

# RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

## WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

## REPORT

Bernstein: *Chichester Psalms*; *Facsimile*. The composer conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, with the Camarata Singers. Columbia ML 6192, \$4.79; stereo MS 6792, \$5.79.

The quality of thought and craftsmanship admired in last summer's first performance of the *Psalms* in the Philharmonic's French-American Festival is preserved intact in this recording of a few days later. The opportunity for a second audition gives no cause to take anything from the praise previously rendered, but does illuminate some sources from which the *Psalms* stem. Prominent among these is Poulenc, whose initiative in the use of everyday secular motives in his "Gloria" is echoed here. The echo, it should be stressed, is only in the method not in the means, which are wholly Bernstein's. The *Facsimile* that follows makes a refreshing addenda in this well-recorded (Manhattan Center) performance.

Brahms: Quintet in B minor. Reger: Quintet in A (scherzo only). Gervase de Peyer, clarinet, with Emanuel Hurwitz and Ivor McMahon, violins, Cecil Aronowitz, viola, and Terence Weil, cello. Angel 36280, \$4.79; stereo 36280, \$5.79.

If this is not the best recorded version of the Brahms quintet, then its superior is unknown to me. It has not quite the attack and fire of the Kell, but it has its own distinctions of mood and sound. The first is more introspective, the second more mellow than the qualities for which Kell was long celebrated. For sound itself, de Peyer's strikes me as a reversion to the older model of Charles Draper, with its woody richness, rather than an emulation of Kell's more brilliant, slightly metallic timbre. It does, in any case, make for a highly satisfactory blend with the members of the quartet, each excellent on his own. The Reger excerpt has the sound of Brahms on an off-day, which is to say that it has many distinctions of workmanship but few of thought. It suggests Brahms, too, in combining two tempi (the trio is almost a slow movement) within the same scherzo unit.

Diamond: Quartet No. 4. Barber: Quartet, Op. 11. Beaux-Arts String Quartet. Epic LC 3907, \$4.79; stereo BC 1307, \$5.79.

Barber's brief quartet (fifteen minutes) is known to some for its slow movement, which has become independently celebrated as the "Adagio for Strings." The whole of Diamond's work deserves the attention of anyone with an ear for distinguished chamber music. It has a double virtue rarely encountered—a series of absorbing ideas not only suited to the medium in which they are employed, but pursued with logic to a finality of outcome. That it has been so well prepared for the purpose of this recording should enable those who missed its "live" premiere in New York (in 1957) to acquire all the familiarity required for appreciation. Indeed, in both the Diamond and Barber works, the group led by Charles Libove (his associates are Alan Martin, violin, Peter Mark, viola, and Bruce Rogers, cello) displays a unanimity of sound and a disciplined intensity that puts them among the world's foremost interpreters of such music. Beautiful reproduction.

Gershwin: Preludes; "Summertime," "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing," "My Man's Gone Now," "It Ain't Necessarily So," and "Bess You Is My Woman" (*Porgy and Bess*); Tempo di Blues. Debussy: *La Chevelure*; *Golliwogg's Cake Walk*; *Beau Soir*. Ravel: *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (Nos. 6 and 7). Poulenc: *Movements perpétuels*. Saint-Saëns: *The Swan*. Ibert: *Le petit âne blanc*. All transcribed by Heifetz. Jascha Heifetz, violin, with Brooks Smith, piano. RCA Victor LM 2856, \$4.79; stereo LSC 2856, \$5.79.

Neither Heifetz's tone nor his mode of musical thought are inherently helpful to the excerpts he has chosen for his transcriptions, the two together tend to prettify and make synthetic an order of expression which is, in its own terms, self-sufficient and genuine. As for the slides, inflections, and presumable "blues" colorations, they have much more to do with the salon than with Catfish Row. They have also a lot more to do with the material on Side 2, which is adroitly self-arranged and performed with much of the stylistic suitability absent from the performance of Gershwin. The one exception would have to be *The Swan*, in which Saint-Saëns's carefully controlled harmonic imagery has been revised to be more befitting of a peacock. Brooks Smith keeps his distance at the piano.

Haydn: Quartets in G (Op. 77, No. 1) and F (Op. 77, No. 2). The Amadeus Quartet. DGG 18980, \$5.98; stereo 13980, \$5.98.

As well as the Amadeus quartet plays the music of other composers, there is little doubt that their talents are most attuned to the idiom and expression of Haydn. Conversely, what other groups may do to surpass in the works of Beethoven or Brahms, they rarely strike the same accent of rightness and balance in their Haydn. Part of this has to do with temperament, but almost as much with pure sound itself. From leader Norbert Brainin on, the players command a blend of warmth and finesse that serves the conversational style of late Haydn (such as these quartets) admirably. The Andante of the F major, which is characteristic of Haydn's best variations manner, comes off particularly well.

Mascagni: "Siciliana," "Brindisi," and "Mamma, quel vino" (*Cavalleria Rusticana*). Bizet: "Je crois entendre encore" (*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*). Cilea: "E la solita storia" (*L'Arlesiana*). Verdi: "Di' tu se fedele" (*Ballo in Maschera*); "Quando le sere al placido" (*Luisa Miller*). Puccini: "Recondita armonia" and "E lucevan le stelle" (*Tosca*). Leoncavallo: "O Colombina" (*Pagliacci*). Tchaikovsky: "Air de Lensky" (*Eugene Onegin*). Halévy: *Passover Scene* and "Rachel! quand du Seigneur" (*La Juive*). Jan Peerce, tenor, with Laurence Dutoit, soprano, and Franz Allers conducting. Vanguard VRS 1129, \$4.79; stereo VSD 71129, \$5.79.

For art, for emotion, for sincerity, Peerce has done nothing in his long career to surpass the quality of his performances in this collection. To be sure, the sound of the voice is not as compelling as it once was, but Peerce remains unique among contemporary tenors for the taste, clarity, and discipline of his phrasing, his awareness of where expression ends and excess sets in. He can even venture a sob in Federico's Lament (*L'Arlesiana*) and make it convincing. As for his *Passover Scene*, it is another reason (the first being Richard Tucker) why *La Juive* should be restored to the Metropolitan's repertory. Miss Dutoit performs capably in the Halévy and Mascagni material in which she is heard, and Franz Allers shows himself to be as much at home in Bizet as he is in Puccini.

Novaček: *Perpetuum Mobile*. Schubert-Wilhelmj: *Ave Maria*. Kreisler: *Schön Rosmarin*. Mendelssohn-Kreisler: *May Breezes*. Schumann-Moses: *Träumerei*. Bach-Wilhelmj: *Air*. Kreisler: *Liebeslied*, *Caprice Viennois*, and *Tambourin Chinois*. Drdla: *Souvenir*. Aaron Rosand, violin, with Michel Walevski, piano. Vox 12850, \$4.98; stereo 512850, \$4.98.

Rosand's collection embodies a good idea in presenting pieces such as *Souvenir* and Novaček's *Perpetuum Mobile*, which are played by most violinists, but few of his quality. However, the digression to the Kreisler transcriptions, Schubert's *Ave Maria*, etc., converts it into just another miscellany, of which he plays some pieces—especially *May Breezes* and *Liebeslied*—uncommonly well, and others just commonly well. Perhaps at some future time Rosand will begin with Novaček, proceed to Nardini, then on to such others as Francois Schubert's *The Bee*, etc., in demonstration of how they should sound. Walevski accompanies capably.

—I.K.

## Man and Music

*Continued from page 80*

mann, gave him a present of money, and commissioned him to write a composition for the church every fortnight. This was too much. Telemann wrote to his mother that he could no longer hold out; he could do no more; he must write music. His mother sent him her blessing, and at last Telemann had the right to be a musician.

*[After tracing Telemann's life through his many activities and appointments, Rolland sums up by saying:]*

In his old age this excellent man divided his heart between two passions: music and flowers. Letters of his are extant dating from 1742 in which he asks for flowers; he is, he says, "insatiable where hyacinths and tulips are concerned, greedy for ranunculi, and especially for anemones." He suffered in his old age from weakness of the legs and failing sight. But his musical activity and his good humor were never impaired.

His ablest musical compositions date from the last years of his life when he was more than eighty years of age. In 1767, the year of his death, he published yet another theoretical work and wrote a Passion. He died in Hamburg on June 25, 1767, overburdened with years and with glory. He was more than eighty-six years of age.

From first to last his vitality remained fresh and enthusiastic. What is so unusual in Telemann is that at no moment of his life did he begin to grow old and conservative; he was always advancing with youth. We have seen that at the very beginning of his career he was attracted by the new art—the art of melody—and did not conceal his antipathy for "fossils." "Yes," writes Telemann, "they tell me that one must not go too far. And I reply that one must go to the very depths if one would deserve the name of a true master. This is what I wished to justify in my system of Intervals, and for this I expect not reproaches, but rather a *gratis*, at least in the future."

In the theater, to begin with, even those who were most unjust to him recognized his gifts as a humorist. He seems to have been the principal initiator of German comic opera. No doubt we find comic touches here and there in Keiser; it was a theatrical custom in Hamburg that a clown, a comic servant, should figure in all the productions, even in the musical tragedies; and to this character were given comic lieder with a simple accompaniment (often in unison) or none. Handel himself played this tradition in his *Almira*, performed in Hamburg. But the comic style was not really sanctioned in German music until Telemann's works were written; the only

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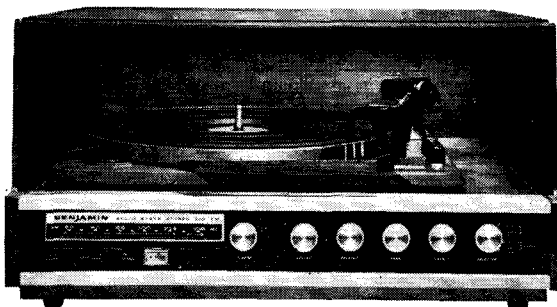
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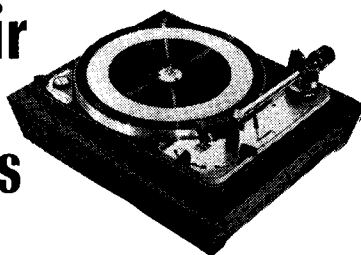
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opera bouffe of Keiser's which has come down to us, *Jodelet* (1726), is subsequent to Telemann's works and is certainly inspired by them. Telemann had the comic spirit. He began by writing, in accordance with the taste of the time, little comic lieder for the clown in opera. But this was not enough for him. He had a waggish tendency, as Herr Ottzenn has noted, to show the comic side of a figure or a situation in which the librettist had seen nothing that was not serious. And he was extremely skilful in delineating comic characters.

When we read such a composition [as the cantata *Ino*] we are abashed at having so long been ignorant of Telemann, and at the same time we are annoyed with him for not employing his talent as he might have done—as he should have done. It makes us indignant to find platitudes and trivial nonsense side by side with passages of perfect beauty. If Telemann had been more careful of his genius, if he had not written so much, accepted so many tasks, his name would perhaps have left a deeper mark on history than that of Gluck; in any case he would have shared the latter's fame. But here we perceive the moral justice of certain of the decrees of history; it is not enough to be a talented artist; it is not enough even to add application to talent (for who worked harder than Telemann?); there must be character. Gluck, with much less music than half a score of other German composers of the eighteenth century — than Hasse, Graun, or Telemann, for example—achieved where the others amassed material (and he did not utilize even a tenth part of it). The fact is that he imposed a sovereign discipline upon his art and his genius. He was a man. The others were merely musicians. And this, even in music, is not enough.

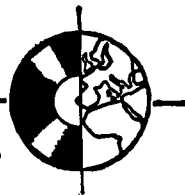
## Kapell with Heifetz

*Continued from page 87*

slightest awed by the company in which he found himself, or deterred from pursuing his objective. In consequence, it is Heifetz's performance that is somewhat different from what might be considered his norm—bigger in sound, bolder in outline, and broader in tonal effects. Unlike some other sonata performances in which Heifetz has participated, the pianist is here a balanced part of the total totality.

The content of Side 2 is, in every way, inferior to what it accompanies—whether as music, as sound, or as a combination of both. The implication in this combination is that those who buy this record for Side 1 are interested in Heifetz, rather than Kapell, least of all Brahms. But Heifetz, and his virtuosity, are all they have in common.

# THE OTHER SIDE



## Shostakovich Premiere, Boehm's "Wozzeck"

LONDONERS who filled the Albert Hall on October 9 to hear the visiting Moscow Philharmonic under Kyril Kondrashin were also privileged to witness the long-delayed confrontation of Russia's two greatest string virtuosos, David Oistrakh and Mstislav Rostropovich, who gave a truly magnificent performance of the Brahms Double Concerto. We were told that they had never before played together, in or out of the USSR, and one can only hope that this instrumental summit-meeting will not have passed unnoticed by one of our record companies, so that it may be repeated in studio surroundings!

Decca's October releases feature no fewer than four separate discs by Ansermet and the Suisse Romande devoted, respectively, to the music of Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Chabrier, and Debussy. It is true that this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Ansermet's joining the staff of the Diaghilev Ballet, but Decca gives no special reason for this little "Festival of Ansermet." Its justification, in any case, lies in the musical distinction that the veteran Swiss conductor confers upon so varied a bill of fare. That he would be thoroughly at home in Chabrier (*España/Marche Joyeuse/Suite Pastorale/Danse Slave/Fête Polonoise*) and Debussy (*La Mer/Rhapsody for Clarinet/Khamma*) one knew from past experience, but the Mendelssohn Collection (*Italian Symphony/Hebrides/Ruy Blas/Melusina*) proves a source of unexpected delights, while the Berlioz program (*Carnaval Romain/Beatrice & Benedict/Corsair/Benvenuto Cellini/3 pieces from Damnation de Faust*) reveals not merely the accustomed sensitivity in matters of orchestral texture but also plenty of rhythmic vitality and a fine feeling for Berlioz's characteristic line.

After this extended visit to Geneva, it is the turn of Vienna to provide Decca with the remainder of this month's list. It includes a further installment, Vol. 4, of the company's projected ten-disc series devoted to the complete dances and marches of Mozart; as before, the Vienna Mozart Ensemble is directed by Willi Boskovsky, and the present, attractive volume is built around the nineteen Minuets, K.103, which have been split up into four separate sequences, interspersed with some later and more sophisticated Contredanses and the D-major March, K.445 (thought to belong to the splendid *Divertimento*, K.334). Three

more Viennese discs all feature the Weller Quartet. After their admired Beethoven and Brahms discs earlier this year, these players now turn to the fountain-head of the quartet literature and offer us Haydn's six "Russian" quartets, Op.33, spread over two discs—a wonderful set of works which they perform with outstanding skill and verve despite an occasional, slight want of flexibility. A twentieth-century coupling by the same group is unusual in that it features, along with Alban Berg's Op.3, the latest string quartet by Shostakovich (his Tenth) which has yet to be performed in public outside Russia. The composer offered this unusual form of "Western premiere" to the Weller after hearing their performance of his Eighth Quartet.

EMI's new stereo recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* has been eagerly awaited for many months, for this oratorio—which, Elgar claimed, "is the best of me"—has occupied a very special place in the affections of musical Britain since it was first performed under Hans Richter at the Birmingham Festival of 1900. Even if its pronounced Anglo-Catholic flavor may not be to everyone's taste, the beauty and sincerity of Elgar's response to the poem cannot be gainsaid; it receives here a fine performance under Sir John Barbirolli.

Among DGG and Archive recordings lately arrived from Germany, we welcome especially two twentieth-century operas new to stereo: Berg's *Wozzeck* and Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*. There has never before been a really satisfactory version on disc of Berg's masterpiece, although the opera is nowadays performed all over the world; fortunately DGG's two-disc album, conducted by Karl Böhm and featuring a strong cast led by Evelyn Lear and Fischer-Dieskau, makes handsome amends for past neglect. After the oppressive atmosphere of *Wozzeck*, Ravel's deliciously naughty one-act brings welcome relief, and there is much to admire in the performance directed by Lorin Maazel. Perhaps the casting is not ideal—the male voices seem insufficiently differentiated in character, and Jeanne Berbié's Concepcion hardly suggests a woman smouldering beneath her outward composure—while the recording misses a number of points in terms of "production" (I should like to see John Culshaw tackle it with Ansermet), but this is still a thoroughly enjoyable issue for the score is a gem, while singing and playing is highly accomplished.

—THOMAS HEINITZ.

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