

Recordings Reports II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Albeniz: "Iberia" "Navarra," "Cantos de España." José Echaniz, piano. Westminster WAL 219, \$11.90.	Echaniz has here engaged a task somewhat more complex and demanding than he can wholly manage. The pieces tend to be similar in accents and coloration, the piano tone hardly as sonorous or varied as it might be. Moreover, the execution is not always technically clean. (The collection covers volumes I-IV, whereas the Arrau on Columbia is incomplete.) The additional pieces are played in the same, less than wholly satisfactory, style.
Bach: Partita in D minor, Sonata in G minor. Nathan Milstein, violin. Capitol P 8298, \$4.98.	Sturdy, well-phrased performances of the sort Milstein has often purveyed in the concert hall, a stamp of approval sufficient unto itself. The "Chaconne" of the D minor is especially absorbing, for its technical solidity and resolute musicality. The G minor is also beautifully formed. Fine sound.
Beethoven: Sonatas in A (opus 101) and E (Opus 109). Paul Badura-Skoda, piano. Westminster 5357, \$5.95.	Two performances of high credit to the ever-developing artistry of Badura-Skoda, though it is quite conceivable he will feel his Beethoven differently in 1965 than now. Here he is most consistently persuasive in the E major sonata. The A major is strongly felt but not so consecutively thought where Beethoven demands understanding more than merely exposition. Good resonant piano sound.
Brahms: "Neue Liebeslieder Walzer," also six songs. Flore Wend, soprano. Nancy Waugh, mezzo, Hugues Cuenod, tenor, and Doda Conrad, bass, with Nadia Boulanger, Jean Françaix, piano. Decca DL 9650, \$4.98.	These affectionate performances have all the virtues and some of the defects of the <i>Hausmusik</i> atmosphere associated with their composition. That is to say, the performers are sometimes stronger in enthusiasm than in proficiency. However, the "swing" in the music is strongly present, especially in the four-hand playing of Boulanger and Françaix. The additional items are "An die Heimat," "Der Abend," and "Fragen" (opus 64), "O Schöne Nacht," "Sehnsucht," and "Nächtens." Fairly good sound.
Brahms: Quartets in A minor and B flat. Vegh Quartet. London LL-1142, \$3.98.	Sharply outlined, well-phrased performances, a little reticent in expression but otherwise of substantial artistic qualities. The players seem more concerned with playing for each other than for the listeners, which is acceptable enough when the over-hearing is so satisfactory. Finely balanced sound.
Caldara: "Come Raggio di Sol," Pergolesi: "La Passione," etc. Magda Laszlo, soprano with Franz Holetschek, piano. Westminster WL 5375, \$5.95.	The thirteen items on two sides of this disc add to a choice introduction to the attractions of the early "arie antiche": the Italian literature of Bononcini, Carissimi, Durante, Scarlatti, Gasparini, not to mention Vivaldi and Pergolesi, which have lip but not throat service from most singers. Laszlo sings them intelligently enough and with real musicianship, not with the full emotionalism they demand. Holetschek is a capable associate.
Debussy: "Chansons de Bilitis," "Fêtes Galantes," etc. Nan Merriman, mezzo, with Gerald Moore, piano. Angel 35217, \$4.98.	An admirable compliment to the recent disc of Spanish material by Merriman, showing the range and versatility of the singer's interpretative talents. Fine vocal sound throughout, and in such songs as "En sourdine," "Le Jet d'Eau," and "Clair de Lune," a superior kind of artistic awareness. The colorful, flexible piano playing of Moore fills another dimension of the whole. Side two provides Bachelet's "Chère Nuit," Fauré's "Ici-Bas!", and "Après un Rêve," Duparc's "Phidylé." Chausson's "Temps des Lilas," etc. Outstanding reproduction.
Debussy: Sonata for flute, viola, and harp. Julius Baker, flute, Lillian Fuchs, viola, and Laura Newell, harp. Roussel: Trio for flute, viola, and cello. Baker, L. Fuchs, and Harry Fuchs, cello. Decca DL-9777, \$4.98.	A truly delectable serving of uncommon musical viands, topped in each instance by the silvery freshness of sound generated by Baker from his sometimes recalcitrant but here obedient instrument. In addition to the fine-sounding versions of the Debussy and Roussel works noted, he engages the solo challenge of Debussy's "Syrinx" and manages it supremely well. The scope and definition of the recording are very well suited to the material.
Dohnányi: Quartet No. 3 in A minor. Dvorak: Quartet in F ("American"). Hollywood Quartet. Capitol P-8307, \$4.98.	The mingling of Smetana and Brahms in the Dohnányi score is very well-appraised by the Hollywood Quartet, which gives back a very sensitive, and on the whole vital, image of the musical values it contains. A decidedly welcome addition to the quartet literature on LP. The associated version of the Dvorak "American" is one of the best available. Superior sound in each instance, characterized by more than average concern for balance.
Fauré: "Nocturne" No. 12, "Barcarolle," "Valse-Caprice," etc. Ravel: "Valse Nobles et Sentimentales," etc. Jean-Michel Damase, piano. London TW 91035, \$4.98.	Light-fingered, atmospheric pianism by the hitherto unfamiliar Damase, especially in the Fauré literature. The Ravel asks a little more, in color and nuance, than he provides, but he would appear to be an artist well above average quality. More of the Fauré literature, in which he shows himself to be unusually adept, would be welcome. Average good sound.
Fauré: Quintet No. 2. Gaby Casadesus, piano, with the Guilet String Quartet. MGM E 3166, \$3.98.	A beautifully prepared, fully matured reading of this work, with excellent mechanical detail to balance the music sense. So much of it is so good that one must conclude, in those passages which do not make the clearest sense, that the composer has himself not quite succeeded in making his meaning clear. However, these passages are infrequent in a work which has much to offer to the chamber-music enthusiast.
Fauré: Sonata in A. Franck: Sonata in A. Joseph Fuchs, violin, with Artur Balsam, piano. Decca DL 9716, \$4.98.	First-class examples of skilled chamber-music playing, especially in the balanced projection of the elements involved. All one might ask is a little more active statement of the poetry in the music, especially in the Franck, which is a little prosy. The Fauré, however, is neatly drawn, without being overdrawn. Excellent reproduction.
Haydn: Quartet in F minor (opus 20, No. 5). Schubert: Quartet in E flat (opus 125, No. 1) Vienna Philharmonic Quartet. Telefunken LGX 66034, \$4.98.	Despite the impressive name, this is no more than adequate chamber-music playing, stylistically, and less than that in fidelity to the printed score. Intonation is not consistently exact, some <i>portamenti</i> (especially in the Schubert) more deliberate (almost smeary) than good taste decrees. Acceptable sound.
Haydn: Sonata in F (No. 23). Mozart: Sonata in D (K.576) Géza Anda, piano. Telfunken TM 68023, \$4.98.	Anda's feeling for the romantic literature as exemplified in recent Angel recordings is not paralleled in these neat but essentially colorless performances. All the notes are in the right places, but the air space between them, the accents that make for interpretative sense, are almost mechanically rigid and unvarying. No plus in the piano sound, either.

—I. K.

should be reported, yet without insistence that we are trying to draw up a musical equation. There is the obvious one of instrumentation; the saxhorn family predominated in many New Orleans bands. It has already been shown that the repertoire—which reflects a turning away from white man's music to songs of Negro worship, and to secular song—resembles that of New Orleans.

The music of both country and city Negro brass bands certainly flows side by side at another point—its relationship to dancing. From the beginning, both in New Orleans and Alabama, audiences have responded physically, and with more than polite foot-tapping or courtly “dancing on the green,” as with white celebrants of band music. One can see a free, loose-hipped dance flowing along in the Second Line that follows a funeral band in New Orleans today; and its counterpart can be seen when the Lapsey or Laneville-Johnson play for Negro audiences in Alabama. The rhythm set up by these bands is not a tight, regular march step. It is more of a fluid, anticipatory emphasis and counter-emphasis, ideally suited to movement of the whole body. Negro brass bands indulge in a minimum of “concertizing” in the grand manner: “Some people plays by notes,” George Herod explained, “and they can't jump by them notes. . . . We'll hit a piece, an' anybody can jump. . . .”

In New Orleans, the bands have played, traditionally, for festive occasions, and for funerals, which in that city constitute a unique festivity. In Alabama, they do not play for funerals, but the “good time” tradition is strong: they are on hand for all barbecues, picnics, parties, night dances, and baseball games. Both the Lapsey and the Laneville-Johnson bands were hired, traditionally, for the protracted, out-of-door functions known in their region as “The Twelve Links” (or “Twelve Lengths”). Locally, different explanations are given for the phrase. Some say that, originally, twelve elders of the church (they do not specify any sect, possibly because the celebration was interdenominational) formed a sort of club, taking its name from the Last Supper served to the Twelve Apostles. Others say the “Links” (“Lengths” are pronounced “Links”) refer to the long distance celebrants had to travel—on foot, on muleback, and in wagons—to get to these functions. Still another version is that the “Twelve Lengths” refers to twelve long, rough board tables set up on trestles under the trees.

“Twelve Links” picnics are held on the Fourth of July. Sometimes, the frolic takes in days before and after the official holiday. This probably

makes confusion over the meaning of the “Twelve Links” complete, as there is some historical basis for assuming that the origin of the phrase could have been either religious or patriotic. Governing church bodies of twelve are known officially to at least one sect, the Mormons, who at one time split off into a faction known as “The Twelveites.” Against this is the original report of the Declaration of Independence having been adopted “by the authority of the Twelve United Colonies dwelling upon this island of America.” A strong probability is that the occasion, with the sympathetic number twelve, provides joyous outlet for a number of fervors. For regardless of the number of tables, participating elders, colonies involved, or miles traveled, the band was always there to play before and after Independence Day for the “Twelve Links,” and it always played from 9 a.m. till dawn of the following day.

There were country brass bands in the parishes surrounding New Orleans, and many Louisiana musicians have recollected that they first blew horns as members of these organizations. Charlie Love, a cornetist now

living in Algiers, recalls the Caddo Band from the Shreveport area where he was born. This band made a cylinder recording in 1913, but it is probably lost. Fred Landry, Sr., trombone player of Donaldsonville, not only gave an account of the early days of the Claiborne Williams Band, but he remembered that at Mardi Gras, all the little bands for miles around picked up and went in to swell the parades in New Orleans. He also remembers hearing the Bolden Band coming out to play on excursions that stopped at Donaldsonville, in the same bayou countryside that saw the birth of King Oliver.

There was a band that played for dancing at Angola Plantation, long before this rich delta bottomland became the Louisiana State Penitentiary where Leadbelly, among others, served a long term. According to Louis Bonner of Angola, who heard this band, it consisted of about seven “regulars.” These included a tuba, French horn, trombone, clarinet, fiddle, and mandolin. This was before 1900. They “used to play it and sing it.” They sang “blues, spirituals, reels . . . the church people would sit there and laugh at 'em when they played

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blues. That didn't bother they 'ligion."

It is of some interest that a Bolden family lived in this countryside near Tunica, and that certain members of that family emigrated to New Orleans. It has not been possible to establish an exact date, or names of the Boldens who moved. It does seem likely, from interviews conducted in New Orleans, that Buddy Bolden's family may have come into this city from an outlying district; but until there is more proof, these shreds of data will have to pass as unrelated.

In all these places, we asked if any of the brass bands were still playing. There was always a sad smile, and a shake of the head. "No, they done broke up long ago. That's the old times." But one day, our question drew a different kind of smile. We were sitting on the porch steps of a cabin not far from Webb's Interest, a country-store crossroads between Marion and Greensboro. "Yes," Dora Williams replied, "they had a band out here for a party one night last summer. I didn't go, but I could hear 'em, even from 'way down the road. I sat on the porch, and listened. Whenever they get to puttin' into them horns, it sounds so good. That was the Lapsey boys."

It took more than a month to find the Lapsey Boys and in the meantime, Cliff, who is cook and *maitre d'hotel* of a log-cabin barbecue run by Billy Grant called "Over the Hill" out of Newbern, Alabama, told us about the Laneville-Johnson boys. Cliff took me over the clay roads and rutted field lanes that twist through the back country around Faunsdale and Laneville and one by one, we persuaded the men to pull out their battered horns and play in a Band of Music.

When the tapes were played back for the musicians on that night when we finally managed a recording, the feeling implicit in the music was put into motion: the alto horn player danced, in a circle formed by the bandsmen, as the monitor speaker fed back each selection. Recordings made on that evening, and on the following Saturday when the Lapsey Band played, may sound strange to trained or "sophisticated" ears. Against this strangeness, it is only fair to report that the music is played with genuine feeling by the men who make it, and that its sounds are intelligible to the audience for which it is intended.

It is a dance music, sung by horns, blown by men who know no written music. It originated in the countryside, as part of blaring, blustering, outdoor celebrations of Independence Day. Its song and rhythm can tell us about a music that was groping its way long before the word "jazz" ever blew into our national vocabulary.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE MODERNS

Chavez on Hi-Fi

THE appearance all at once of three new versions of the Chavez "Toccata for Percussion Instruments" (which has already been available for some two years under the Boston imprint) is no mere coincidence but a symptom of the alarming growth of the hi-fi thinking that views musical qualities and relations as by-products or vehicles of faithful reproduction. One of the three new LPs (Capitol P-8299) frankly addresses itself on its sleeve to "High-Fidelity Enthusiasts" in particular and seeks to impress them with the "special challenge" faced in achieving utmost "technique and finesse" with the difficult medium of percussive sound. Now, it is my impression that there have been many superb instances of immaculate reproduction of percussion, and I have even on occasion gone to my door to usher in an unexpected visitor at the instigation of a triangle trill that sounded like the bell. In the early days of LP Varese's "Ionisation," which is scored for a much larger percussion ensemble than the Chavez, became unwittingly a demonstration piece for those who listened from the acoustical standpoint, and since that time almost every release of a contemporary work with prominent percussion solos has been hailed as an acoustical phenomenon that must be called to the attention (I guess I too have been guilty of doing so on occasion) of hi-fi listeners. Yet we have still to hear a wholly convincing sound of a first violin section of the orchestra emanating from a loudspeaker. Piano or chorus, furthermore, or massed sonority of chorus with orchestra, or an occasional dense modern orchestral tutti (in which percussion may be one of many elements) still presents considerably more challenge than the rather sparse chamber percussion ensembles so fascinating to the hi-fi crowd (though this fascination has, I admit, provided encouragement for recording several contemporary works for odd combinations—this one included—that we should not normally have had the opportunity of hearing otherwise).

What, I wonder, would Capitol do in the line of high fidelity with such a work as the Chavez Symphony for Strings? The fuzzy string sound in Bartók's "Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celesta" on the reverse side of the Capitol LP is

far from encouraging in this regard, but in all fairness it should be pointed out to the listener that this is a repressing of the old Harold Byrns version. Or, if we are to have percussion (and there is no denying its charm as a relief from the standard works now and then), why does not some enterprising company tackle this medium in the tricky combination with chorus, as in the excerpts from Milhaud's "Oresteia," which were among the gems of the 78-rpm era and are woefully missing from the LP catalogue? This, alas, would have been more fruitful than so much duplication of Chavez.

It should not be at all surprising if my tally of the relative merits of the four extant LPs of the Chavez Toccata is very different from that of the reviewers who approach them at hi-fi experiments. Too many things are to be considered: balance, which depends not only on relative loudness of the instruments but also on their placement in relation to the microphone; attack, which is contingent on the player's ability as well as the conductor's monitoring; timbre, which may be a matter of taste; the promptness with which the lingering resonance is muffled, and the usual factors of tempo and expression.

The best all-around results seem to my ears to have been achieved in the last movement of the version under the dynamic leadership of Izler Solomon (M-G-M E3155). Here the admirable sharpness of reproduction that prevails throughout the work is wedded with expert execution. The tentative entrances of the glockenspiel in the slow (the middle) movement are a pity, but on the whole this version stands out. The Capitol LP will, I suspect, please the hi-fi experts least, but with adjustment of the dials (including addition of more volume than the others require) the painstaking performance directed by Felix Slatkin is capable of striking the discriminating musical listener very favorably indeed. It is notable for its articulation and its easy yet precise beat. Urania offers us warm, rich sound that is not quite in character with the wiry music (LP-7144). The performance under Milton Forstater's direction has a number of things to recommend it, but the disproportionate loudness of the glockenspiel in the slow movement and the slow pacing of the last are two rather