

tone-shaping circuits giving a number of repeatable curves with many different—and repeatable—characteristics. When not in use, as is usually the case, they are taken out of the circuit altogether. Tone controls in any circuit may cause distortion, and tone controls in the studio might mask a faulty mike location, or some other error.

These requirements of ruggedness, serviceability, versatility, interchangeability, and standardization of results are basically responsible for the great differences between home and studio sound systems. And these requirements—plus the limited size of the market for studio equipment, which makes every unit nearly custom-made—are responsible for the far higher prices of most professional apparatus.

Aside from this, how much difference is there in quality? Surprisingly enough, very little. The minimum standards which were set for broadcast equipment a few years ago are now not only being met consistently, but are also being surpassed by both home and studio equipment. The best home equipment will sound as good as the better professional gear. Used twenty-four hours a day, tossed into station wagons for remote broadcasts and location recordings, most home equipment would soon crumble. But when the specifications for frequency response, distortion, noise level, wow and flutter and other factors are compared, amateur and professional gear are about equal. Sometimes the specifications of audiophile components are even better.

Unfortunately, this does not always mean that the home system is superior. In some cases it is. More often, the specifications are related to different standards, which are stated fully only in the professional spec sheet. One brand lists the noise level of its home machine as “-50 db,” and as “-50 db at 2% distortion” for their closest professional equivalent. The latter is, of course the more meaningful figure—the two specifications may or may not be the same.

The buyer of the better equipment gets high quality for his money, fine styling, light compact units that are easy to use, move, and install, and many professional features. He gets adequate, if limited, versatility that is easily controlled, and adequate durability. The ruggedness and versatility of professional equipment—and their attendant high weight, bulk, and cost—are not really necessary in the home, and are probably not desirable.

Should the audiophile buy professional equipment? If he has the space, the muscle, and the money for it, yes. But home equipment will suit most home uses as well, if not better.

—IVAN BERGER.

A Distinguished Dido

PURCELL: “*Dido and Aeneas*.” Soloists, the St. Anthony Singers (Choirmaster, John McCarthy), and the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Anthony Lewis, harpsichord continuo by Thurston Dart. London-L'Oiseau-Lyre SOL 60047, \$5.98.

This “Dido” manages to do almost consistently what its predecessors did only intermittently. It combines scholarship with vitality. The version used (by Margaret Laurie and Thurston Dart, who also functions as harpsichordist and annotator) is remarkably authentic in terms of its dynamic scale, ornamentation scheme, rhythmic conventions, and general spirit. Yet there is nothing pedantic about the results.

The forces have been selected, perhaps, with an eye on economy (there isn't a star in the cast), but, fortunately, that eye was also focused squarely on the peculiar needs of Purcell. The singers may not be major box-office attractions, but each knows what to do and, better yet, how to do it. One cannot deny the presence of an impure tone here, an inelegant phrase or two there, but a strong unifying concept remains the crucial element in such an undertaking, and this one has it.

It is difficult to judge whether that unifying concept comes from the obvious source (conductor Anthony Lewis) or an authority in less immediate control (Thurston Dart). Regardless of who is ultimately responsible, however, the important fact remains that this “Dido” manages to avoid sounding like either a museum piece or a misplaced bit of romanticism. For this, one is grateful. (Dart, by the way, would receive a considerable portion of that gratitude if he had contributed nothing more than the imaginative continuo realization of “Haste, haste to town.”)

The “lively approach” gets the better of the performance only at one point. The Sorceress (Monica Sinclair) and her two witches-in-waiting (Rhianon James and Catherine Wilson) are permitted—probably encouraged—to cackle and snarl in a manner recalling Gilbert-and-Sullivan caricatures and the worst of Walt Disney. It is all very funny, and the ladies manage to croak musically, imitative coloratura passages not excepted. But witches are supposed to be nasty and frightening, even in baroque opera. A less exaggerated approach

might have served their purposes better.

As Dido, Janet Baker sings with extraordinary dignity, pathos, and control. Although her voice is not particularly opulent, her phrasing is notable for its aptness and expressive understatement. It is understatement, in fact, that give Miss Baker the edge over her more famous colleague, Kirsten Flagstad, who recorded the opera near the end of her career. Furthermore, in matters of diction, Miss Baker has the added advantage of native security, and in “When I am laid in earth,” she imparts subtle meaning to the interpolated embellishments, which are quite appropriate both to the period and the emotion involved.

Patricia Clark, the Belinda, is not so sweet of tone or agile of execution as could be wished, but hers too is an authoritative performance. Raimund Herincx offers a virile Aeneas who colors his words effectively in the recitatives, even when Purcell intentionally perverts the accents of the text. John Mitchinson (a tenor rather than the soprano originally used) brings just enough swagger to the Sailor's song, and Dorothy Dorow, aided by a distant echo effect, sounds properly mysterious in the recitative of the Spirit.

PROBABLY the most striking contribution, however, is that of the St. Anthony Singers, a chorus of modest size and enormous discipline. Their diction is faultless throughout, they manipulate the line as flexibly as they handle dynamic contrasts, and they command sufficient virtuosity to make the famous laughing chorus sound menacing and accurate without seeming breathless. All things considered, its intimate scale, fine sound, and, above all, appropriate spirit, place the Oiseau-Lyre effort in an unrivaled position among recordings of “Dido and Aeneas.”

Writing about the work itself, Dart claims in his notes: “Within the confines of the familiar plot, within the limitations of Tate's libretto, Purcell builds a world in little. All is in perfect proportion, each character is sketched in lightning strokes, each mood flashes on to the scene in a moment, each event is given just the weight it needs.”

This holds as well for the recording in question as it does for the composer.

—MARTIN BERNHEIMER.

Recordings in Review



Rita Gorr—"an artist with a mind as well as a voice."

The Art of Gorr

WAGNER: "Entweihte Götter" ("Lohengrin"), "Mild und leise" ("Tristan"); MASSENET: "Qui m'aurait dit" ("Werther"); VERDI: "O don fatale" ("Don Carlo"), "Condotta ell'era in ceppi" ("Il Trovatore"); MASCAGNI: "Voi lo sapete, o mamma" ("Cavalleria Rusticana"); SAINT-SAËNS: "Printemps qui commence" and "Amour, viens aider" ("Samson et Dalila"); GLUCK: "J'ai perdu mon Eurydice" ("Orphée") and "Divinités du Styx" ("Alceste"). Rita Gorr, mezzo-soprano, with the orchestra of the Paris Opéra conducted by André Cluytens. Angel S 35795, \$5.98.

As intimated in a recent comment on Wagner's "Die Walküre" in which she sings Fricka (SR, Oct. 27), Rita Gorr is not only a formidable vocalist but a dramatic personality of power and eloquence. The confirmation of this, so far as her effect in the theatre is concerned, was provided by her recent Amneris and Santuzza at the Metropolitan, but a fuller index to the range of her abilities may be found in this decalogue of operatic excerpts.

As a reading of the list will show, they include such substantial items of the soprano's repertory as "Voi lo sapete," the "Liebestod" and "Divinités du Styx" as well as the staples of the mezzo's, which makes Miss Gorr an embodiment of as well as a claimant to

the title of mezzo-soprano. And she offers credentials for proficiency in German and Italian as well as French. This is indeed a broad span of vocal timber for one individual, and a close examination of the ground it covers offers some interesting details for comment.

What I would call the true Gorr voice may be heard predominantly in the French material—the Massenet, the Saint-Saëns, and the Gluck, in which the timbre and the text are completely bonded. These are performances of imposing dramatic conviction and ringing sound as well, the creations of an artist with a mind as well as a voice. To judge from the two examples offered, German is her next best language, and, even more remarkably, she sings a "Liebestod" that many a soprano might envy (no assurance, of course, that she could sing the role as well, or any part of it).

In the Italian material, Miss Gorr is the same admirable artist, exhibiting an adaptability few would aspire to, let alone achieve. But the special language requirements, as well as the tessitura, of Eboli, Azucena, and Santuzza take a toll of her efficiency, cutting down both the beauty of sound she manages elsewhere and the vibrant warmth of tone such writing merits.

However, this in no way lessens respect for Miss Gorr's artistry or esteem for the capacities so widely manifest on this disc. It is, simply, that such specialists as a Simionato or Barbieri will always have an advantage over the performer of greater versatility. In such a specialty of her own as "Divinités du Styx" (with its range of two full octaves), Gorr achieves a standard reserved for only a few singers in any generation. Cluytens does his work for the most part very well, though the effort to impart "drama" to Orfeo's lament (as well as the rewritten final measures of the orchestral part) are extraneous to the composer's style as exemplified in most other versions. The reproduction is excellent.

Fischer-Dieskau on Liszt

LISZT: "Es muss ein Wunderbares sein," "Three Sonnets by Petrarch," "Oh! quand je dors," "Die drei Zigeuner," "Die Vätergruft," "Der Alpenjäger," "Blume und Duft," "Vergiftet sind meine Lieder," "J'ai perdu ma force," and "Ihr Glocken von Marling." Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone, and Joerg Demus, piano. DG SLP 138 793, \$6.98.

SCHUBERT: "An die Leier," "Philoktet," "Memnon," "Fahrt zum Hades," "Orpheus," "Orest auf Tauris," "Der entsühnte Orest," "Fragment aus den Aeschylus," "Der zürnenden Diana," "Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren," "Aus Heliopolis," and "Freiwilliges Versinken." Fischer-Dieskau, baritone, with Joerg Demus, piano, DG SLP 138 715, \$6.98.

When all the heavy cannonading of the recent Liszt anniversary (the 150th of his birth in October, 1811) in the form of rhapsodies and tone poems, concerti and fantasias, has subsided, it may be that the quiet artistry of this disc will outlast all the others. For it is not merely a rarity for a singer of either sex to devote time to this literature, but it is also practically unprecedented for a male singer of Fischer-Dieskau's qualities. It is among his best impulses, and one which he fulfills to near perfection.

For Liszt, like some other underrated composers of his time, was a song composer of high abilities, just below the level of the greatest. When his literature is combed for its best examples, as it has been here by Fischer-Dieskau, the results are imposing. It is especially interesting to observe the mentality of Liszt wrestling with the text of Petrarch, in the context of their more elaborated, better-known form for piano. And certainly many should know the quality of "Oh! quand je dors," if only from the famous versions by Maggie Teyte and Fischer-Dieskau's great predecessor, Heinrich Schlusnus.

In the range of this well-chosen material, which adheres almost wholly to the lyrical Liszt, Fischer-Dieskau is closer to the consistent standard of Schlusnus than in any prior collection. He not only makes a beautiful sound, with a finely sustained legato as its primary property, but stays within its dynamic range with scrupulous care for his top power (save in the climax of this very "Oh! quand je dors.")

The Schubert songs are, in their way, as well chosen for congruity, for they are all derived from texts which permit them to be titled "Songs of Greek Antiquity." Save for such as "Memnon," in which he is again dynamically overburdened, the performances are of rare poetry and insight. In both instances, Demus's collaboration is as artistically useful as it is pianistically adroit.

Six by Szigeti

BACH: Partitas Nos. 1-3, Sonatas Nos. 1-3. Joseph Szigeti, violin. Vanguard-Bach Guild BG 627-9, \$9.96.

By all outward evidence, the credit for this accomplishment belongs solely to Joseph Szigeti, without so much as an accompanist to share the glory of