

LEONARD BERNSTEIN'S MIRACLE ON 57th STREET



The New York Philharmonic is currently having the finest season it has had in years. The Carnegie Hall box office has dusted off its SRO sign. Critics are digging for their most commendatory adjectives. And life is great for the nation's oldest symphony orchestra. Credit for this goes to Leonard Bernstein, the supremely gifted young conductor who became permanent musical director of the Philharmonic this season.

COLUMBIA
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**LEONARD BERNSTEIN
SHOSTAKOVITCH:
PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2
RAVEL: PIANO CONCERTO
IN G MAJOR**



Leonard Bernstein at the piano and conducting the
New York Philharmonic

Among Mr. Bernstein's most impressive performances are those in which he doubles as piano soloist and conductor. Two such performances are found in this new Columbia Masterworks recording—the delightful and very appealing Shostakovich Concerto No. 2 and the brilliant, exacting Concerto in G of Ravel.

SHOSTAKOVITCH: Piano Concerto No. 2—Leonard Bernstein at the piano and conducting the New York Philharmonic • RAVEL: Concerto in G Major—Leonard Bernstein at the piano and conducting. ML 5337 MS 6043 (stereo)

GUARANTEED HIGH-FIDELITY AND
STEREO-FIDELITY RECORDS BY



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Bartók in Stereo

BARTÓK: Six String Quartets. The Fine Arts Quartet—Leonard Sorkin and Abram Loft, violins; Irving Ilmer, viola; George Sopkin, cello. Concert-Disc Stereo CS 207, CS 208, and CS 209, \$6.95 each.

BÉLA BARTÓK DIED in New York in 1945. Like Schoenberg and Stravinsky, he was a titan, a world-shaking figure in twentieth-century musical composition, but he died poor and broken in spirit. Five years of self-exile in a land forever strange to him had demanded too much and given too little. Ironically, Bartók's death, at sixty-four, brought him almost instant glorification, with nearly fifty major performances of his works being given in a period of a few weeks after his life ended. Since then his name has been appearing on concert programs with heartening regularity and frequency, and the public is growing more and more accustomed to the taut dissonances, intricate rhythms, and striking coloristic effects that characterize his music.

Bartók's output as a composer was notably large, and little of it was insignificant. No other body of his work, however, is of greater importance, or has made a more telling impact on the music of our time, than his string quartets, all six of which are included in these new stereophonic recordings.

As Beethoven extended the range and established the norm of quartet writing for his century, so Bartók seems to have done it for ours. And since no composer of string quartets today can hope to avoid assessment in terms of Bartók's achievements, most turn to his examples for direct instruction and guidance. As a result, echoes of Bartók's intensely personal style are to be heard internationally. Many are superficial and ineffectual when considered independently, but all help to make Bartók's own challenging measures seem more familiar, and therefore more meaningful, when the originals themselves are heard.

An ardent collector and annotator of authentic folk music in his native Hungary throughout most of his adult life, Bartók adapted many of its melodic and rhythmic elements for assimilation into his complex compositional idiom. It must be clearly understood, however, that these elements were not only thoroughly adapted, but quite as completely assimilated into his style. Anyone ap-

proaching these quartets, for example, in the expectation of finding obviously "folksy" flavor is headed for the bitterest disappointment.

Since the first of the quartets was composed in 1907 and the sixth in 1939, the entire group covers a creative span of thirty-two years, or very nearly the whole of Bartók's life as a mature artist. But the marked differences of mood and outlook one might expect to encounter in works so widely spaced in terms of time are not readily apparent here. While stylistic alterations and developments can be noted, all the quartets share the same searing intensity of expression. From first to last they probe, strike, and lash with uncompromising force, honesty, and logic.

The Fine Arts Quartet's interpretations of these extraordinarily difficult essays are revelatory and admirable in every way. Their ideas about tempo, dynamics, and instrumental balances seem to have the rightness of inevitability, and their perception of the organic relationships that unify the parts of the separate works appears to be complete.

Hardly less exciting than the monumental works themselves and the masterful performances set down here are the benefits both reap in having been recorded stereophonically. The advantages of stereophonic reproduction are operative at all times in the playback of the quartets, but when one gets to a movement like the fourth of the Fourth Quartet, for example, the effects are truly sensational. This is the famous movement in which Bartók incorporated virtually every kind of pizzicato, or plucked-string playing, applicable to instruments of the violin family. Heard stereophonically, it vibrates with almost uncanny lifelikeness. The listener knows exactly which instrument is doing what at every instant, and as the music whirls along, his dazzlement at the achievements of both the composer and the performers knows scarcely any bounds.

—ALLEN HUGHES.



Lincoln Center

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seems designed with several motivating factors. One—and we recognize its purity—is to provide something like an ideal framework for the specific activity. The other relates to the concentration on the Metropolitan's own problems and interests to the extent that competitive effort of a musical drama or spectacle character may be frozen out of the Center during its season. In this respect, it profits from the limited possible usage of the Philharmonic concert hall and from the restriction on capacity of the Dance Theatre. The Metropolitan disclaims responsibility for this, but is it in the interests of the long-term utility of the Center that its range of possible usages be limited by strictly contemporaneous factors? Rockefeller and his associates will have much to answer for in years to come: the answer should be clear, clean and uncontaminated. If the Metropolitan, performing in an air-conditioned theatre, finds it expedient to extend its activities fore and aft of the present starting and ending dates, the ballet public may find its interests drastically affected, if not shunted into the hot weather months. Rather than enlarging the facilities available to New York's eight millions (not to mention visitors) we may end up with less usable space than was available when the Metropolitan and Carnegie Hall were augmented by the Manhattan Opera House, the Hippodrome, the Century Theatre, the Lexington Opera, etc.

This brings us, finally, to a peripheral but related question. What happens to the present Opera House when (and if) its uptown successor becomes available? The present plan calls for it to be sold, and the equity it represents (\$4,500,000 minus a mortgage of \$1,000,000) converted into an endowment fund for the company's future activities. This is all very well, and a customer is doubtless available, for the real-estate value alone is choice.

But would it not be possible for the city of New York to acquire it, to preserve it as one of its few worthwhile showplaces of the past? Doubtless there would be considerable demand for its utilization by worthy attractions (ballet, for one, or other touring spectacle). Failing this, would it be available for sale to private interests for similar use? Or must it be demolished lest it serve as downtown counterdraw to the uptown attractions? These questions are all in the public interest, and merit answers.

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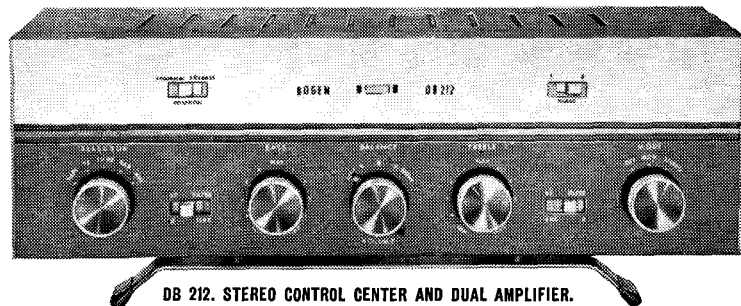
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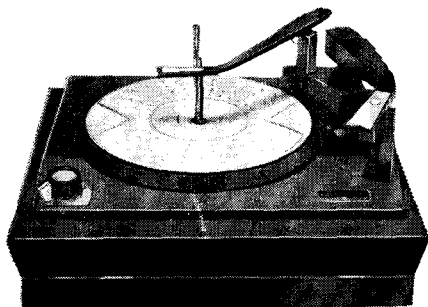
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The Ages of Gielgud

SIR JOHN GIELGUD: *Shakespeare's "Ages of Man."* Columbia Masterworks OL5390, \$4.98.

JUST about everyone of us who had the joyous privilege of hearing and seeing Sir John Gielgud in his "Ages of Man" program will always look back upon that performance as being one of the greatest and most lastingly satisfying events in the theatre of our time . . . and, it well may be, of any time. For many of us, it was an aesthetic and inspiring experience akin to spiritual exaltation and this writer, for one, went about for days afterward in a happy blear of grace. Remembering this dedicated state, I found myself somewhat reluctant to hear the present recording that presents the major portion of the program as given in the theatre, fearing I might be let down. Happily and gratefully, I was not. This may be because my visual memory of that evening (or rather *those* evenings, for I went three times) is still so vividly keen and my mind's eye will always conjure up the picture of an easy-mannered, modest man in simple dinner jacket and soft shirt who, without props or lighting effect of any kind and with the strictest economy of movement and gesture, in little more than two hours conveyed to a spellbound audience the flawless beauty, the poetic grandeur, the all-embracing humanity of the greatest poet-playwright of all time. And now in this excellent record . . . and even, I believe, without the benefit of a visual memory . . . the same sort of conveyance occurs, modified, as is true of all dramatic recordings, and without the tremendous impact, but none the less arresting and moving.

ONE listens to Gielgud's inspired voice, speaking these deathless lines, with the delight with which one might listen to the most perfect of symphonies, only without the occasional wandering of attention inevitable to all music listening, for here one is intent on every word, every inflection. Curiously, this is not a great voice when it comes to volume. It has more the clarity and precision of the single instrument as compared with the diapason of the full orchestra. At times, it is almost reedlike and at others, there creeps in a definite tremolo. But this is carping, for

the richness of resonance, the charm of diction, the intelligence and sensitivity of interpretation make this record a thing of beauty and a joy for whoever owns it.

The choice of selections is completely satisfying. There are, of course certain "familiar great speeches," but there is nothing hackneyed about their delivery. Sir John slips with graceful ease into Hamlet's "To be or not to be" or Henry Bolingbroke's "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" or the bewitching "Queen Mab" speech and one listens as though hearing these much quoted lines for the first time. Richard II's weak and tragic abdication is especially compelling and when Gielgud's voice wails out Lear's terrible "Howl, howl, howl, howl!" torrent of grief over the death of Cordelia, one shares the unbearable anguish of the mad old king. The lyrical passages such as Lorenzo's "The moon shines bright" and Prospero's "Ye elves of hills" are sheer beauty and one takes special delight in the sonnets, particularly two very funny and rather bawdy ones.

Sir John's commentary between selections is simple and to the point. This is a fine recording of the loveliest lines in the English language spoken superbly by a magnificent artist. —CORNELIA OTIS SKINNER.



Gielgud—"a magnificent artist."