

# RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Beethoven: Sonata in B flat, Op. 106 (*Hammerklavier*). Daniel Barenboim, piano. Command CC 33-11026, \$4.98; stereo SD 11026, \$5.98.

Hardly a dozen pianists have recorded the *Hammerklavier* since the very first by Schnabel, in the Thirties. No one of the better-known versions was by a pianist still in his teens, which leaves Barenboim with the unique distinction of having done it twice, though he has but recently passed his twenty-second birthday. The first conspicuous fact in a comparison of this performance with the one on Westminster WXN 18760 is that it is a vastly better likeness of the piano. It quickly develops that it is also a more dynamic likeness of the music than its predecessor, which repeatedly found Barenboim attempting the equivalent of carving marble with a penknife—however good the intentions, the equipment was insufficient. His tone production still strikes me as the least suitable of his attributes for a complete *Hammerklavier*, which is to say that he is more mature mentally than he is mechanically. However, as represented in this performance, it comes closer, especially in the slow movement, than it did five years ago. Doubtless Barenboim will, in another five years, play it better than he does today, but there are some stretches of the music, in the opening allegro as well as the adagio, in which he plays himself into a complete identity with as massive a problem as the literature contains. The strong reproduction sometimes picks up pedal noises as well.

Brahms: Quintet in F minor, Op. 34. Rudolf Serkin, piano; with the Budapest Quartet. Columbia ML 6031, \$4.98; stereo MS 6631, \$5.98.

No question where the motive power of this performance is centered. It is, dynamically and emotionally, an emanation of Serkin's presence at the keyboard. This is not to say that he dominates the performance in any untoward way, but simply that he gives it a direction and dimension to which his associates provide a stimulating counterreaction of their own. Doubtless some will regard this as a reissue of a performance with which they have long been familiar; but it will be an illusion, if an understandable one. Serkin has long been associated with one of the best of all performances of this quintet, with the Busch Quartet on V-Set 607; and the Budapest Quartet has also had a share in a fine version with Clifford Curzon. But it is not merely their first recording of the Quintet together; it is the first time they have recorded anything together. The results show that this collaboration is long overdue, if only for its corrective influence on intonation and tone of the string ensemble. Big, well-shaped sound.

Haydn: Quartets, Opus 55 (Nos. 1-4). Allegri String Quartet. Westminster WSN 19084, \$4.98; stereo WST 17084, \$4.98.

Contrary to the suggestions of the name—which might identify the players as compatriots of the Quartetto Italiano or the Quintetto Boccherini—the performers are in that great tradition of English chamber-music performance that has added many distinguished records to the catalogue. This is exemplary for its combination of assured leadership by Eli Goren, and a fine balance of tonal as well as technical qualifications among Peter Thomas, second violin, Patrick Ireland, viola, and William Pleeth, cello. The style of performance is admirably suited to the refinement and spirit of the writing, which represents Haydn at a mid-point of progress between the early, soloistic works and the more profound later ones. The players are also keenly responsive to the play of inner voices which depict Haydn's response to the six great works Mozart dedicated to him a few years before. In all, a cultivated pleasure, complete with mirror-clear recording.

Liszt: *Missa Choralis*. Bruckner: *Os Justi* (Gradual). Hans Gillesberger conducting the Vienna Kammerchor; with Elizabeth Thomann, soprano; Gertrude Jahn, mezzo-soprano; Stafford Wing, tenor; Eishi Kawamura, baritone; Harald Buchsbaum, bass; and Josef Nebois, organ. Vox PL 1040, \$4.98; stereo STPL 501040, \$4.98.

There is little doubt that, on talent alone, Liszt could have been any kind of a composer he wanted to be. However, it was the complexities of his personality that determined that he should be one kind in one set of circumstances, quite another in different ones. This work of 1865 (the year in which he took the orders that entitled him to be known as the Abbé Liszt) is almost a *cappella*, the organ providing harmonic support from time to time. It has scant resemblance to any generally known works of Liszt, but substantial interest nevertheless. For that matter, very few would recognize the *Os Justi* as the work of Bruckner. It is a modal (Lydian) concept, which looks backward to the precepts of Palestrina. Both are sung with uncommon purity of sound by the choir under the direction of Gillesberger, and the organ, when it is used, is mixed discreetly with the voices. Very good, natural-sounding reproduction.

Strauss-Godowsky: *Symphonic Metamorphosis on "Artist's Life."* Paderewski: *Theme with Variations*, Op. 16, No. 3. Herz: *Variations on "Non più mesta" (La Cenerentola)*. Rubinstein, A.: *Etude*, Op. 23, No. 2. Thalberg: *Don Pasquale Fantasy*. Hummel: *Rondo in E flat*. Earl Wild, piano. Vanguard VRS 1119, \$4.98; stereo VSD 71119, \$5.95.

To judge from his success in unstranding the complex texture of Godowsky's elaborations on Strauss themes, Wild could be just the man to do a full disc of Godowsky transcriptions, including those on Schubert songs, the Passacaglia on the opening theme of the *Unfinished* Symphony and some of the fifty-odd reworkings of Chopin. He also performs with sensitivity as well as fluency in the Paderewski variations, conveying much of that musician's refinement of mind as well as something of the matter in which he played the piano. However, in the Herz and Thalberg display pieces especially, Wild's search for a manner to take the place of substance inclines him to a mechanized likeness of the "Virtuoso Piano," as the collection is inscribed. The stiff rhythms and heavy accents are almost too much "in the style." But in all cases, Wild is a phenomenally accurate as well as fleet-fingered performer whose skills must be many another pianist's despair. Highly successful recording.

Verdi: *The Troubadour* (excerpts). Elizabeth Fretwell, soprano; Patricia Johnson, mezzo; Charles Craig, tenor; Peter Glossop, baritone; with Sadlers Wells chorus and orchestra directed by Michael Moores. Capitol P 8609, \$3.98; stereo SP 8609, \$4.98.

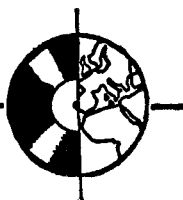
To be sure, Capitol doesn't go as far as billing this as *The Troubadour*, but it might well have, considering that everything else about this pastiche is in English (including the conducting). It has a measure of interest for those with a curiosity about the standard of execution that prevails in England's own "native" opera (Covent Garden is now thoroughly internationalized). They will find that it is a serious, conscientious effort to do justice to Verdi, with special stress on enunciation of the English translation by Norman Tucker and Tom Hammond. As might be anticipated, the vocal values are unevenly disposed, with Fretwell's strong if not wholly controlled sound as the most rewarding, and Glossop's stolidly constricted effort at the other extreme. Johnson is not really an Azucena, and Craig is light for Manrico. For the most part, the words might as well be "Tacea la notte" as "Fled was that golden vision," "Stride la vampa," "Il balen," "Di quella pira," "Mira, d'acerbe," "Ai nostri monti," and "Prima che d'altri vivere" as well as the English equivalents. Relatively few can be heard, for all the efforts of the singers. (The *Miserere* is also included.) Capitol has provided the best of its technical resources for this product, price notwithstanding.

Wilder: Sonata for Trombone and Piano. Corelli: Sonata. Pergolesi: *Siciliano*; etc. John Swallow, trombone; with Harriet Wingreen, piano. Golden Crest RE 7015, \$4.98 (mono only).

Wilder and Swallow are here engaged in a reciprocal project, with mutual benefits. The composer is stimulated by the performer's uncommon technical qualifications, the results thereby affording a means of expression otherwise nonexistent. Wilder has used Swallow's qualities of "lip" and flexibility to write a blues-tinged work that has a definitive trombone character and yet is a persuasive embodiment of his own personal qualities as a composer. It is one of the best of the numerous "special" pieces he has written for trumpet, French horn, tuba, etc. Overside, Swallow is engaged in more conventional technical triumphs by means of transcriptions of Corelli and Pergolesi, and a work described as "Camille" by Saint-Saëns. It is, forsooth, Cavatina by Saint-Saëns. Ending all is a fruit salad of a piece by the bygone virtuoso of the slip horn, Arthur Pryor, in which *The Blue Bells of Scotland* are submitted to every known form of disfigurement on behalf of the trombone's greater glory. It rated two bows at least.

—I.K.

# THE OTHER SIDE



## Hoffmann at Covent Garden, Pelléas on Discs

LONDON.  
**T**O EVERYONE'S relief, the members of the London Symphony Orchestra returned safely to their home base in time for a family Christmas, travel-weary yet elated by the success of their around-the-world musical mission. To be sure, there were no hordes of screaming teen-agers at London Airport, no shouts of "We want Gervase" or "We love you, Barry"—only a welcome-home message from the Queen delivered by the Master of Her Musick, Sir Arthur Bliss, to reassure our cultural ambassadors that we had been following their westward progress with considerable interest. The real reunion between the orchestra and its public will not, however, take place until February 1, when the LSO will have the honor of reopening the Festival Hall following the prolonged face-lifting operations on the South Bank.

While the LSO is thus riding high, another London orchestra of high repute, the Royal Philharmonic, remains in the doldrums. The plight of Beecham's erstwhile ensemble is indeed sad to behold for anyone with treasured memories of its halcyon days; after the bitter wrangles over its title and the loss of its association with Glyndebourne (where it was replaced by the London Philharmonic last summer), we are now faced with what looks like a concerted attempt to deal it the *coup de grâce*. The new and highly successful subscription scheme just launched by the Festival Hall management embraces concerts to be given there by the LSO, the LPO, and the New Philharmonia, but excludes the BBC Symphony (whose finances are not directly dependent on box office receipts) and the RPO (whose finances most certainly are). It may well be that we now have in London too many orchestras chasing too few concertgoers, but such a struggle for survival provides a most unedifying spectacle as rival managements seek financial support from private and public funds, and accusations of sabotage, backed by tape transcripts of a vital telephone conversation, are flung at the secretary of the Arts Council by supporters of the RPO.

Meanwhile Covent Garden has announced a three-year extension of Mr. Solti's present contract as musical director, and it gave us an attractive revival of *The Tales of Hoffmann* as a highly suitable Christmas entertainment. Elegantly conducted by Solti, who re-

stored the acts to the order originally intended by Offenbach (Olympia-Antonia-Giulietta), these were very enjoyable performances, thanks to the exceptionally strong and carefully prepared cast, in which the agile and charming Reri Grist (Olympia) was the only "outsider." The decision to employ front-rank artists for even the smallest parts—we had David Ward as Crespel, Kenneth Macdonald as Franz (providing a superb mixture of comedy and bel canto), and John Lanigan as Spalanzani—paid off handsomely and provided the principals—Richard Lewis (Hoffmann), Geraint Evans (Lindorf-Coppelius-Dr. Miracle-Dapertutto), Miss Grist, Heather Harper (Antonia), and Marie Collier (Giulietta)—with some formidable competition. Perhaps the most distinguished singing, however, came from Josephine Veasey (Nicklausse.)

In France operatic standards appear to have declined alarmingly during the past few decades, as witness the fact that we have had in recent years four complete stereo recordings of *Carmen* none of which featured a French Carmen or Don José, while two of them assigned all four principal roles to non-French artists. This month, too, we have a magnificent new Decca recording of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in which only Pelléas and Yniold can claim French as their mother tongue, the rest of the cast coming from Holland, Canada, and Britain. This set is a most important addition to the stereo repertoire, and Decca was wise once more to entrust the musical direction to the experienced and sensitive hands of Ernest Ansermet. He is excellently served, too, by an intelligently chosen cast featuring Erna Spooenberg's touching Mélisande, Camille Maurane's sensitive Pelléas, and George London as a really impressive Golaud.

As though to make up for the lack of aural spectacle in *Pelléas*, Decca's remaining January issues offer a generous ration of sensational sonics. Best of these to my mind is a Kodály disc by Kertész and the London Symphony that brings us the attractive Dances of Galánta and the inevitable *Háry János Suite* (though the latter is augmented here by two songs from the same opera, featuring Hungarian mezzo Olga Szönyi): it shows orchestra and conductor in top form, and the recording makes a tremendous impact. Magnificent playing and gorgeous sound also come to us from Vienna, with Maazel directing the

Philharmonic in Sibelius's second Symphony, but the result seems to me more a dissection of the score than an organic performance. Decca evidently thinks otherwise, for we are to have an entire Sibelius cycle from Maazel and the Vienna Philharmonic.

Although, anniversary-wise, this month belongs to Michael Tippett, who on January 2 celebrated his sixtieth birthday (though he looks, sounds, acts and composes like a man half his age), we shall have to wait a while for promised recordings of several of his recent works. Britten, on the other hand, is now regarded as sure-fire box-office by the Decca group; since, unlike Tippett, he has always been a highly prolific composer, there are still plenty of his works waiting to be recorded (including a number of the operas). The latest disc to appear, on Argo, contains a miscellaneous collection of part songs ranging from two settings of 1934 to the Choral Dances from *Gloriana* (1953). The *Five Flower Songs* of 1950 contain much lovely and characteristic invention, but to my mind the most astonishing item is a wartime composition, the *Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard* for male voices and piano—a grim and ironical setting of an anonymous poem from the *Oxford Book of Ballads*. This fascinating program is excellently sung by the Elizabethan Singers under Louis Halsey and finely recorded.

From DGG comes a varied and attractive selection of Archive releases, covering three centuries of European musical history. There are madrigals and keyboard pieces by Thomas Morley and concertos by Handel contemporaries such as Geminiani, Festing, Woodcock, and Baston to represent these islands, Fanfares and so-called symphonies by Mouret and Lalande (or Delalande, or de la Lande, if you prefer it) to recall the glories of the French court with the aid of some superb trumpet playing by Adolf Scherbaum, and a fine pair of Bach discs containing the musical offering, directed from the harpsichord by Karl Richter, and four organ preludes and fugues played by the indefatigable Helmut Walcha. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is a disc of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century music from Nuremberg. The beginning of Side 2 is sure to make your Wagnerian friends sit up and take notice, for it starts with the words "Als ich, Hans Sachs. . ." In fact, there are five extended songs for solo voice by the cobbler-poet-composer immortalized in *Die Meistersinger*, but it is the other side of the disc—fourteen songs and instrumental pieces from the Locheimer Liederbuch and other sources—that makes this issue especially enjoyable.

—THOMAS HEINITZ.