

# Recordings Report I: Orchestral LPs

## WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

## REPORT

Bach: Suites in C and D. Hans von Benda conducting the Berlin Chamber Orchestra. Telefunken LGX 66040, \$4.98.

Von Benda's phonographic pedigree is an honorable one, a fact reaffirmed by the tact, sensitivity, and animation of these fine performances. They do not incline to the strongly personal, but each is musically forthright and very well executed. In addition, the reproduction is spacious, bright, and very well balanced.

Bach: J. C.: Sinfonia Concertante in A major. Georges Alès, violin, and Pierre Coddée, Louis de Froment conducting. Sinfonia No. 4 in D. The same. J. S. Bach: Concerto in D minor for violin and oboe. Alès and Pierre Pierlot, oboe, with de Froment. OL 50074, \$4.98.

The material of Johann Christoph, the "London" Bach, is outstanding in interest and beautifully performed. The "sinfonia" is actually a junction made, by a hand other than the composer's, of two operatic overtures, but it qualifies for its title. The D minor concerto of Bach, senior, is also known in its keyboard form in C minor. This version evokes admiration for the oboe playing of Pierlot, though there are others in which the violin part is delivered with more suavity and strength than it is by Alès. Acceptable sound.

Bartók: "Suite No. 2." Antal Dorati conducting the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. Mercury MG 50098, \$4.98.

A creation of 1907, this suite tells more about the background of Bartók's creative influences than the future of his art. It would scarcely be recognized as his, heard unaware. Nevertheless, it has its pleasant moments, and Dorati makes the most of them. Excellent sound.

Beethoven: Symphony No. 3. William Steinberg conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Capitol P-8334, \$3.98.

This is a methodical, well-formulated presentation of the demanding work, which does credit to Steinberg's mature musicianship. However, it doesn't rise to the dramatic climaxes in a way that convinces me, tending to keep the whole expression within a "classic" framework. It attains that end skilfully, without matching existing standards (Toscanini, Furtwängler, Leinsdorf, etc.) as expression of epic poetry. Full ranging reproduction.

Brahms: Symphony No. 2. Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt conducting the North West German Radio Symphony. Capitol P-18000, \$3.98.

Solidly routinized performance, not animated by anything distinctive in emotional or musical penetration. The recording is competent, the orchestra likewise. In another time, this kind of well-sounding, non-offensive performance might have had a mild interest, but the present competition is too exacting.

Delius: "Sea Drift," "Paris." Sir Thomas Beecham conducting the Royal Philharmonic with Bruce Boyce, baritone, and the BBC chorus. Columbia ML 5079, \$3.98.

The Beecham standard in the performance of these works has remained constant since the memorable issues of the 1930s, while the mechanical work has appreciated greatly, of course. Perversely, too, the better results are now available for considerably less than *either* cost in other days. To sum up, a highly attractive offering. Boyce and the chorus both do their work well.

Dvorak: "Slavonic Dances" (complete). Artur Rodzinski conducting. Westminster WN 2204, \$9.96.

Highly cultivated direction by Rodzinski, who has a superior ear for the orchestral texture of these attractive pieces. However he also has a tendency to linger over the slower ones and the dance impulse tends to become obscured. The totality, altogether, is not as lively as Kubelik's recent set for London, and neither matches the vivacity and charm of the Talich set on Urania (C-604). The Westminster sound is excellent.

Halffter: "El Cojo Enamorado." The composer conducting the Orquesta Sinfonica of Barcelona. Capitol P 18003, \$3.98.

Halffter's colorful score, built along lines pioneered by Falla, is worth hearing, but it is all but subdued by the zapataedoes and castenets of the accompanying Pilar Lopez Ballet. Of interest, naturally, to ballet fans, but music-lovers may welcome the warning. Overside is a suite of dances (Albéniz, Infante, Turina, etc.) done in similar style. The noises are better reproduced than the music.

Hummel: Concerto in A minor. Artur Balsam, piano, with the Winterthur Orchestra conducted by Otto Ackermann. Concert Hall 1241, \$3.98.

An interesting backwater of musical history navigated with ease and understanding of the sub-surface obstructions by Balsam, here in excellent pianistic form. Heard without identification, the style-conscious music-lover would probably associate it more with Chopin than with any other individual. However, he was still in his 'twenties when Hummel died in 1837. It is a work of genuine appeal, provocative in its historical implications. The performance is painstaking, the reproduction excellent. With it is a Clementi, not as absorbing as some others which have lately been exposed.

Strauss: "Tales from the Vienna Woods," "Fledermaus" overture, "Pizzicato" and "Tritsch-Tratsch" polkas. Andre Kostelanetz, conducting the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. Columbia CL 769, \$3.98.

Excellent sound is the primary virtue of this miscellany, which adds Schubert's "Marche Militaire" and the waltzes from R. Strauss's "Rosenkavalier" to the Johann Strauss material noted to the left. The Kostelanetz treatment has the externals of the "Strauss style," but it is an inlay on the thickly lacquered Kostelanetz "sound" which gives the performances their special (and to me, unauthentic) color. Efficient reproduction.

Tchaikovsky: "1812" overture, "Capriccio Espagnole." Antal Dorati conducting the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, with cannon, bells, and Deems Taylor, annotator. Mercury MG 50054, \$4.98.

Lest the leftside description be misleading, Taylor does not do his narrating while the music is being played, though if he did it would add but slightly to the general confusion. Part of this comes from the superimposition of a West Point cannon and bells from the Harkness Tower, at New Haven, on the playing of orchestra and brass band in Minneapolis. What the criteria for evaluating solo cannon with orchestra may be, I lack the experience to say, but it doesn't enhance the appeal of a work described by the composer himself as "a poor piece." Taylor's learned comments on the muzzle-loaded cannon and its military history would be a fine subject for his satiric pen were he not the party of the first part. On my set, the fieldpiece sounded like an aggravated turntable rumble.

Tchaikovsky: "Sleeping Beauty" suite. Manuel Rosenthal conducting the orchestra of the National Opera, Paris. Capitol P 18005, \$3.98.

Rosenthal has some interesting ideas on this familiar material and a superior way with orchestral balance, inner voices, etc. However, the orchestra itself is not up to the quality of others which have recorded this ballet, either complete or in part, the total result arousing little impulse for all-out recommendation. The sound is neither an asset nor a liability.

Verdi-Mackerras: "The Lady and the Fool." Robert Irving conducting the New Symphony of London. London LD 9218, \$2.98.

An attractive melange of excerpts from lesser known operas of Verdi ("Un giorno di regno," "I Lombardi," "Joan of Arc," and "Attila"), as well as such better known ones as "Vespi Siciliani" and "Don Carlo." They were assembled by Mackerras (known for his similar work with A. Sullivan material in "Pineapple Poll") for use by the Sadler's Wells Ballet, and fare well here in the energetic, well-phrased performance directed by the man who has done the ballet itself, Robert Irving. Suitable reproduction.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

## Hi-fi on the Campus

**W**ALK through the student quarters on any campus on any evening term-time and you'll enjoy a remarkable cacophonous cocktail. But if you stay around a few days, certain patterns will emerge out of this seeming sonic chaos. You would probably find that the freshmen, their high school days of gregarious jungle rhythms not far behind them, are playing swing music or some horrible current popular songs. Sophomores, however, have discovered Beethoven—not, I regret to say, the quiet Beethoven of the quartets but the majestic thunderous Beethoven of the later odd-numbered symphonies. This discovery is shared by most of the surrounding neighborhood, for sophomores like their Beethoven neat, *i.e.* full volume, and their satisfaction is only complete when pictures begin to fall off trembling walls.

The juniors tend to play operas of one sort or another—also at full volume—and it is only towards the end of their junior year that they start to abandon the noisy ones like "Boris Godounov" for quieter ones like "Cosi fan tutte." At about this stage of college careers the hi-fi fiend is likely to make his appearance and he will play anything that gives his devil machine, or machines, a good workout. "Listen to that cello!" he will scream, "Can't you hear those strings?". My God, can't we just, though. It's almost as though one was inside the wretched instrument.

The senior year brings a certain amount of peace and quiet on the campus hi-fi front. Chamber music is the big favorite and tends to be played at moderate or, *mirabile dictu*, low volume.

But even a hi-fi man graduates eventually, and if he goes to graduate school he'll find all sorts of hi-fi types there. The first year or so of graduate school is the time for contemporary music, particularly of the atonal avant-garde variety. Later on, of course, the fellows discover that they just can't work with this racket going on, and they are likely to stack a dozen innocuous German operettas on the turntable while they hit the books. Somewhere around the second or third year in graduate school one of two things may happen—the boys get a bit depressed and tend to revert to the heavy Beethoven of their sophomore days, or else, sinking fast in a mounting sea of unpaid bills, the grad student sells his beloved set, and a deep, unnatural—almost palpable—silence fills one room, at least, on the campus.

—L. C. AGNEW.



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