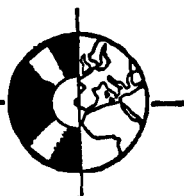


THE OTHER SIDE

Revision for the Garden, Strauss, Monteverdi



LONDON.
WITH both the Royal Opera House and the Royal Festival Hall closed for alterations, the present season has come to a precipitate end. London now resembles a musical desert until the "Proms" begin to fill the Albert Hall with their very own atmosphere of conviviality. At Covent Garden work is in progress on the upper part of the house to merge amphitheater and gallery into a single unit, providing increased seating comfort, better ventilation, and improved intermission facilities for the theater's less affluent patrons. It is fitting that the work is scheduled to be completed in time for September's two *Ring* cycles, and there is also a strong likelihood that in a year or two Covent Garden will no longer be surrounded by its famous fruit and vegetable market but will become the center of a new cultural precinct.

On the South Bank, by contrast, work will not be completed for another nine months, after which the Festival Hall should at last be able to fulfil the varied functions envisaged by its original designers. At the same time attempts are to be made to improve the widely criticized acoustics of the main auditorium. There can be no doubt that musicians and music lovers alike eagerly await next year's reopening. Meanwhile, alas, the cultural life of the capital is sadly disrupted, for London possesses no alternative locale for symphonic music save the monstrous edifice bequeathed to us by Victorian England. Our orchestras may find the going even rougher than usual during the coming autumn and winter.

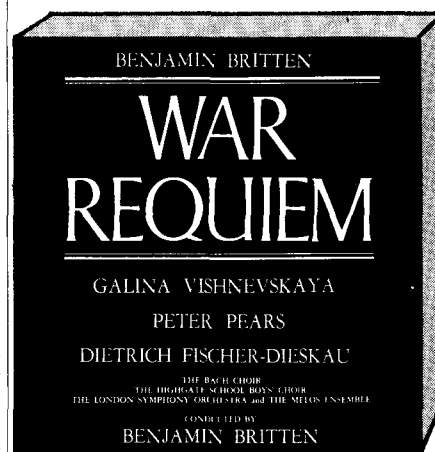
Decca's contribution to the Strauss centennial is a very attractive collection of his earlier songs, performed by the gifted Hermann Prey and Gerald Moore—this being the first disc from a non-EMI label to feature our most celebrated accompanist. As for EMI, this group offers no fewer than five issues bearing a special *Richard Strauss Centenary* medalion. However, two of these—highlights from *Arabella* (featuring Schwarzkopf, Metternich, Gedda, and the Philharmonia under Maticic) and the *Symphony for Wind Instruments* (London Baroque Ensemble under Karl Haas)—are reissues of oldish mono recordings. Two others devote only one side apiece to Strauss. The *First Horn Concerto*, finely played by Myron Bloom with the Cleveland Or-

chestra under Szell (though without the breathtaking panache that the late Dennis Brain brought to this youthful work), is coupled with Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*, while Lisa Della Casa's recital featuring seven familiar songs is backed by Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*. EMI's last centenary disc also revolves around Della Casa, bringing us highlights from *Ariadne*. Concentrating on the music associated with the title role, it omits Zerbinetta and her companions altogether. In the final duet, which occupies the whole of the second side, she is joined by Rudolf Schock, a rather tight-voiced Bacchus, but Della Casa's own contribution is admirable, as is that of the Berlin Philharmonic under Erede.

LEAVING aside anniversaries and the like, I shall undoubtedly remember June 1964, as the month when EMI issued its Angel recording of Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. If our gratitude for this glorious album is nonetheless tinged with a measure of exasperation, it is because the company lacked the courage of its own convictions and refused to record the Glyndebourne production in its entirety. In order to fit the work onto two discs, some forty minutes of music had to be omitted—an act of unforgivable vandalism, even if the hapless editors (who were told that, unless they agreed to cooperate, the opera would not be recorded at all) performed their disagreeable task with admirable skill.

When Glyndebourne decided to stage Monteverdi's last opera two years ago, few would have guessed how directly a work composed 320 years earlier could speak to present-day audiences—yet for many of us it has been an operatic revelation paralleled during the past decade only by the Covent Garden production of Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. Much of the credit for this achievement is certainly due to Raymond Leppard's profoundly imaginative realization of the score—providing the missing orchestral parts and rearranging the roles of Nerone and Ottone for tenor and baritone—and to Günther Rennert's superbly apt and beautiful production. Yet when all allowances for skilful adaptation have been made, one is still left marveling at the ability of the seventy-five-year-old Monteverdi to create so "modern" an opera almost a century and a half before Mozart wrote his great comedies. —THOMAS HEINITZ.

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"Critics' Choice" Indeed

IT MIGHT be argued that I should not review a new release called *Critics' Choice* (Columbia CL 2126) since I picked one of its twelve selections—"Blue Light," by Duke Ellington, which, although it involves only a handful of players, seems to me the first major performance of Ellington's great period, for reasons that I gave in the record's liner notes. On the other hand, I did not pick eleven of the selections. And the album may well indicate the state of—well, *something*.

I was about to say the state of jazz criticism but a) two of the contributors are employees of Columbia Records (and one of those two has seldom written anything that purports to be criticism), and a third is a radio disc jockey, internationally for the Voice of America and locally in New York, who has also written little or no jazz criticism; and b) if these be the choices of critics, perhaps we have fewer critics than we have record reviewers.

The invitation presented by the LP was to pick a favorite recording from the Columbia catalogue, past or present. The opportunity was given by implication to get a worthy but neglected performance currently back into print.

Ralph J. Gleason, "syndicated jazz columnist," picked nothing, saying, perhaps coyly, that it is impossible to have a favorite above all others in the Columbia jazz catalogue. Willis Conover, the Voice of America disc jockey, picked a piece of dance-band *kitsch* from 1940 by Claude Thornhill called "Portrait of a Guinea Farm." (It sounds like Delius, he explains in his appended note. And what if it does?) Leonard Feather picked a selection composed by Leonard Feather. However, he justly praises Martial Solal's piano solo thereon. John Hammond of Columbia Records picked Bessie Smith's "Baby Doll" and wrote a few words in praise of the traditional blues. "Baby Doll," alas, is not a blues.

George T. Simon picked Goodman's "Benny Rides Again" ("It gassed me"), which was obviously written out of the twin facts that its composer, Eddie Sauter, had formal music training and enjoyed Fletcher Henderson. John S. Wilson, who presides as exclusive jazz critic for both the *New York Times* and *High Fidelity* and who also contributes reviews regularly to *Down Beat*, picked a small-group Ellington recording, Cootie Williams's "Downtown Uproar."

The piece is a kind of amiable burlesque of 1920s jazz that, for me, doesn't come off and is little credit to Williams and Ellington.

It might be indicative to note that Mr. Wilson, when recently asked to pick a basic jazz library of twelve LPs, chose records by Morton, Armstrong, Ellington, Basie, Hampton, Lunceford, Waller, and Billie Holiday. Quite aside from other considerations (considerations like the fact that the list means that both Fats Waller and Lionel Hampton are greater musicians than Art Tatum and Charlie Parker), think how bored Mr. Wilson must have been with his work for the last twenty years! Incidentally, a happy error in the early pressings of the *Critics' Choice* LP substituted the gently touching and much superior "Blue Reverie" for "Downtown Uproar."

There are three selections on *Critics' Choice* that reflect a kind of middle ground of achievement. Nat Hentoff protests that Jimmy Lunceford's is a neglected orchestra in current criticism, but somehow picked one of the band's novelty performances, "Baby Won't You Please Come Home." Nat Shapiro, of Columbia Records, picked a very good example of small-group swing, Teddy Wilson's "Blues in C-Sharp minor" (with painfully out-of-tune bass work by Israel Crosby), but neither he nor anyone else pointed out that the partici-



Young—"first truly original jazz soloist after Armstrong."

pants include Roy Eldridge, Chu Berry, and Sidney Catlett. Stanley Dance chose to present a very good ballad by Ellington's tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves in "Happy Reunion," but it does not alter what we already knew, that Gonsalves is one of the most gifted tenor saxophonists who ever played with a large jazz orchestra, but also one of the most erratic.

The remaining three selections do involve major musicians in major work. Dan Morgenstern chose Louis Armstrong's 1932 "Lord, You Made the Night Too Long," a stirring and completely neglected recording from Armstrong's major period. Ira Gitler of *Down Beat* chose the durable Lester Young "Lady Be Good," a recording that revealed the first truly original jazz soloist after Armstrong and also revealed Count Basie's radical rethinking of the style and function of jazz piano. Don DeMicheal, editor of *Down Beat*, picked Miles Davis's relatively recent and much-imitated "So What," which in its modal approach, opened up a provocative new basis for jazz improvising.

Continuing on the subject of reissues, the old Commodore catalogue has been acquired by a label called Mainstream and is currently being made available. The editing of several of the Mainstream sets is curious. For example, *Town Hall Concert* (Mainstream 56004) includes tenor saxophonist Don Byas's technically astonishing reading of "I Got Rhythm" but does not include his "Indiana," recorded on the same occasion. That latter somehow shows up in a mélange of tenor saxophonists' recordings on Mainstream 56002, *The Influence of Five*. The label also has a Billie Holiday collection (56000). It is a bit skimpy, being limited to ten formerly ten-inch 78 rpm selections, but never mind, because several of them are superb.

A new RCA Victor reissue, *Body and Soul: A Jazz Autobiography—Coleman Hawkins* (LPV-501), is a fascinating, if not ideal, cross-section of the tenor saxophonist's work from 1927 through 1963. It includes perhaps his greatest recorded performance in "Body and Soul," here interestingly juxtaposed with an earlier, and then celebrated, Hawkins ballad, "One Hour," from 1929.

We hear Hawkins adapting himself to early large ensembles, swing-period small ensembles, be-bop groups, and even sucaryl strings. He is always alert to changes in the music, yet always himself. And the album shows why. He knew the basics of music when he was in his teens. He absorbed the basics of jazz as a Fletcher Henderson sideman, helped by some of the best players then working. And he had, and has, something to say. —MARTIN WILLIAMS.