

# Tapes in Review

## Bach, in Part

**BACH:** *Christmas Oratorio*. Guenther Ramin conducting the Hamburg Chamber Orchestra, with the St. Thomas Choir (Leipzig), and Helga Gabriel, soprano, Ursula Boese, alto, Leo Larsen, tenor, and Jakob Staempfli, bass. Concert Hall stereophonic tape CHT/BN-21-2, \$23.90.

**THE TIMELINESS**, as well as the timelessness, of Bach's Christmas Oratorio would seem to indebt us doubly to Concert Hall for its recording of this Leipzig performance in Bach's own St. Thomas Church under the direction of so distinguished a Bach scholar as the late Guenther Ramin. The album, however, is misleadingly labeled. Although the cover gives no indication, the two reels enclosed contain only the first three of the six cantatas Bach composed for the celebration of the Nativity.

Also disturbing is the quality of a performance that one might logically expect to find reflecting the vigorous tradition of its setting and the personal dedication of its conductor. If these are present, it is only dimly and occasionally throughout a traversal that is curiously flaccid, uneven, and wanting in the stout-heartedness with which Bach affirmed his faith. How much of this may be due to possible recording difficulties and how much to the absence of vitalizing leadership is hard to say. Poor acoustics or poor microphone placement might account for the fact that during much of the performance the St. Thomas choristers are severely over-balanced by the small, efficient corps of instruments, but mechanical hazards can hardly be blamed for the choir's indifferent diction and absence of style.

Ramin's devotion and authority have guaranteed a performance that is authentic and intact in its smaller details. No excisions or curtailments have been permitted, and no attempt has been made to inflate the scale of the work, either in performance or in the recording laboratory. Such considerations are laudable, but they constitute rather passive virtues. What one misses is the affirmative vigor of the baroque spirit—something wholly alien to the sluggish musical pulse and weakly-articulated projection that is offered here.

There are so few recordings of this music that one must, of course, be grateful when any fresh viewpoint is made accessible. Fairly old recordings

by Vox and Remington are on LP discs, and while I am not familiar with the former, I am somewhat better acquainted with Remington's 1950 waxing of the uncut manuscript on four 12-inch discs (Rem. 199-118), in which Hans Grischkat and the musicians of Stuttgart perform in heartening style. Despite its relative antiquity, the disc, in my opinion, has it considerably over the present two-channel edition, even in the matter of recording clarity.

## Well-Cracked Chestnut

**TCHAIKOVSKY:** "Nutcracker" Suite, performed by the Symphony of the Air. Concertapes stereophonic 24-8, \$11.95.

*The same.* Arthur Fiedler conducting the Boston Pops Orchestra. RCA Victor stereo-orthophonic BCS-62, \$8.95.

"Nutcracker" Ballet (concert version). Artur Rodzinski conducting the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of London. Sonotape stereophonic SWB-9002, \$17.95.

**THIS INGRATIATING** ballet music has become so popular a feature of the holiday season it is scarcely surprising that presentations of it should simultaneously make their appearance on three different labels this month.

In certain respects, the familiar Suite as performed by the Symphony of the Air is most noteworthy, not only because the recording has preserved the spaciousness and resonance of its Carnegie Hall setting, but also because of the sense of drama animating the efforts of an orchestra that elected to perform without conductor upon the retirement of its revered maestro, Toscanini. Recorded shortly after the re-formed ensemble's debut concert a few seasons ago, the performance testifies to the group's fine esprit de corps.

The Suite's eight episodes are propelled brightly and with a sense of overall pattern that must have become ingrained upon the group's musical thinking over the years. For its present effort it had, in any case, a reliable frame of reference in its own recording made with the maestro for Victor (LM 1986—LRY 9000) when it was still the NBC Symphony.

Arthur Fiedler, with one or more versions of the Suite already to his credit, has lately chalked up still another recording of it for Victor, released on disc some months ago and

now available on stereotape as well. The performance is marked by his usual directness and vigor, but the music emerges less well detailed than in either of its other performances considered here.

The well-drilled orchestra is adept and responsive, but in this performance it seems to lack buoyancy. The Waltz of the Flowers is heavy-footed, the Trepak whipped to an unlikely frenzy that points up the rather disjointed contouring of the overall suite.

Sonotape's release falls into a slightly different category, for in it the suite is incorporated in a concert version that presents all of the ballet's important episodes. These latter seldom fall below an agreeable level of interest, but they also serve to prove that the suite still comprises the engaging portions of the score.

Rodzinski's approach is both cordial and orderly, and the orchestra (apocryphally titled though it may be) performs with animation and a deft touch for the music's blithe character. The sound is especially spacious, although some adjustment may be desirable to compensate for the over-emphasized bass.

## Whose Zoo?

**SAINT-SAENS:** "Carnival of the Animals." Hermann Scherchen conducting the Vienna State Opera Orchestra. Sonotape stereophonic SWB-8026, \$11.95.

**THE TREND TOWARD** ever greater "realism" in recording has been given a (somewhat oblique) nudge forward in this gay little tour through Saint-Saens' gallery of musical caricatures. Now, even the animals in the Bronx zoo can boast of having made their debut on stereo.

To accomplish this, Westminster engineers spent several days on stereophonic safari, stalking their game with peanuts and sugar. The reward of their efforts, along with a narration by Garry Moore of John Burt's amusing couplets, was then dubbed on a tape of the Saint-Saens score as performed by Scherchen and the Viennese ensemble.

The result of this adventuring is an unusually lively and provocative edition, in which seeming irreconcilables have been compatibly juxtaposed. Although the animals sound startlingly near at hand, their vocalizing does not intrude upon the musical portions. In these, Scherchen's sense of parody finds apt employment, the orchestra performs zestfully, and the teamwork of duo-pianists Josef and Grete Dichler is spirited and crisp.

—MILDRED NORTON.



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# Recordings Reports: Pre-recorded Tapes

| WORK, PERFORMER, DATA  | REPORT   |
|--|--|
| Berlioz: "Reverie and Caprice." Saint-Saëns: "Havanaise"; Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso." Aaron Rosand, violin, with Rolf Reinhardt conducting the Southwest German Radio Orchestra, Baden-Baden. Phonotape S-712, \$11.95. | An animated, musicianly performance makes this a congenial addition to the stereo catalog—particularly the Berlioz piece, which does not seem to have been previously recorded in high fidelity. Rosand projects the violin's considerable role with authority and receives first-class cooperation from Reinhardt and a well disciplined orchestra. Stereo's illusive power defines the solo voice easily amid its orchestral setting, but sensible engineering has kept all factors in true proportion.  |
| Brahms: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. Erica Morini, violin, with Artur Rodzinski conducting the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of London. Sonotape SWB-9005, \$17.95.  | Miss Morini's carefully considered approach makes for a first movement of unusual gravity, so deliberately played as to suggest some lack of ease between soloist and conductor. In the rest of the work, however, they establish a rapport marked on Miss Morini's part by an encompassing technique and lyric warmth, and on Rodzinski's by intelligently modeled support. This release of their performance (it is also on Westminster disc 18600) has the full depth and definition of good multi-channel recording, and is especially faithful to the rounded sweetness of Miss Morini's tone.                                  |
| Christmas Hymns and Carols, Vol. I. Robert Shaw Chorale, directed by Shaw. RCA Victor CCS-86, \$10.95.   | Well groomed singing and skillful direction make these twelve a cappella items an ingratiating holiday package. Tasteful arrangements by Shaw and Alice Parker explore the choir's pliancy and tonal richness in devotional settings that range from Praetorius to "Silent Night," with everything eloquently set forth on a clean, quiet tape.  |
| Deutschmeister on Parade. The Deutschmeister Band conducted by Julius Herrmann. Sonotape SWB-7004, \$6.95.   | Anyone whose pulse doesn't quicken when this redoubtable group strikes up is too old to appreciate hi-fi. For more than 200 years (except those of the Nazi occupation) this regimental band has been lifting Viennese spirits with its swashbuckling rhythms, and more lately has become known in America through Westminster records. The present tape, bearing six lusty marching tunes, is in the nature of an advance sampler heralding the band's projected visit (its first since 1893) early next year.  |
| Handel: "Messiah" excerpts. Thompson Stone conducting the Zimble Sinfonietta, the Chorus of the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, and soloists. (Livingston) Boston BO 7-9, \$11.95.   | These excerpts are from the complete performance, recorded in Boston's Symphony Hall and released on Unicorn discs two years ago as the first American recording of the entire work. Soloists are Adele Addison (soprano), Lorna Sydney (contralto), David Lloyd (tenor), and Donald Gramm (bass), all of whom are excellent and in the case of Miss Addison, superb. The well-trained choral units sing with strong attacks, supple phrasing and exceptionally clear diction. Spaciousness and sonority are among the tape's enlivening factors, but no attempt has been made artificially to inflate the music's natural grandeur. |
| Ibert: "Escales." Charles Munch conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor ACS-57, \$6.95.   | Orchestral finesse and transparency are mandatory for this evocative music, and these the Boston players can furnish in full degree. This is the kind of music, exotic yet lucid, that Munch seems to approach with especial relish, and he conducts it with appropriate concern for both factors. However, the present skimpy packaging of tapes leaves this one with overpowering competition from the corresponding disc (LM 2111) released in a well-annotated album that also contains "La Mer."  |
| Khachaturian: "Gayne" Ballet Suite. Moussorgsky: "A Night on Bald Mountain," etc. George Weldon conducting the Hallé Orchestra. Mercury MDS 5-6, \$12.95.  | Completing the album are Borodin's "On the Steppes of Central Asia" and Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Flight of the Bumble Bee." Weldon's approach to all of this is pretty conventional, and his reluctance to exploit orchestral timbres other than strings and percussion presents the music with only nominal effectiveness. Tape is sufficiently vital, but for pieces so vividly scored little advantage is taken of stereo's reproductive fidelity over the corresponding LP (Mer. 50137).  |
| Liszt: "Mephisto" Waltz. Hermann Scherchen conducting the Vienna State Opera Orchestra. Sonotape SWB 7007, \$6.95.   | A strongly individual approach lends this an unfamiliar, although not unagreeable, cast. Scherchen's Mephisto is a sly devil, sinuous and mocking, as limned in the broad rubatos and novel accentuation that characterize this interpretation. The orchestra plays resolutely, with vibrant tone and textural clarity, but the result sounds more like Scriabin than Liszt.   |
| Strauss: Waltzes from "Der Rosenkavalier." Weber: "Invitation to the Dance." Heinrich Hollreiser conducting the Bamberg Symphony. Phonotape S-711, \$11.95.  | A pedestrian effort all around gets very little out of these ingratiating waltzes. The Weber piece fares somewhat better than the Strauss, for which Hollreiser seems to have scant resources of breadth or sentiment, being content apparently to trace the music's surface outlines with a minimum of shading. The orchestra does not play very proficiently, either, to judge by the incidence of fluffed passages. All of which is a pity, for the tape is excellently processed.  |
| Tchaikovsky: "1812 Overture." Hermann Scherchen conducting the Vienna State Opera Orchestra. Sonotape SWB 7002, \$6.95.  | As in his disc encounters with this music (Westminster 7043, 18283) Scherchen here wastes none of his ammunition until the battle is joined. Until then he holds his orchestral forces in check, so that the music's culminating extravagances sound properly overwhelming, although this is accomplished, in the present recording, at some cost of momentum throughout. No field artillery is touched off, but the orchestra crowns its sonorous efforts with round, golden horn tones in the terminal bars. The engineering of a tape so heavily weighted has been judiciously done.  |
| Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4. Artur Rodzinski conducting the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of London. Sonotape SWB 9001, \$17.95.   | Rodzinski gives this a solid, straightforward exposition that hews to the musical structure, but with no sacrifice of dramatic color or instrumental detail. The orchestra is sweet-toned, with none of the thickness noted last month in its performance of Beethoven's Fifth. As is usual with Rodzinski, the music emerges as all of a piece, logically planned, scrupulously executed. The tape is excellent, and the ease with which stereo transmits the full orchestral volleys without distortion or peaking is balm to the aural nerves.  |
| The Sound Of Christmas: "Adeste Fidelis," etc. John Halloran Choir, with orchestra conducted by Leonard Sorkin. Concertapes 505, \$7.95.   | A five-inch reel that contains unpretentious offerings of six well-loved songs, among them "O, Little Town of Bethlehem" (sung with refreshing simplicity), "Jingle Bells," and the melody of "Greensleeves" set to a Yule text. The vocal quality of the mixed chorus is sweet, unforced, and while the arrangements (for which no credit is given) are nothing very special, they add to the agreeable effect.   |
| Wagner: "Tannhäuser" Overture and Venusberg Music (Paris Version). Charles Munch conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor BCS-55, \$8.95.  | Munch invests the Overture with full dramatic weight, and whips the Bacchanale to an electrifying crescendo, but his finely controlled dynamics make even this expansive effect seem a logically-arrived-at part of the musical totality. Pliancy, eloquence, and bright, full-bodied tone are contributed by the orchestra, while Munch's ardent approach, along with stereo's reproductive sensitivity, make for an unusually compelling performance. Well processed tape.   |

# Herrmann

Continued from page 43

to himself in relation to a piece of music—never has he said “my interpretation,” “my music,” but always his comment has been about the joy and excitement of the music at hand. One has the impression that he is rediscovering the music anew and afresh every day of his life. His interest in new music is avid and full of curiosity. All one needs to do is mention a new work—or an unfamiliar composer—and he immediately wants the score. His friendship and kindness to modern composers, and his valiant work on their behalf, need hardly be chronicled by me. Only a great artist could so unselfishly and with such generosity give of his time and efforts to further the music of his contemporaries.

As an interpreter of the classics of the eighteenth century, his performances have great elegance and warmth, and at the same time an irresistible rhythmic outpouring. One of the finest examples may be heard in his recording of Haydn's Symphony “La Poule.” It is my opinion that his recording of Berlioz's Fantastic Symphony, made some years ago, remains the finest performance of this work available on records, nor has it been my experience to have encountered a superior performance in concert. For this work remains one of his *chefs d'oeuvre* and it is ideally suited to him, musically. His passionate presentation of this work is a remarkable achievement and should certainly be made available on LPs.

As an interpreter of Elgar he is unique in that he imparts to this music a fervor that it rarely gets and so much demands. Fine examples are his recordings of the Second Symphony and the “Enigma Variations.” His personal vision of the “Dream of Gerontius” is such a moving experience that I am certain, if it were captured in a recording, it would enrich the lives of thousands of music lovers.

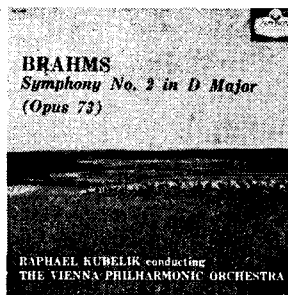
Sir John and the Hallé are now busy making a new set of recordings, and for this we must be grateful. For without the opportunity of hearing this orchestra in person, records remain our only source. We may be well and deeply appreciative that today in Manchester, through the medium of a magnificent orchestra that has been welded and molded by Sir John Barbirolli, the volcanic art of imaginative orchestral playing and leadership is being carried on in a great tradition—one of the few traditions of music worth preserving.

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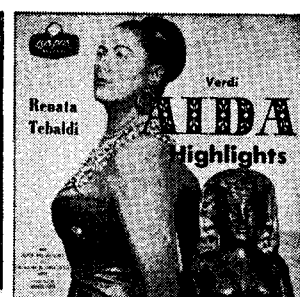
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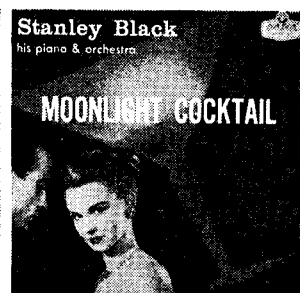
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## THE OTHER SIDE



## "PARASTAT" AND ELECTROSTATIC SPEAKER

DECCA has at last allowed us a brief glance behind the iron curtain of secrecy which had so far hidden its stereo-disc plans from the public gaze. Provided that a trade recession does not undermine the economic stability of the record industry in the meantime, next autumn should witness the commercial launching of microgroove stereophony, and thus another notable milestone in the history of the gramophone will have been reached. For the present, however, other technical developments of no little consequence vie for our attention. One of them is the "Parastat," a strange-looking device developed by Cecil Watts (for many years now a leading light in the British Sound Recording Association) which, it is asserted, will effectively eliminate static electricity from microgroove discs. Watts has already devoted much time and thought to this problem, and his "Dust Bug" is by common consent the most successful record-cleaning gadget on the market.

The "Parastat," however, will be no mere cleaning device but is designed to inject into the tiny crevices just under the shoulder of the groove an electrically conductive substance which provides a leakage path for static electricity. It is claimed that the treatment is permanent and that it leaves the area of contact between stylus and groove untouched; the whole operation takes only a few seconds. The "Parastat" is unlikely to gain wide currency in the home—it will probably be too costly for the average collector—but it is anticipated that, with its help, record shops will be able to offer this service to their clients and, in time, the process may be incorporated in record manufacture.

For the past three weeks the major part of my listening has involved a piece of equipment which I had been anxious to add to my "hi-fi family" ever since I first encountered it at London's first Audio Fair, in April of last year. After many disappointing delays, production of the QUAD Full-Range Electrostatic Loudspeakers began towards the end of September and, even since then, the customary greeting between hi-fi specialists is no longer "How are you?" but "Have you got yours yet?" The idea of listening to first-class, reproduced sound involving no cone, no

magnet, and no voluminous enclosure requires some degree of mental readjustment, but already I am convinced that, barring sensational developments in other directions (such as the Ionophone, for example), the QUAD Loudspeaker represents "the shape of things to come."

In many respects it is already strikingly superior to the best of conventional systems: the treble response, in particular, is unbelievably clean, crisp, and smooth—after listening to the QUAD, even the finest moving-coil assembly sounds slightly "dirty" and curiously sluggish in dealing with transients. At the lower end of the scale however, the QUAD is less impressive than, for example, my large Voigt horn, though still very good in view of its modest size. Perhaps its most noticeable characteristic is its "neutrality," in other words the astonishing absence of coloration—what the uninitiated used to call "a nice tone"—which enables it to tell us the truth about any recording without exaggerating possible faults.

THE QUAD Loudspeaker, in its present form, is a remarkable achievement but it is not, nor was it intended to be, all things to all people. The lunatic fringe—those who use hi-fi mainly in order to sublimate their aggressive instincts—will find in it little cause for rejoicing since its capacity for handling loud volume is strictly limited, the bass does not thump nor the treble pierce your eardrums. It is not readily matched up with any amplifier you may happen to possess and its efficiency is well below that of any conventional system. On the whole it yields its best results with music employing limited forces and depending on subtle tonal shadings. Solo piano, voice and piano, violin and piano, chamber orchestra—such discs, provided they are cleanly recorded, show the QUAD speaker to be in a class all its own. The most revealing experience so far was provided by a Decca harpsichord disc (Scarlatti Sonatas played by George Malcolm: London LL 963): here, I felt, were the most enchanting and truly lifelike sounds yet heard from any recording. No less astonishing in its way was the "kindness" shown by the speaker to the re-issued Schubert B flat Trio played by Cortot, Thibaud, and Casals (vintage 1926),