

prise — artistic progress. Young and sometimes inexperienced singers stumble over tasks they are not yet fit to fulfill. But where would be the helpful director, the interested conductor, the friendly stage manager to guide them and to advise them how to grow artistically, to unite them to slowly forming a new congruous ensemble? In the same way, contemporary composers go begging, because it is so much simpler to unearth some long-forgotten opera for a noted prima donna's or a famous tenor's gala performance than to risk a flop by mounting a "modern"—and therefore unpopular—opera. Under Karajan, the Viennese are fed Italian operas at no end (to the detriment of Mozart and Strauss performances, which are steadily declining) and in the original language, too. It is amusing to read Reimann's description of the snob-studded audience listening to an Italian-sung performance of "Falstaff" with such somber faces that they might be attending a performance of "Parsifal."

What, with all the publicity, is the true picture of Herbert von Karajan? In the opinion of some, he is "World Conductor Number One," because he typifies the conductor of our time who — in contrast to Wilhem Furtwängler, the "conductor of poets and dreamers" — is the "conductor of mathematicians and engineers." He is not, as Mahler was, the apostle of a musical work, but its interpreter, dynamic rather than impassioned, imposing, but not overtly creative. His goal, always to be in full command, to play the role of superman, is the reason that he had to learn to live with some complexes he no longer can shrug off. He had admirers, adversaries, business partners, and people eager to serve under him, but since he himself cannot be anybody's friend, no friend. Says Reimann: "He became so overestimated that he is forced to live in a cloud."

About the five years of his directorship in Vienna, Reimann states: "Fascinating as the Karajan era may be, it is uninteresting. It consumes much money, but demands little spirit." Again: such statements may be symptomatic from the point of view of a refined Viennese, but also show us one of the pitfalls of government-sponsored music theatre management: the eventual appearance of an operatic director-dictator under whose global baton the last bastions of true art would crumble. And not for these reasons alone, but for many others, the crucial test that the Vienna State Opera is now undergoing, is one we can learn from and perhaps draw our own rightful conclusions for American opera houses.

—ROBERT BREUER.

## Dresden "Tannhäuser" Complete

THE complete recording of Wagner's "Tannhäuser" recently issued by Angel (Stereo 3620D/L, \$23.98) raises some disturbing questions for an operagoer who, in former decades, heard this work in notable performances. Has the bloom worn off the once-absorbing libretto (among Wagner's most human and sympathetic) and the colorful music; or have latter-day mountings deteriorated to the point of obscuring the real "Tannhäuser"? One would prefer not to follow this latter thought, because it can lead toward living in the past. Yet standards must be respected; and this writer, familiar with some of the opera's good years, feels there is nothing wrong today with "Tannhäuser" that a brilliantly sung and directed production might not cure.

Glowing memories persist for those who have heard Elisabeth and Venus sung by Lehmann and Olczewska; Rethberg and Branzell; Jeritz and Kappel. Melchior's Tannhäuser remains un-effaced, as does the Landgraf of Richard Mayr. These artists had large-scale dramatic conceptions, an ability to color the music vocally at will. Current casts for the opera are generally grubby; and the new recording by Angel, featuring the orchestra and chorus of the German State Opera, Berlin, makes no striking departure from this state of affairs, save that the performance comes off as uninspired rather than poor.

Does one ever in our time hear the original versions of Verdi's "Boccanegra," "Forza del Destino," or "Don Carlo?" Obviously not, for the great Italian opera houses respect the revisions made by the composer in his later years. Such, unfortunately, is not the case with "Tannhäuser." Many German theatres still cling doggedly to the early edition of this opera, first presented at Dresden in 1845, and turn away from the superb revisions made by Wagner sixteen years later for the Paris Opéra, when he had completed "Tristan und Isolde" and was at the height of his creative power. Chauvinism may be at the root of this choice, or else that obsession with museum pieces which seems to form part of the German soul.

Supporters of the Dresden version claim 1) that it maintains a consistency of style throughout, whereas the Paris edition—by introducing a new, Tristanesque idiom into the Venus music—violates the sense of unity; and 2)

that Wagner's heart was not in the Paris revisions. One might answer 1) that the composer knew marvelously well how to rewrite the music of Venus while keeping intact that of Elisabeth so that the inequality of styles (purposely arrived at) represents the two different worlds between which Tannhäuser must choose; and 2) that Wagner, far from being reluctant about these revisions, composed—in addition to the expanded Bacchanale—not only a thoroughly rewritten Venus scene, but also a tightening in the second act of the Minnesingers' contest, achieved by suppressing the pallid song of Walther von der Vogelweide and sparking one brief reminiscence—in Tannhäuser's fevered brain—of the new, Parisian Venus. These changes found Wagner in wonderful form.

The conducting of Franz Konwitschny is capable, but lacks the fire needed to make this score come alive. Elisabeth Grümmer sings acceptably as the heroine; Marianne Schech is a quavery Venus; Hans Hopf, a tight-voiced, unimaginative hero; and Gottlob Frick, an effective Landgraf. The big disappointment is the Wolfram of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. His playing of the part on stage has been praised by reliable critics. For this taste, his singing in the current album is overly refined until it loses a sense of urgency. There remains—as must happen with so first-class an artist—much to admire: beautifully turned, subtly molded phrases. Yet it all adds up to a certain preciousness.

In this recording, the Dresden edition is offered with absolutely no cuts. There are, however, one or two technical peculiarities worth noting. In the last act, when Tannhäuser seeks out the cave of Venus, an off-stage wind band representing the sound of bacchantes appears to have been dispensed with and the parts cued into the regular orchestra. In any case the desired sense of distance and unreality have here not been achieved. The final fortissimo chord of the opera fades out, evidently the fault of the tape.

For those to whom any Wagner is a rite, the new recording may be recommended, with reservations. Admirers of "Tannhäuser" in its Paris version, preferably with some shred of vocal-orchestral glamour in performance, are advised to pass it by.

—ROBERT LAWRENCE.

# RECORDINGS REPORTS I: Orchestral LPs and Tapes

## WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

## REPORT

Beethoven: Symphony No. 2; "Consecration of the House" Overture. Janos Ferencsik conducting the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. Parliament PLP 156, \$1.98.

Janos Ferencsik may not be the best new conductor of 1961-62 (though it would be challenging to find a better) but he is certainly the most recorded. As a counterbalance to his Liszt, this shows Ferencsik to be thoroughly grounded in basic principles of the classic style, though he is partial to more orchestral mass, a bigger body of sound in the symphony than some others deem appropriate. But there is a good flow of lyric feeling in the slow movement, and ample animation in the faster ones. The overture is firmly, respectfully treated. Both works are cleanly performed, and spread out in full detail in the recording.

Delibes: "Sylvia" and "Coppélia" excerpts. Robert Irving conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra, with Yehudi Menuhin, violin. Capitol SG 7245, \$5.98.

If Yehudi Menuhin is entitled to label credit for his playing of the solo violin passages in these collations (and he assuredly is, on the basis of the quality effort he provides), then why not the solo clarinet? He plays much longer, and in respect to the problems of his instrument, just as well. In any case, the two collections are highly creditable to everybody concerned, Delibes included. Irving is a little heavier in some climaxes than I would prefer, but his work always has impulse and momentum. For the rest, "Scheherazade" fans can no doubt look forward now to a Capitol version with Menuhin playing the soli, followed by one from Columbia with Stern and Francescatti alternating.

Dvorak: Concerto in A minor; "Romance" in F minor (Opus 11). Joseph Suk, violin, with Karel Ancerl conducting the Czech Philharmonic. Artia ALP (S) 193, \$5.98.

Suk is not only worthy of the name he bears (he is a thirty-three-year-old grandson of the composer-friend of Dvorak), but one of the best violinists to come to attention recently. His sound is rich and resonant, his attack sure, his control of a bold style of playing thoroughly equal to the requirements of the music on this disc. The Romance is a pleasant work which makes an attractive counterpart to the concerto. Ancerl and his orchestra afford him ideal support in both, and the recording is of excellent quality.

†Dvorak: Concerto in A minor. Tchaikovsky: Concerto in D. Ruggiero Ricci, violin, with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. London 80080, \$7.95.

Here is a heartening instance of the maximum advantages of tape being applied to the most productive ends: an uninterrupted performance of each work in either direction of the tape, the two major works being combined on a single reel with no disadvantage to either. For that matter, Ricci's playing realizes a major percentage of the musical values contained in the two works, different though they are. He is not lacking in the impulse and dash to set the whirling patterns of Tchaikovsky in motion, nor, at the extreme of another sort, the introspection to make a rewarding experience of the Dvorak Adagio ma non troppo. Sargent makes a well-balanced match for Ricci in his conducting of the orchestra, and the high-range writing for the high positions of the violin in the Dvorak comes clearly to the ear from the tape.

Dvorak: "Slavonic Dances" (Opera 46 and 72). Jonel Perlea conducting the Bamberg Symphony. Vox SVUX 52001, \$5.95.

"Old-fashioned" may often have connotations of virtue in interpretation, but in these performances Perlea has taken us a little too far back. That is, before the time when the re-creations of Vaclav Talich (and later, Rafael Kubelik) gave the non-Czech world a true conception of the music contained in these dances. Musically speaking, Perlea's work is always gratifying for its clarity and order, but, in times past, these have been combined with a stronger sense of style, a sharper attention to nuance and dynamic details than are audible here. Good reproduction.

Dvorak: Symphony No. 5 in E minor ("New World"). Istvan Kertesz conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. London CS 6228, \$5.98.

A fugitive from the Hungarian uprising of 1956, Kertesz has made impressive strides toward a place in the world of international music, a tribute to undoubted talent. However, the energy he applies to this performance is still undisciplined, the intrusion of some unwanted ritards no tribute to his taste. And it would not by any means be an automatic deduction from the performance that the Vienna Philharmonic was the orchestra. All of which means that this is rather too much too soon from Kertesz, but that there is every prospect that he will be heard from regularly in time to come. The London recording is a little boisterous in its use of timpani in the climaxes.

Mouret, J. J.: Concert de Chambre in E; Boismortier, J. B. de: Sonate pour les Violons (Opus 34); Dauvergne: Concert de Symphonie (Opus 3, No. 1). Gerard Cartigny conducting a chamber orchestra. Music Guild Stereo S-18, \$6.50 (\$4.87 by subscription).

The general title for this issue of "the 18th century French symphony" is as good as any other, indicative as it is of something in the process of becoming as well as of in being. As it happens, the work of most appeal to me and of greatest musical distinction (in my view) is the Mouret, which is clearly a suite and nothing else, though it is simultaneously something more—an ensemblage of movements all flow and proportion, highly cultivated in melodic formulation and beautifully balanced relative to each other. Its qualities also enable Cartigny, who is otherwise unknown to me, to demonstrate taste, musicianship, and flair for a literature which urgently requires each in suitable proportions. The other two works also have substantial interest, and are justly performed. Very good sound, and particularly well-centered stereo.

†Strauss: "Till Eulenspiegel," "Tod und Verklärung," and "Dance of the Seven Veils" ("Salome"). Herbert von Karajan conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. London L 80078, \$7.95.

Karajan uses these opportunities as an egotistical actor does the lines of a play—to give the best possible performance of himself. He is, by this standard, a rather perverse Till, a coy Salome, and a petulant philosopher in "Death and Transfiguration," all through the wish to "do something" with these scores that others haven't. This includes quick for slow in "Till" (and vice versa), inside-turned-outside so that the seams show in "Salome," and a suppression of the fullest eloquence possible in "Tod und Verklärung," a kind of conscious underplaying. The orchestra follows him implicitly and the recording of the well-arranged tape ("Till" and the "Dance" one way, "Tod und Verklärung" the other) is exemplary.

Tchaikovsky: Concerto in D. David Oistrakh, violin, with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy. Columbia MS 6298, \$5.98.

Whether this is the third or fourth recording by Oistrakh of this work depends on the identity of the more than one credited to him from Russian sources. It is, in any case, as well played as any predecessor, and richer in total sound—which means that, in its bravura style, it is the equal of any version now available. So far as the slow movement is concerned, I would go beyond that characterization to say that it is superior to any known to me. Ormandy and his superb ensemble have a suitable part in that, particularly in the playing of the solo wind instruments in the background.

Wagner: "Tannhäuser," "Meistersinger" Overtures, "Siegfried's Rhine Journey" and "Funeral Music" ("Götterdämmerung"). Wolfgang Sawallisch conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra. Angel S 35755, \$5.98.

Sawallisch offers a strong testimonial to the values of his Bayreuth affiliations in these vital, admirably controlled performances. Somewhat springier and quicker-moving than was the preference of a previous generation of conductors (especially in the forward-moving "Tannhäuser" overture), these interpretations nevertheless carry their own justification in every measure. Sawallisch knows the nuances of scoring (at least in these works) thoroughly, and he rarely misses a musical point. In turn, the Philharmonia accommodates him in every inclination, and the reproduction is comparable to London's "Rheingold"—as good a Wagner standard as there is.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

## Music for Export

ONE of the most successful American cultural products sent abroad during recent years brought together Jerome Robbins as choreographer and Robert Prince as composer with a visual aid from Ben Shahn. The complete billing on RCA Victor's new record jacket (LPM 2435, \$3.98, LSP 2435, \$4.98) is a mouthful:

Music excerpts from Jerome Robbins' "Ballets: U.S.A."

"EVENTS" and

"N.Y. EXPORT: OP. JAZZ"

Three talented Americans

JEROME ROBBINS, Choreographer

ROBERT PRINCE, Composer

BEN SHAHN, Painter

create two internationally famous ballets . . . , etc.

"Events" is a second and more recent creation of these combined talents. American critics assessing the production laid emphasis on the visual aspects and tended to underestimate the music. European listeners were quicker and more eager to evaluate the distinctive characteristics of Robert Prince's evocative score. The jazz elements are urbane; at once smooth, sharp, vicious, exuberant, and moving. To the foreign observer the rhythmic elements, asymmetrical patterns, melodic contour—trite and sentimental at times, in fact even on the vulgar side—are all individual and colored with hues distinctly American.

In both ballets Prince approaches his material — which is essentially jazz — simply as *materia musica*, and not as some local color to integrate into the more accepted framework of so-called serious music. He does not try to elevate jazz—he uses it.

The wedding of the Prince and Robbins talents followed the recording of a set of pieces which George Avakian (then at Columbia Records) asked Prince to write. Avakian included them in a Columbia album called "What's New?" Using part of this music as a point of departure, Robbins and Prince worked out the score and choreography for "N.Y. Export: Op. Jazz." The first recording of the score appeared on a Warner Bros. label—Avakian then being at Warners. Shifting his allegiance subsequently to RCA Victor, he brings us this newest recording. It is a little smoother than the earlier version, which tended to the brash. The second ballet, "Events," is recorded here for the first time. While it does not add much that is new, it is nonetheless a fascinating and individual score. Perhaps the proper billing for this recording should include a fourth name. It might properly read: *Four* talented Americans — Robbins, Prince, Shahn, and George Avakian.

— OLIVER DANIEL.



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