

# 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 farò" 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.

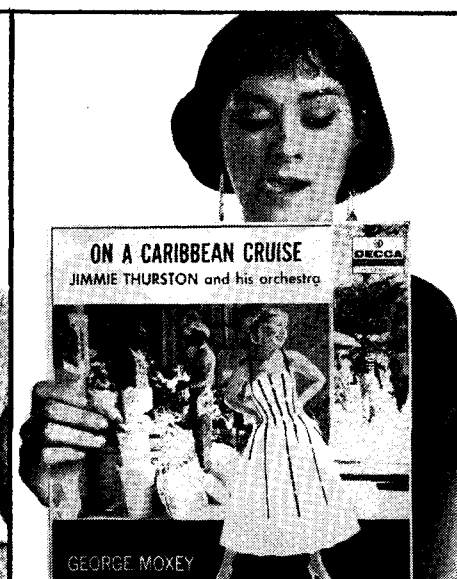
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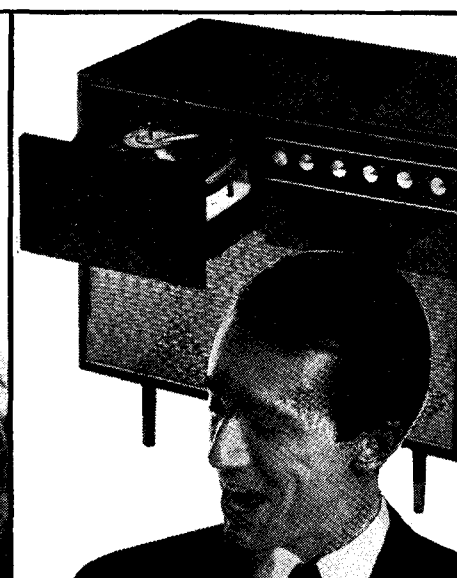
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# Tapes in Review

## Stravinsky on Stereo

STRAVINSKY: "*Firebird*" Suite. Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic. Columbia stereo tape IMB-3, \$12.95.

STRAVINSKY: "*The Rite of Spring*." Pierre Monteux conducting the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra. RCA Victor stereo-orthophonic tape ECS-67, \$14.95.

STRAVINSKY: "*L'Histoire du Soldat*." Robert Mandell conducting the Ars Nova ensemble. Sonotape stereo-phonics SWB-8003, \$11.95.

STRAVINSKY's salience in contemporary music makes it anything but surprising that his works should be among the vanguard of those destined for prompt release on stereo. Concurrently, three companies have brought out two-channel versions of their respective discings of Stravinsky works composed before 1920—an era which many feel represents his creative impulse at its most audacious.

Columbia's release of the "*Firebird*" Suite also marks the stereo debut of Leonard Bernstein, whose recent discing of it (ML 5182) the company can now add to its two earlier editions (Stravinsky with the same ensemble, and Ormandy with the Philadelphia). Interpretative values aside, the stereo version has qualities that make it singular among the several recordings now available.

In its ultra-brilliant tonal dress, the music's excitement and exotic coloring have an urgency not previously engendered outside the concert hall. Instrumental accents too often lost or falsified in earlier transfers—as, for example, the upper strings in the Introduction, or the muffled drumbeats in the Infernal Dance—are scrupulously registered. However, the searching light of stereo can also expose to view any multitude of little flaws that were formerly swallowed up by the lower signal-to-noise ratio of earlier recording techniques. Thus, despite the sonic clarity of this performance (or rather, indeed, because of it) the orchestra's texture appears by no means as irradiate as the vivid musical palette deserves. Bernstein's rather small-scaled approach is a curiously personal one, with its own idiosyncrasies of rubato and accent.

Monteux's second recording of "*The Rite of Spring*" for Victor (the first was with the Boston Symphony several seasons ago) took place in Paris, fittingly enough, for it was here that he conducted the ballet's historic

premiere some forty-four years ago. The effect of shock that marked that occasion has long since worn off, as repeated performances have made the score's rhythmic and harmonic eruptions pleasurable familiar to two generations; but something of the same sense of excitement must attach to the recording devotee's first hearing of the concert version in the fresh aural realism of stereo.

Here one feels the music's savage brilliance with an impact that is almost physical, and with that sense of re-discovery which is among the serious listener's most rewarding dividends. Monteux, with the ageless vitality of a true Frenchman, gives it the dynamic direction of a conductor sure in every detail and candidly enamoured of his task. The orchestra performs with similar esprit.

Although it falls within the chronology of the "*Firebird*" and "*Rite*," "*L'Histoire du Soldat*" anticipates Stravinsky's later style in its skeletal leanness, its off-beat rhythms, and the autonomy of its instrumental timbres. Stereo's accurate reproduction does well by this brusquely articulated music, although the score must suffer some loss of effectiveness when separated from its lively visual components.

The clean, spare musical writing, which requires virtuoso skill from each of the seven instrumentalists, is reproduced with commendable clarity on a tape that does credit to Westminster's recording engineers. The performance, however, lacks style, and the rather pedestrian direction fails to capture enough of the music's sardonic character. Although there is nothing on the jacket to indicate that it is a suite, the narration has been omitted.

## Beethoven by Rodzinski

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony No. 5*. Artur Rodzinski conducting the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of London. Sonotape stereophonic SWB-8015, \$11.95.

ARTUR RODZINSKI's meager representation on discs has been one of the less amiable features of the recording scene—a situation that is graphically pointed up anew by the present stereo release. This is a challenging addition to the already numerous recordings of the Fifth, and if Rodzinski's stunning job of conducting did not of itself provide adequate basis for a fresh evaluation of similarly ranking projec-

tions, the expanded aural canvas opened up by stereo can present a formidable argument in its own behalf.

The dramatic and emotional force of the Fifth Symphony make it easy to forget that there are refinements in the musical writing which have been almost inevitably sacrificed in mechanical reproduction. Not the least among stereo's virtues is the fact that it exposes these with the clarity of actual performance, and re-establishes for the music its rightful equilibrium of forces.

Rodzinski's direct, unrhettorical approach strives for no hypertense effects of phrasing or climax, yet the element of the daemonic which animates this music is always there. A sense of priestliness informs the spacious unfoldment of a slow movement proportioned, like the rest, to a conception both detailed and integral. A rather thick textured orchestral tone, offering less effective separation of choirs than was due the excellent stereo processing, is almost the only detracting feature.

## Boston "Francesca"

TCHAIKOVSKY: "*Francesca da Rimini*." Charles Munch conducting the Boston Symphony. RCA Victor ortho-stereophonic tape DCS-51, \$12.95.

VICTOR, which has lately replaced its old Dobrowen waxing of this with Munch's recent discing with the Boston Symphony (LM 2043), has now brought out the latter in a binaural version—wishing, apparently, to occasion no feeling of under-privilege among stereophile admirers of the Boston ensemble's *chef d'orchestre*. These, however, will have to wait until a later date to hear on stereo the "*Romeo and Juliet*" fantasy-overture that forms the disc's companion work.

In this two-channel presentation, Munch's efforts add up to an electrifying tour de force of Tchaikovsky's Dante-inspired fantasy, but his Gallic sense of aptness holds a secure rein on those pictorial elements which in less discriminating hands might easily degenerate into mawkishness. The initial descriptive passages, of buffeting winds that hurl the sinful endlessly around the Inferno's Second Circle, seem to open up immense aural vistas.

Munch is seldom finer than when dealing with music of high dramatic coloring, and in this performance imagination and taste combine toward a cohesive and brilliant exposition. The orchestra's warm, translucent tone is skillfully preserved by the recording engineers.

—MILDRED NORTON.