one article, that by Neville Cardus of the *Manchester Guardian*, must be quoted here:—

"He is a singer of extraordinary beauty, endowed with the incomparable bass quality which seems the Russian birthright, a quality made sensitive by culture gained in a cosmopolitan school. Kipnis is really an opera singer; but he is able to adjust his technique to the smaller and intimate canvas of *Lieder*. The sophistications gained by experience in German music have not altogether spoiled the naïve sincerity which we associate with Russian singers; he is so direct in his expression that he can get his effects by means of a few colours. His soft singing is more beautiful than any I have ever before heard from a bass singer; it is remarkable, indeed, to find a bass singer approaching anywhere near the fragile devotion of Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh* and Schumann's *Mondnacht*. Yet Kipnis makes such songs his own; he can sweeten masculinity with a poignant enough tenderness. He is, in his own way, a magnificent artist. I rank him superior to Chaliapine in vocal culture, in sincerity of technique and of imagination. His treatment of the German language is poetic; the way he pronounces the words *Du bist die Ruh, der Friede mild*, is a benediction. He can be strong and austere, as in Schumann's *Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes*; he can broaden into a rustic humour, as in one or two of the Russian folk-songs which he sang on Sunday."

Kipnis will soon be giving a series of concerts in England, and it behoves every one of our dealers to link up with those appearances and to put their

"Sascha" Kipnis (left) with his wife "Mildi" and brother-in-law, Hans Heniot, the American critic.



selling force behind the records of this remarkable artist in whom we believe we have one of the best sellers of the near future.

In enthusiasm for his art I have wandered away from the subject of Kipnis the man and told little of the proud father that he is, of his appreciation of good food and good wines and good company, and good conversations and good stories, of his delight in the English countryside, of his standing for six hours to take movie-camera pictures of the Jubilee procession, of Sundays by the Thames with Harold Askham, when our laughter at Maidenhead must have been heard at Henley. The great artist is always a great man.

THE IMPROVEMENT CONTINUES

A year ago this month we were exulting, for Red Label sales were increasing. The improvement has been maintained, and comparing September, 1935, with September, 1934, we are pleased to see the same gaining of ground—a steady increase that is the only real evidence of maintained and increased public support.

Reggie Brayne and Tommy Fenton, E. M. G.'s brilliant experts, are positively exuding delight as they talk of their increasing record sales; Mr. Rimington, who now orders symphonies as other people ordered *Hear My Prayer* at the height of its popularity, has had the best record selling summer of his very successful record trading career, and hosts of other keen record people—prominent among them Rhythm, of Reigate, and Millers, of Cambridge—are gaining ground and making new and valuable record customers every week.