

Recordings Reports I: Orchestral LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Beethoven: Symphony No. 3. Cleveland Symphony Orchestra conducted by George Szell. Epic LC 3385, \$3.98.

There is so much that is truly exemplary about this performance it is regrettable that the recommendation can be only a partial one. Szell draws a comprehensive blueprint of virtually every subtlety the score contains, and the orchestra executes it (so far as I can hear) faultlessly. Moreover the reproduced sound is outstanding for clarity and sheen. As an emotional communication, however, this "Eroica" is a rather confined, unconvincing statement of the turmoil and exaltation in this score, though one is often turned from such considerations by the sheer excellence of the execution.

Beethoven: "Leonore" No. 2 overture; Mozart: Symphony No. 25 in G minor; Berlioz: Overture to "Waverley." Nikolai Rabinovitch conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic. Liberty SWL 15002, \$3.98.

Rabinovitch's is a new name to me among Soviet conductors (and apparently to the annotator also, who omits any reference to him) but he is a musician of decisive impulses and strong control of this fine orchestra. The Mozart "moves" from first to last, though the string sound is rougher than we prefer in such music. The climax of the Beethoven is almost too impetuous, the Berlioz overture also forthright. Mechanical means appear to have been used to enhance the original tape, the resulting sound having a good deal of clarity but also a little shallowness.

Couperin: "L'Apothéose de Lully." Corrette: Concerto in G. Maurice Hewitt conducting the Hewitt Orchestra, with Lucien Lavallotte, André Sagnier, and Georges Boo, flutes. Epic LC 3383, \$3.98.

The opportunity to hear the eleven pieces grouped under the title "L'Apothéose de Lully" is a prizeable one, especially as the orchestral version by Louis Saguer is previously unknown to me. He has done very well in providing varied tonal colorations for the music originally written as "trio sonatas." However the Hewitt ensemble is not up to its usual standards of accuracy in intonation and ensemble, due perhaps to the unfamiliar style of the material. It does much better by the lively concerto with three solo flutes by the early 18th century Corrette.

Glière: "Ilya Murometz." Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Columbia ML 5189, \$3.98.

As is rather well known, a full performance of this work runs to 70-odd minutes, which is still beyond the content of two twelve inch sides, though these contain more than fifty minutes of music. There is no indication of abbreviation on the sleeve or in the annotation (which is wholly silent about the music) which might lead a purchaser to wonder why Westminster (W 2212) requires three sides for what Columbia can do on two. I have no brief for a lengthy "Murometz" (it is certainly full of repetition) but the consumer is entitled to know how much, if less than all, of a work he is getting. The performance is full of majestic colors and dazzling performance, the reproduction close to Columbia's best.

Grieg: "Lyric Suite," Dvořák: "Slavonic Dances" (Nos. 11-16). Nicolai Malko conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra. RCA Victor LM 2107, \$3.98.

Malko's performance of Grieg does not quite qualify for the exalted areas achieved by the late Erik Tuxen in his fanciful, finely shaped treatment (London 1313) but it has distinctions of its own, especially the excellencies contributed by the Philharmonia personnel. The sequence of dances avoids the most familiar ones, and is probably derived from a more extensive collection. The open, full recording is an aural pleasure in both instances.

Holst: "The Planets." Leopold Stokowski conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with members of the Roger Wagner Chorale. Capitol P 8389, \$3.98.

The course of these heavenly bodies in their orbit has long been familiar to Stokowski, though he has not had the opportunity previously to share that knowledge with the disc public. Capitol has given him every technical assistance to the end of a high fidelity recording that marks a new level of accomplishment for this label. For sheer musical effect, however, I prefer the Boulton version on Westminster; the Los Angeles ensemble lacks the virtuosity to go all the way with Stokowski.

Liszt: Concertos: Nos. 1 and 2. Julius Katchen, piano, with the London Philharmonic conducted by Ataulfo Argenta. London LL 1683, \$3.98.

Two highly creditable accomplishments for Katchen, especially the second, lesser played of the two works, to which he gives a good deal of stylistic distinction as well as musical continuity. Standards of virtuosity being what they are in the E flat (Rubinstein and Gilels among others) Katchen's effort is understandably overshadowed. Argenta fulfills his unaccustomed task with all the musicianship and verve of his accustomed ones. Finely sonorous recording.

Mancinelli "Cleopatra" Overture, Martucci: "Notturmo" in G flat, other works of Verdi, Ponchielli and Mascagni. Pierino Gamba conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. London LL 1671, \$3.98.

The London engineers have made the energetic performances of Gamba an occasion for a particular display of high fidelity pyrotechnics, especially in the vibrantly orchestrated, little-known work of Mancinelli and the attractive one of Martucci. In such associated tasks as Verdi's "Traviata" preludes, and "Vespri Siciliani" overture, the Intermezzo from "Cavalleria" and the "Dance of the Hours," the erstwhile baton prodigy shows a developing ability to command the attention of his men and a good sense of the basic elements—rhythmic and dynamic—of successful interpretation.

Prokofiev: Concerto No. 2 (G minor); Mozart: Concerto No. 3 (G major). Leonid Kogan, violin, with the London Symphony conducted by Basil Cameron and the Philharmonia conducted by Otto Ackermann. Angel 35344, \$4.98.

Suave sound and impeccable execution are the primary attributes of these performances by Kogan and his assorted associates. The violinist's qualities are especially well suited to the slow movements, both sung with tenderness and warmth. Elsewhere he tends to be more methodical than absorbing, the Mozart in particular pursuing a rather inflexible pattern. The three lengthy cadenzas by Oistrakh do not add to the Mozartian total. Both conductors provide Kogan with orchestral assistance well-adjusted to his sense of tonal values.

Schubert: "Rosamunde" music (complete), "Magic Harp" overture, Serenade (opus 135), Twenty-third Psalm. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Fritz Lehmann. Decca DXB 144, \$7.96.

The lingering memories of Dean Dixon's work with the "Rosamunde" music (Westminster 18483) are all pleasant ones, but there is little doubt that Lehmann's all 'round effort is a finer one. His neat adjustment of dynamics in the ballet music and vocal episodes are faithfully honored by the excellent wind players, mezzo Diana Eustrati and the Berlin Motet Choir. The inclusion of the C major "Zauberharfe" (usually known today as the "Rosamunde" overture) is welcome, especially as executed with rhythmic definition and dynamic precision by the fine orchestra. The delightful Serenade (opus 135) and a magical performance of the superb setting of the Twenty-third Psalm contribute to further Schubertian pleasures. Very fine recording.

Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 8, Partita for Double String Orchestra. Sir Adrian Boult conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. London LL 1642, \$3.98.

Boult's version of the eighth symphony is a logical, and able, addition to his comprehensive treatment of the seven symphonies as previously issued by London. The unfamiliar partita (a 1948 revision of a double string trio) has some modal kinship with the "Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis" but also a good deal of individuality of its own. Both are performed with luminous sound and a strong sense of style under Boult's knowing direction.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



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Recordings Reports II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Beethoven: Variations on a Theme of Diabelli. Leonard Shure, piano. Epic LC 3382, \$3.98.	Shure's enthusiasm for this work (derived from his associations with Schnabel) is of long standing and his comprehension of its content is considerable. What he fails to provide, in the course of a serious, well-informed, often illuminating performance, is the personal accent, the sense of climax and triumph to differentiate a recreation from a rendition. He is more successful with the individual physical materials than he is with the concept as a whole. The recording leaves little to be desired.
Brahms: Sonatas in A major (Op. 100) and D minor (Opus 108). Ruggiero Ricci, violin, and Julius Katchen, piano. London LL 1569, \$3.98.	So far as sharing a mutual musical concept is concerned, Ricci and Katchen make an admirable partnership, with a suitable amount of the give and take appropriate to the works with which they are dealing. The position relative to Brahms is not so fortunate with Ricci, for his tone production is light for such a work as the D minor, and pushing it to the necessary weight roughens it considerably. The totality is better adjusted in the A major.
Brahms: Sonatas in A major (Op. 100) and D minor (opus 108). Mischa Elman, violin, with Joseph Seiger, piano. London LL 1630, \$3.98.	Accustomed as we are to duplications, it is something novel for the same company to offer the same pair of works in overlapping versions almost simultaneously. However, where Elman's Brahms is concerned the outcome is so much more Elman than Brahms that the resemblance to other interpretations would be largely incidental. The amount of thought-taking is considerable, but the musical outcome is full of abrupt accents and discontinuous phrases which are inimical to Brahms.
Chopin: "Fantaisie-Impromptu," Mendelssohn: "Rondo Capriccioso," Debussy: "Golliwogg's Cakewalk," etc. Leonard Pennario, piano. Capitol P 8391, \$3.98.	As the partial table of contents suggests, this is a highly miscellaneous 'book,' especially as it goes on to Pennario's "Midnight on the Cliffs," the E major Etude of Chopin (opus 10 No. 3), other bits and pieces by Mendelssohn, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Gershwin ("Preludes"). Pennario plays them all fluently and with a more sonorous piano tone than has sometimes characterized his work. His own piece is associated with a film called "Julie" and is in the Addinsell ("Warsaw Concerto") and Bath ("Cornish Rhapsody") tradition.
Chopin: Etudes (Op. 25), "Trois Nouvelles Etudes." Claudio Arrau, piano. Angel 35414, \$4.98.	There is so much facility and fine piano sound in these performances that a lack of the ultimate in fantasy and coloration should not deny Arrau credit for a highly skilful accomplishment. Inclusion of the three "New Etudes" of 1839 completes the treatment of Chopin works in this genre begun by Arrau with the Op. 10 set on Angel 35413. No little praise is due the Angel technicians for getting a piano sound of such clarity yet warmth. This is especially true of the meaningful tracery of the final E major.
Gluck: "Orfeo" (excerpts). Margarete Klose, Erna Berger, and Rita Streich, with Arthur Rother conducting. Urania UR 8015, \$3.98.	The best of the singing by Klose in the full-length "Orfeo" is here presented in what sounds like a reprocessing to improve the sound. She is impressive in the earlier sections of the score, in which her ample voice can spread itself to advantage. However "Che faro" is disappointingly sung, the final "Trionfi, Amore" also inferior. Both sopranos (especially the now well-known Streich) add much to the total with their efforts.
Haydn: Trios, Op. 38 (Nos. 1-6). Poul Birkelund, flute, Arne Karecki, violin, and Alf Petersen, cello. Vanguard VRS 1008, \$4.98.	One of these pieces tends to sound much like another, the totality a kind of six course serving of table-talk artfully varied if dealing with the same subject. They are ascribed to the 1780s, but show no special stylistic affinity with the symphonies Haydn was writing at this time. Each of the instrumentalists (all are affiliated with the Danish State Radio Symphony) is a master of his instrument and a full partner in the joint enterprise. The lulling, non-exhorting music is aptly complemented by recording of fine sonority and resonance.
Kabalevsky: Children's Pieces, Op. 27 (Books 1 and 2). Lenore Engdahl, piano. MGM E 3322, \$3.98.	Twenty-five separate pieces on two sides of this LP may be a little too much for continuous listening, but many of them (including some of the simplest) have a good deal of fantasy and charm. Miss Engdahl plays them with spirit and conviction, also the clarity wanted for purposes of study.
Lees: Quartet No. 1. Debussy: Quartet. Paganini Quartet. Liberty SWL 15004, \$3.98.	The excellent Lees quartet, which has had one superior disc performance by the Juilliard ensemble, receives another. Which the composer might prefer is a mootable point, for each has values not quite duplicated in the other. However, the clarity, drive, and insight of the Temianka-led performance can only be admired. The coupled Debussy has a good many creditable technical details, but does not quite match the finesse of the Quartetto Italiano. Fine sounding reproduction.
Mozart: Sonatas (No. 1 in C, No. 2 in F, No. 3 in B flat, No. 4 in E flat). Carl Seemann, piano. Decca DL 9867, \$3.98.	Clean, well-fingered Mozart, which induces a higher regard for Seemann's qualities than anything previously heard from him. The quality he projects is a nice mediant between impersonal objectivity and overstressed subjectivity—what might be termed a truly musical approach. Fine technical work by the DG engineers adds to the sum of pleasure.
Poulenc: "Stabat Mater," "Le Bal Masqué." Jacqueline Brumaire, soprano, Pierre Bernac, baritone, Francis Poulenc, piano, the Choral de l'Alauda, and the orchestra of the Concerts Colonne conducted by Louis Frémaux. Westminster XWN 18422, \$3.98.	Two aspects of Poulenc, of which the more absorbing is also the more ambitious, the "Stabat Mater" of 1950 dedicated to Christian Berard. It is a deeply conceived, fully accomplished work in which the mature musicality of Poulenc is shown full force. Excellent performance, especially by the sweet-voiced Brumaire. The earlier (1930) "Bal Masqué" is moderately entertaining, but a little long. Both performances were prepared with the composer's collaboration, and, in the "Bal Masqué" with his participation as pianist. The French recording does not match the best contemporary standards.
Sibelius: "Voces Intimae," Grieg: Quartet in G minor. Budapest Quartet. Columbia ML 5202, \$3.98.	These interpretations boast the rarest attributes a disc can claim: Tempered, warm-blooded performances, masterfully projected. Perhaps the use of Stradivarius instruments (belonging to the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation) in the surroundings of the Library of Congress auditorium has a part in the results, but the players obviously could not transcend their own knowledge of the scores which is no less than embracing. The recording keeps pace every measure of the way with the playing (a work of the original Roisman-Kroyt-Schneider-Schneider foursome).
Smetana: Czech Polkas and Dances. Rudolph Firkusny, piano. Capitol P 8372, \$3.98.	The quality of these pieces is variable, some of them hardly providing the matter for a pianist of Firkusny's resources. However he applies the resources without stint, and they include freshness of feeling, rhythmic zest and a special knowledge of the idiom as well as all the technical facility wanted. The four "Polkas" are interspersed among the ten "Dances," an acceptable enough procedure for the purpose of miscellaneous listening. Good sound. —I. K.