

RECORDINGS REPORTS I: Orchestral LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Bartók: Concerto. David, G.: Concerto. Pál Lukács, viola; János Ferencsik conducting the Staatliches Konzert-Orchester DGG 18 874, \$5.98; stereo 138 874, \$6.98.

This performance of Bartók by Lukács and Ferencsik probes a little deeper, and is certainly better recorded, than the version from Prague noted here not too long ago (Nov. 30, 1963). But the special interest of this disk reposes in the creation of Gyula David, a composer in his early fifties, now a professor at the Budapest Conservatory. To judge merely from its mode of writing, it could have been written anytime after 1910 (it dates from 1951); it is full of sound ideas, admirable workmanship, and structural finesse. The Finale runs down in interest toward the end, but it is a work that offers much listening interest. Part of its effect is due, no doubt, to the bold, incisive style of Lukács, to whom it is dedicated. An orchestral player before he took to teaching at the Budapest Conservatory, Lukács handles his awkward instrument adroitly and draws a beautifully rounded sound from it. Both the solo instrument and the orchestra (presumably a group affiliated with the city of Budapest) are well represented in the spacious, brightly resonant recording.

Bruckner: Symphony No. 6. Hubert Reichert conducting the Westfälisches Sinfonie-Orchester. Vox 12 540, \$4.98; stereo 512 540, \$4.98.

Not since a version of this work was available in the Westminster catalogue some years ago has the interested listener been able to hear for himself what came between the fifth and seventh of Bruckner's symphonies. In this clear evidence, it is something of a lacuna rather than a link, a disjointed sequence of movements. The Scherzo is strongly suggestive of better sections of the sort by Bruckner (the annotator notes "the music sometimes pays due respect to Wagner's *Rhinemaidens*"), and the Finale constantly reverts to a theme that is either a paraphrase or a reproduction of the opening of the *Liebestod*. In either case, it lacks either profile or stamina of its own, and the attention wanders accordingly. Reichert's orchestra fares fairly well until the Finale, in which the ensemble is uncertain. For a better performance, the recording would be acceptable, but it is no source of strength in this instance.

Hanson: *For the First Time*. Howard Hanson conducting the Eastman Philharmonia Orchestra. Mercury MG 50357, \$4.98; stereo SR 90357, \$5.98.

Composer-conductor Hanson provides an engrossing lecture-demonstration of the tonal patterns (derived from the circle of pitches in the chromatic scale) employed in the movements of this Suite, depicting a day in the life of a child. It is both ingenious and illuminating of the principles pursued in the composition. However, the outcome, in the twelve brief sections, suggests that Liszt, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, and Stravinsky must have evolved the same principles previously, for the concepts labeled "Bells," "Fireworks," "Mists," and "Dreams" are very close to the sounds previously associated with them. The orchestra plays the well-scored work with considerable expertise, and the reproduction both of the lecture-demonstration and of the performance itself is highly proficient.

Haydn: Concerto in C. Boccherini: Concerto in B flat. Milos Sadlo, cello; Alois Klima conducting the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. Artia ALP 206, \$4.98; stereo ALS 7206, \$5.98.

The attention that is attracted to this disk by the billing of Haydn's recently discovered score as "magnificent" and a "masterwork" is less likely to be retained by its bland patterns than by their execution by Sadlo, a cellist of outstanding abilities. It has long been known that Haydn wrote a concerto in C, and the authenticity (related to the use of matter quoted by Haydn in his own catalogue) of this manuscript discovered near Prague in 1961 seems beyond doubt. However, its musical discourse is seldom more than prosaic, whatever the name attached to it. In his enthusiastic effort on behalf of both works, Sadlo shows not only a fluent command of the fingerboard but also a tone of fine sound and refinement. Klima's supporting effort is efficient; the recording very good.

Martinu: Concerto. Bruno Belcik, violin; Vaclav Neumann conducting the Prague Symphony. Concerto No. 3. Josef Palenicek, piano; Karel Ancerl conducting the Czech Philharmonic. Artia ALP 205, \$4.98; stereo ALS 7205, \$5.98.

Martinu's endeavor to create an "Elman concerto" (it was commissioned by the eminent violinist twenty years ago) was blessed with an auspicious beginning and a thorough knowledge of the instrument. Unfortunately he was not able to resolve the scheme without resorting to a patchwork of passage work that lets interest down just where it should intensify, in the finale. It is impressively well played by Belcik, now concertmaster of the Czech Philharmonic. As much can be said for the effort of Palenicek on behalf of the piano work. It is, however, rather more externally motivated (this time on behalf of Firkusny in 1948) with flashes of quality, but not a consistently sustained level of achievement. Recorded quality from Czechoslovakia is now up to the general European standard.

Mozart: Concertos Nos. 1 (B flat) and 5 (A Major). Isaac Stern, violin; George Szell conducting the Columbia Symphony. Columbia ML 5957, \$4.98; stereo 6557, \$5.98.

As a down payment on the Stern project to record all the concerti of Mozart with Szell, this disk is not only welcome in itself, but also a happy promise of things to come. By comparison with some Mozart recordings by Stern in years past, it shows him now arrived at a sound more lean and concentrated, with less vibrato, and a stronger sense of the results that can be achieved with minute alterations of dynamics and tonal colorations. In this respect, unity with the Szell-led orchestra is high on total, the equality of conceptions reflected in totality of result. What might be welcome, here and there (especially in the slow movement), is a *soupeçon* more of relaxation, ease, and warmth. But what we welcome is exceptional in itself. For those to whom the B flat (No. 1) is an unknown quantity (it lags behind in concert-hall favor), it may be certified as thoroughly Mozartean and rewardingly musical. (Jodachim cadenzas.)

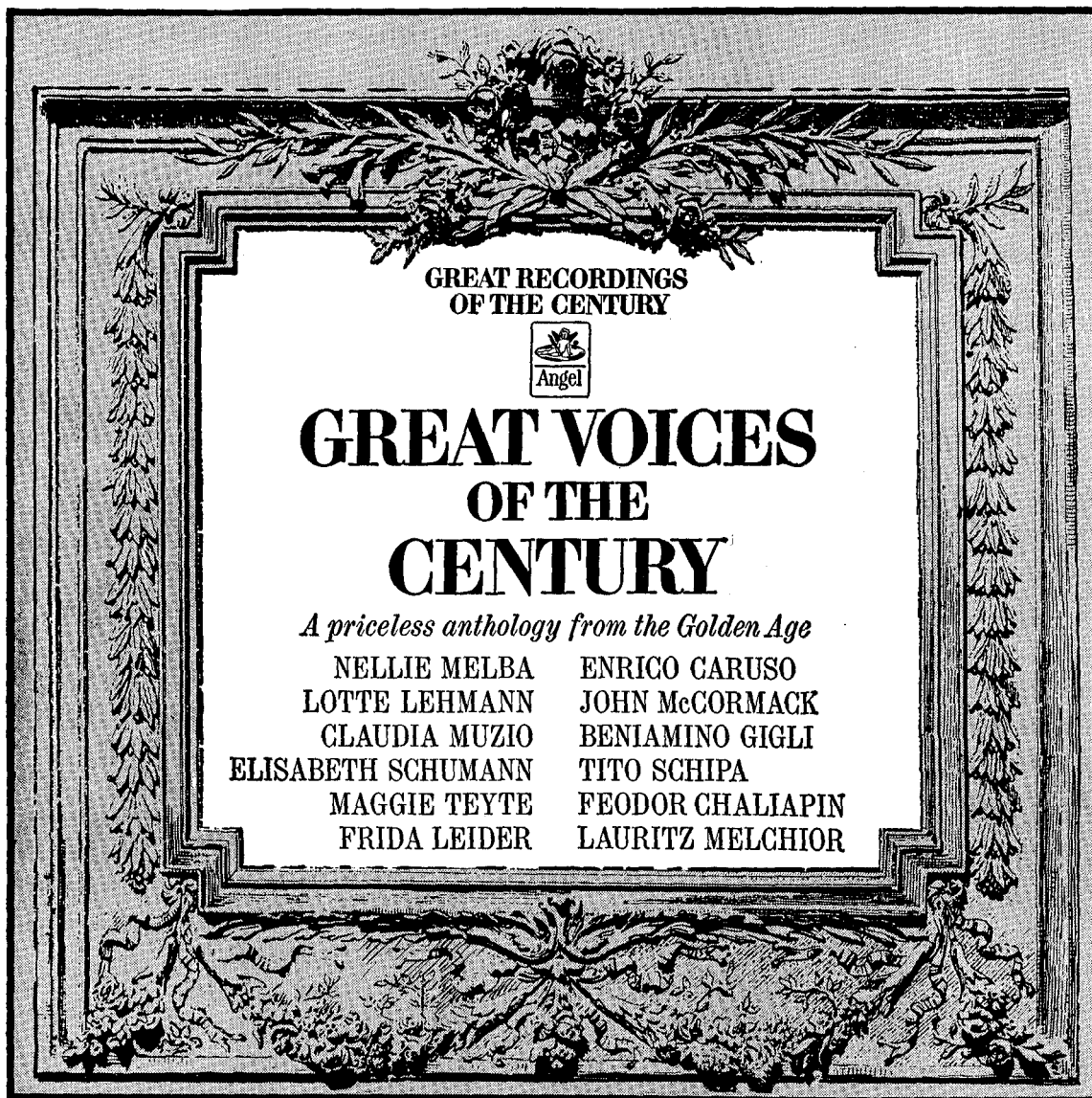
Mozart: Concerto No. 4 in D (K. 218), No. 6 (?) (K. 271a). Yehudi Menuhin, violin and conductor, with the Bath Festival Orchestra. Angel 36152, \$4.98; stereo S 36152, \$5.98.

The mental energy and musical probity of Menuhin are equally evident in his performance of both works, but the work identified as K. 271a is much more precise technically and altogether a better example of violin playing than its partner. This could be a vagary of circumstances, save that the earlier work is famous as one of Mozart's best creations for violin and orchestra, while the latter is of questionable authenticity and altogether of lesser musical quality. My impression is that Menuhin took considerably more pains with the less well-known work than he did with its disk-partner. In it, too, the playing of the orchestra under his own direction is better coordinated than in K. 218, where the solo performance is on one aural plane, the orchestral background on another. In it, the cadenzas are by Menuhin and very good. Those for K. 271a are by Enesco.

Mozart: Sinfonia Concertante; Duo in G. Igor Oistrakh, violin, and David Oistrakh, viola; Kiril Kondrashin conducting the Moscow Philharmonic. London CM 9377, \$4.98; stereo CS 6377, \$5.98.

Oistrakh Sr. adapts his skills to the larger, deeper instrument with expectable success, producing a lustrous tone and all the control necessary to shape it to the needs of these works. However the playing of the two Oistrakhs, in the Sinfonia Concertante, is more than a little clumsy and lacking in finesse by the standards of the Lillian-Joseph Fuchs duo on a Decca version, or the Stern-Primrose pair with Casals. It betrays itself in swells and vibratos that are not really in the Mozartian idiom, and in some heavy accentuations by Kondrashin. On the whole, the son and father (to name them in the order of the instruments on which they perform) have a more compatible feeling for the duo, which is rather more on the surface, than the Sinfonia Concertante. Both recordings (including the reproduction of the Moscow Philharmonic) are first class.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



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RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Debussy: *Quartet*, Op. 10. Ravel: *Quartet*. Vlach Quartet. Artia 204, \$4.98; stereo 7204, \$5.98.

Those with an affection for chamber music at its best should lose no time in making the acquaintance of this record by the outstanding Vlach Quartet. Though information is lacking on the identity of the players other than Joseph Vlach (former leader of the Czech Chamber Orchestra), its first violinist, they are obviously of an equal ability rarely heard even in fine quartets. Of critical importance is the nameless viola player who performs the important function of connecting top and bottom ranges with uncommon facility and authority. Some may find the treatment of the Debussy a little broad and full-blown for their taste, but the proportions of the playing are maintained consistently throughout. In any case, the spontaneous yet disciplined results they achieve in both works qualify them for automatic attention in any subsequent release. The recording has fine resonance, but sounds best with the bass response thinned out somewhat.

Grieg: *Sonata in C minor*. Franck: *Sonata*. André Gertler, violin, with Edith Farnadi, piano. Westminster 19054, \$4.98; stereo 17054, \$4.98.

The admirable art of Gertler has not been much represented on disks since his well remembered version of the Berg Concerto, and it is gratifying to have him active in the recording studio again. The results are especially admirable in the Grieg Sonata, which he plays with a fine command of its dramatic manner, and with excellent sound (save in the last movement where its dynamic burden becomes a little oppressive). However, it is all but impossible to tell what Gertler is capable of doing in Franck as the balance of this version with Farnadi is completely tilted in favor of the piano. At times, indeed, it reminds one of those "next-studio" collaborations of 78 rpm days, though now it is the violinist who is treated as accompanist, and the pianist as the soloist. Thus, there is only half a record that truly represents his abilities.

Hovhanness: *Symphony No. 4*, Op. 165. Giannini: *Symphony No. 3* (1958). A. Clyde Roller conducting the Eastman Wind Ensemble. Mercury MG 50366, \$4.98; stereo SR 90366, \$5.98.

Hovhanness achieves a consistently ingratiating sound texture in the three movements of his work, though its relationship to anything commonly called a symphony is extremely tenuous. However, the work must fail of its full effect, for, says the composer in his notes: "I would prefer the massive free rhythm bell orgies of Zurich to the spineless glockenspiel chimes and vibraphones of our industrial orchestras. I would like to ring all the bells in the thousand towers of the lost Armenian city of Ani in wildly clashing free rhythm." The Eastman Wind Ensemble can not accommodate him in this, but they do fairly well otherwise. Giannini's requirements are more modest and so are his aspirations. His first and last movements become bogged down in formulae (they tend to the Straussian and Korsakovian), but he develops a reflective mood persuasively in the slow movement and has achieved a little jewel of a Scherzo. The last of these propounds some intricate evolutions for clarinets, flutes, oboes, and such. The players under Roller's able direction clarify them convincingly. Good reproduction.

Kalomiri: *Prelude to Magic Herbs*. Ben-Haim: *Sonatina*, Op. 38. Mimaroglu: *Pièces Sentimentales*. Hossein: *Prelude No. 1; Persian Legend*. Fuleihan: *From the Aegean*. Rigai: *Israeli Rhapsody*. Amiram Rigai, piano. Vox 12 570, \$4.98; stereo 512 570, \$4.98.

The cloak of identity thrown over these men as composers of "Piano Music of the Near East" is rather porous as well as ill-fitting. Ben-Haim was German-born, Fuleihan has lived much of his life in America, and Hossein, though Iranian, went to Germany in 1921 and later lived in Paris. What they do have in common is the excellent interpretative art of Rigai, who has studied here with Egon Petri and Clarence Adler. He searches out what is individual about the writing of Hossein, Mimaroglu, and Fuleihan—who seem to have more of their own to say than the others. Ben-Haim, however, surely has the most compositional technique—and applies a decidedly discriminating tonal sense and much dynamic variety. Rigai's own *Rhapsody* tends to the "picturesque" and possesses so many built-in repetitions that it may not bear much more of the same. Kalomiri (if he is still living) would now be eighty-one and strikes the ear as reared in a Scriabin-conscious period. Thus if there is no single compelling reason for seeking out this disk, there are a variety of moderate appeals, not least the playing of Rigai. The reproduction is very good.

May-Neubach: *Heut ist der schönste Tag in meinem Leben; Wenn du jung bist gehört dir die Welt; Ein Lied geht um die Welt; Es wird dir im Leben mehr genommen als gegeben; Ein Stern fällt vom Himmel; Wenn beim Wein ein Walzer klingt*. Ernst, G.: *Liebe kleine Frau*. Marischka-Tauber: *Du bist die Welt für mich*. Dellinger-Walter: *Komm' herab, o Madonna*. Di Capua: *Lisetta*. Löhner-Altman: *Wenn der alte Brunnen rauscht*. Strauss, J.: *Wiener Bonbons*(?). Joseph Schmidt, tenor, with various orchestras. Capitol T 10367, \$3.98; mono only.

This is not the best collection of the art of Joseph Schmidt, but it should be treasured by all lovers of fine singing who have his other collections, as well as by those who were not buying records when Capitol issued a prior (mostly operatic) collection a dozen years ago. Schmidt was the short man (less than five feet) with the long voice (up to C or C-sharp when needed), whose quality had a heavenly soaring sound that seemed as if it might take off by itself. In these film and operetta excerpts there is no test of his true artistry, but he shows himself an almost flawless exponent of the Tauber method, with a taste and technique that sometimes outdo that of the model himself. Because of his abbreviated size, Schmidt had a scant career in opera. He was a brilliant radio performer and appeared in concerts all over the world (including the U.S.). Unfortunately, Schmidt had the wrong parents (he was a Romanian Jew) for the Nazis and died in an internment camp near Zurich in 1942. It might be noted that the last J. Strauss bit is not *Wiener Bonbons*, but an item called *Launisches Glück* (developed from a Strauss theme by Julius Bürger) out of *Indigo*, which shared an old 78 rpm disk with *Wiener Bonbons*. The sound is surprisingly good.

Mozart: *Serenade* (K. 320); *Serenata Notturna* (K. 239). Victor Desarzens conducting the Chamber Orchestra of Lausanne. Westminster 19057, \$4.98; stereo 17057, \$4.98.

Spirits could hardly be higher or musical materials manipulated more adroitly than they are in these works of Mozart's last years in Salzburg (1776 and 1779). The seven movements of K.320 are an uninterrupted delight (save for the interruption for tuning between the fourth and fifth sections) and the three of K.239 no less rarefied in their content. Desarzens is well-versed in the subtleties of their construction and puts the pieces together artfully. There are rough edges and loose joints, nevertheless, related to flute and oboe, which do not blend precisely in pitch, and a string section that is sometimes at miniscule, but telling, variance with both. As for the solo on the posthorn (from which K.320 takes its name), it is clearly more accustomed to the sharp air of Switzerland than it is to the atmosphere of Mozart.

Schubert: *Sonata in B flat*, Op. post. Géza Anda, piano. Deutsche Grammophon 18 880, \$5.98; stereo 138 880, \$6.98.

To judge from this recording, in the sequence of several prior ones, Anda has recovered from the inevitable recession from his first rapid emergence to prominence a decade ago. He now has the sound of an artist with all the problems of the music he plays under sure control. To accomplish this in the present work is no small feat, for Anda takes literally the *Molto Moderato* inscription for the first movement and yet manages to sustain the interest as well as the flow of the music. It is all in a somewhat lower key than the performance of Fou Ts'ong, admired several months ago (on a disk that also includes the A minor), but persuasively delivered as Anda views the work. His ascension to a plane of true artistry is decisively confirmed in the finale where his facility is applied to clarifying the subtle relationships of Schubert's writing rather than to any glorification on its own. Anda also manages to shade his tempo variations to vary the melodic flow without disturbing the basic rhythmic pattern. The recording is in keeping with the disk's other distinctions.

—I.K.