

Recordings in Review

Schuricht's Bruckner

BRUCKNER: *Symphony No. 8 in C minor*. Carl Schuricht conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Angel mono 3656, \$4.79; stereo 3656, \$5.79.

Few consequential conductors of this era have had quite the kind of career vis-à-vis America that has accrued to Carl Schuricht. For most of his life the Polish-born, Berlin-educated Schuricht held the post of municipal music director in Wiesbaden, afterward moving to Frankfurt, and then to Switzerland. He was regularly by-passed for American engagements by the appeal of better-known names and more glamorous backs. When he did come, at the age of seventy-six, to lead the Vienna Philharmonic on its first tour of the States in 1956 (the honor came to him because of the deaths, shortly before, of several more "logical" claimants for priority), his mastery was widely recognized and generally praised. Outside of a tour to such places as Tanglewood and Ravinia in the following year, Schuricht has not ventured another visit, the reason being a precarious state of health—which limits European engagements also.

For that matter, recordings have hardly been abundant—which makes this one exceptional if not unique. It is by no means an accident that this rarity finds him conducting Bruckner. The Seventh, in E, was included on the first program Schuricht directed in New York and it was performed with such understanding and sense of the beauty of the music that it absorbed the listening attention even of those who would

not consider themselves devotees of the composer. What he has done with No. 8 is exactly in keeping with that precedent, although it was recorded when Schuricht had passed his eighty-second birthday.

The secret of Schuricht's success with Bruckner is neither mysterious nor difficult to isolate. It begins with an avoidance of the thick string sonorities and full-blown (frequently overblown) brass sound that some consider the hallmark of a proper Bruckner style. It prefers—especially with such an orchestra as the Vienna Philharmonic—a string tone that is always beautiful but not pulsating with vibrato, and a blend of heavy brass and horns that is as close to the sound of Bruckner's beloved organ as can be attained with the orchestra. It moves steadily but not stodgily over a terrain with which he is thoroughly familiar and of which he is deeply fond. Least of all is there any sense of special pleading: to play Bruckner as meaningfully as he might Brahms or Beethoven is, in Schuricht's clearly communicated view, as much as is necessary.

Moreover, he is not one of those Bruckner conductors who make a smashing thing of a scherzo and leave the slow movement to play itself. The scherzo of this C minor receives a full measure of the momentum due to it, but so also does the adagio. This is the center of gravity (emotionally as well as physically) of the symphony and Schuricht's sound for it is a model of equilibrium. For those who prefer their Bruckner nonportentous and with the rugged simplicity of emotion that was inherent in the man himself, Schuricht's way will appeal.

Rossini's Lively "Sins"

ROSSINI: "Toast pour le Nouvel An," "I Gondolieri," "La Passeggiata," "Les Amants de Seville," "La Notte del Santo Natale," "Choeur Funèbre pour Meyerbeer," "La Chanson du Bébé," "L'Amour à Pekin," and "Musique Anodine." Soloists and Chorus of the Società Cameristica di Lugano directed by Edwin Loehrer. Nonesuch mono H-71089, \$2.50; stereo H-71089, \$2.50.

Many music lovers are aware that the entertaining score for the Massine ballet called *La Boutique fantasque* was orchestrated by Respighi from sundry pieces composed by Rossini in his years of "retirement." Fewer, probably, are aware of another Respighi suite called *Rossiniana* or of Benjamin Britten's

Ma inées Musicales and *Soirées Musicales*, all derived from the same source. And the number of those who know that there are many more (which Rossini called *Péchés de vieillesse*, or "Sins of My Old Age") can hardly be legion.

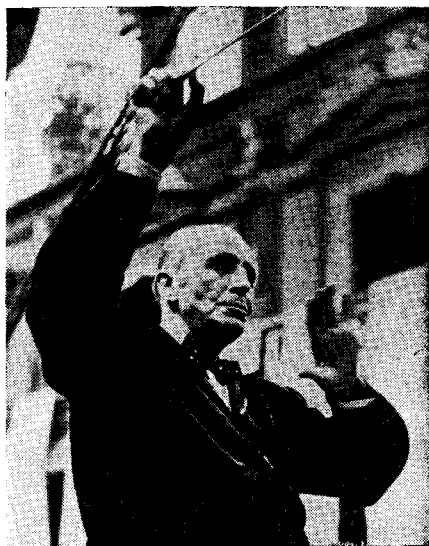
Something about the character of them is contained in this delightful disc, which could be every record fancier's preferred holiday greeting card to a favored friend. As the titles suggest, the character is as varied as the number of items the disc contains. For the clear fact is that the phrase "retired composer" (which is sometimes applied to Rossini because he gave up writing operas in his late Thirties) is as much an anomaly as "ex-politician." The infection that produces the results in either case is, unquestionably, a lifelong affliction. The music in Rossini continued to ooze, even when it took the form only of such a whimsy as "La Chanson du Bébé."

Musically, these fancies belong to the category of house-music best known in Mozart's canons, Schubert's dances, and the *Liebesliederwalzer* of Brahms. They are intimate, informal, technically non-complicated, but artistically of the first quality, on the premise, no doubt, that those who would frequent a "house" of Mozart, Schubert, or Brahms or the *salon* of Rossini, would have musical tastes on the level of his own. Fortunately, too, the members of Lugano's Società Cameristica, directed by Loehrer, have the sympathetic comprehension that the material merits, as does the pianist Luciano Sgrizzi. The other performers, for purposes of future reference, are Lucienne Devallier, contralto, Eric Marion, tenor, and Jean-Christophe Benoit, baritone. Everything about the issue is gratifying, including the note that it was awarded a Grand Prix du Disque.

Brandenburgs—Regular, Deluxe

BACH: *Brandenburg Concertos*. Pablo Casals conducting the Marlboro ensemble with Rudolf Serkin, piano, Alexander Schneider, violin, and Peter Serkin, continuo. Columbia mono M21.331, \$9.58; stereo M2S 731, \$11.58. Southwest German Chamber Orchestra, Friedrich Tilegant, conductor. RCA Victor mono LM 7038, \$9.58; stereo LSC 7038, \$11.58.

Casals's sense of these works is well known from his prior recording with the Prades ensemble, of which Alexander Schneider was his faithful deputy then as now. If anything, his treatment now is even more personal, which means as personal as one can get with this music. To my taste, some of it is distinctly overdrawn, especially the speed for the second concerto, which is difficult enough for the high trumpet at best,



Schuricht—"a model of equilibrium."



—Dora Harvey.

Berg—"strongest, most concentrated contact." (The photo was taken on the day of *Wozzeck's* dress rehearsal in Vienna, March 28, 1930.)

and is all but impossible for Robert Nagel, its performer here, at Casals's conception of allegro.

On the other hand, there is little question that he generates a rapport of a rare sort in the fourth and sixth concerti, which are of a more intimate character in any case. There are those who will undoubtedly flinch at the use of a piano in the *concertino* of No. 4, but the kind of thought Rudolf Serkin conveys through it is so just, the relationship to the violin of Schneider and the flutes played by Ornulf Gulbrandsen and Nancy Dalley so keenly adjusted, that the means of expression becomes secondary. On the whole, I would prefer to recommend Casals's Brandenburgs in particular instances—Nos. 4 and 6 surely, No. 3 perhaps—rather than as a group, for they do not stand up equally well.

It might be the expectation that the versions by Tilegant and his associates would be cited as an example of how Bach can be performed in a more objective, less personal way. That, however, is hardly the case: they go to the opposite extreme of the unengaging, anonymous treatment in which one work is as much like the other as one note like the next. The sole exception comes in the closing measures of the allegros, which are uniformly retarded in the train-coming-into-the-station manner. Of the six, No. 3 is about the best, because the ensemble sounds small, all the performers are excellent, and something animated emerges from the inter-

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Inside "Wozzeck"

LAST MONTH Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, this month Berg's *Wozzeck*—these are the far from subtle exclamation points that announce a new chapter in the lore of recording—one that bears its own symbolic identification: DGC. In the old chapter, accumulating over a period of years since its postwar reconstruction, the Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft gave warning that a new giant (or, rather, an old one revived) was rising on the recording scene, with full-length ventures into Mozart and Beethoven, Weber and Strauss.

Now, with two ventures that have long cried out for proper representation in contemporary recording techniques, DGC has demonstrated not only its ability but also its willingness to engage in the most formidable tasks on an uncompromising artistic level. Doubtless the American market is the primary target, with side considerations for its own country and neighbors. We can only hope that, together, they will come reasonably close to liquidating the sizable expenses involved and encourage the addition of the many other things whose doing is desirable.

In bringing together Karl Boehm as conductor, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as *Wozzeck*, and Evelyn Lear as Marie, DGC has merged a trio of highly qualified exponents of the work for which Berg is best known (DGC stereo 138 992-2, \$11.96). Each has a substantial credit of phonographic accomplishment, but it is almost a certainty that their identification with this project will out-rank most of the others.

In the case of Boehm, the qualification can be eliminated. His comprehension and command of the intricate tonal web in which Berg embedded his feeling for the miserable "hero" of Büchner's play has become familiar fact to Metropolitan Opera goers. But, it is clear from his unerring and concentrated statement of the score here, his Metropolitan *Wozzeck* embodied some specific as well as general compromises with ultimate excellence. One was the use of an English text which, however advisable in that context, dilutes the strong, bitter flavor of Büchner's German (as adapted by Berg). The other was the dissipation of sound that must happen in every theater.

In this recording neither compromise need be indulged. The result is the strongest, most concentrated contact with Berg that anybody has yet had.

The extracts previously available on RCA Victor (Curtin and the Boston Symphony under Leinsdorf) and Mercury (Pilarczyk and the London Symphony under Dorati) have shown that there is a wide range of values in Berg's scoring that cannot be brought out of an orchestra in the pit of an opera house. Here the microphone has taken each listener as close to the source of it all as anyone would want to get with the result that one feels himself "inside *Wozzeck*" for the first time. Moreover, the absence of scenery enables Boehm to pace the interludes just as he wills for *musical effect alone*.

When all the values can be assessed and all the relationships of voices and instruments, tonal and non-tonal elements balanced, it is more than ever clear that *Wozzeck* is not a strange new hybrid, but one further, legitimate descendant in the long line of musical development that produced Wagner as well as Brahms. In the great trio of Viennese musicians who at one time seemed to have taken off in a new direction altogether, Berg is unquestionably the poet, as Schoenberg was the pedagogue and Webern the scientist. *Wozzeck* is what it is because the poet was prepared to discard the pedagogical and the scientific when he was so moved by the plight of the people with whom he identified himself. Probably this is what "disturbs" Stravinsky about *Wozzeck* (as he mentions in *Dialogues and a Diary*): that it strikes out for expressivity regardless of all else.

In addition to Boehm's total grasp and the projection of the inner elements of the score, the sum of expressivity is substantially enhanced by the clarity as well as the flavor of Fischer-Dieskau's execution, taking in both words and music. How he would look on stage, I cannot say; but he carries vocal meaning as *Wozzeck* one step beyond the sizable effort of the late Hermann Uhde, or Mack Harrell in the well-remembered derivative of a New York Philharmonic broadcast under Mitropoulos (with Eileen Farrell) that was issued a decade or so ago by Columbia. Lear is not quite so convincing, but certainly good as Marie; and the subordinate performers include Gerhard Stolze as an excellent Hauptmann, Fritz Wunderlich as Andres, and Karl Christian Kohn as the Doktor. But the honors belong primarily to Boehm, Fischer-Dieskau, and the technicians.

—IRVING KOLODIN.