

Maazel, Classicist

BACH: *Mass in B minor*. Teresa Stich-Randall, soprano; Anna Reynolds, contralto; Ernst Haefliger, tenor; John Shirley-Quirk, bass; Lorin Maazel conducting the RIAS Chorus and RSO Berlin, Philips stereo, SPS 3-981, \$14.87; mono, SPM 3-581, \$11.87. (3 discs).

BACH: *The Six Brandenburg Concertos*. Lorin Maazel conducting RSO Berlin. Philips stereo, SPS 2-982, \$10.08; mono, SPM 2-582, \$8.08 (2 discs).

BACH: *Four Suites for Orchestra*. Lorin Maazel conducting RSO Berlin. Philips stereo, SPS 2-983, \$10.08; mono, SPM 2-583, \$8.08 (2 discs).

IN THE old days, conductors used to get their start and basic training as assistants in the opera house; today they come up through radio and recordings. In Europe, that is. In America, conductors serve their apprenticeship with minor-league orchestras, which gives them the privilege of conducting bush-league orchestras for the rest of their lives; meanwhile the majors import their conductors from elsewhere.

Faced with this fact and with the bleak future of an ex-prodigy, Lorin Maazel hitchhiked to Europe on a Fulbright, let it be known that he was available anywhere, anytime, and, through the magic of European radio (and, later, recordings), made it to the big time. Maazel's early successes were nearly all radio dates in Italy and France, but, still in his mid-thirties, he has increasingly taken a dominant position in Central European musical life. A few years ago he was invited to Bayreuth, the first American and the youngest conductor of any nationality ever to appear there; it was his first assignment in an opera house, an incredible reversal of the traditions of German operatic theater!

Since then he has become a great recording star, rivaling von Karajan in popularity and sales. And he has all but taken over the second capital of musical life in the German-speaking world. The orchestra here, the former RIAS symphony, is the Radio Orchestra of Berlin, a close second to the Berlin Philharmonic; Maazel succeeded Ferenc Fricsay as its permanent director; he is also director of the West Berlin Opera.

Recording and radio conducting (which often involves recording on tape) call forth a very different kind of music making than, say, the old opera-house traditions; perhaps the point has

not been sufficiently emphasized in explaining the history of recent performing style. In the opera house, flexibility, expansiveness, verbal phrasing and breath articulation, projection, and even embellishment and rhythmic freedom are necessary virtues, and these ideas naturally carried over into symphonic conducting. With radio and recording, precision, accuracy, vitality, crisp articulation, and briskness are essential features of a performance that can be heard over and over again and cannot afford to display errors, mannerisms, or any kind of laboring or hammering home. Rhythmic vitality, evenness, no foot-dragging, and a certain amount of stylish resonant pomp generally work well. This is Maazel's basic style—to the dismay of older opera buffs, he even carries it right into the opera house.

Maazel followed a rather familiar path in his choice of repertoire. Gifted with a remarkable memory (which, however, on occasion may fail him), he has always specialized in everything; but, basically, he began with the moderns, worked his way through the Romantics, and is now in the process of becoming a classicist. In fact, his Fulbright topic was to study performance practice in Baroque music, and these recordings might be regarded as his thesis if not for the fact that, merely on the grounds of performance practice, they fail pretty badly. The harpsichord is there and modestly present in most cases, and some of the other instruments are also the apposite old ones; but the performances are extremely sparing and, worse, extremely inconsistent in matters of ornament (there are places where absolutely parallel passages get different length apoggiaturas, a sin punishable by condemnation to copy C.P.E. Bach's treatise in Gothic script). Then, too, he lays out the dynamics in terraces, but the construction of the levels is often mighty peculiar and there are some strange, thinly drawn-out final ritards. Finally, as a general comment, the orchestral sound is large and weighty, sometimes too much so; with the help of an over-reverberant acoustic (notably in the B-minor Mass), lines he has obviously worked so hard to etch out are obscured and reduced to mere disturbance beneath an over-rich, vibrant surface.

Except for the use of a large, resonant sound, these are not really the faults of the old Romantic, operatic school of conductors. Maazel can be rhetorical—

it is perhaps his biggest fault—but it is modern rhetoric all right and, in its general grandiosity and pomposity, not always so far from certain aspects of Baroque expression. Maazel fails ultimately, not only because his engineers do him in, but because his rhetoric is purely instinctual, his grandiosity purely personal. There is no "overt" distortion here; merely a lack of study and thought that grows out of the assumption that because it is done with Maazelian personal conviction it is well done.

Some of it is, in fairness, quite well done. When there are no "Gloria" choruses, no shouts, trumpets, and drums, but only two or three long-spun, crisp, rhythmic lines, the results can be superb. The Brandenburg set is actually full of excellent things and nearly always in inverse proportion to the size and lushness of the ensemble. With a capable international group of soloists and some good old-instrument sounds, Maazel works out long, brilliant articulations and a breathless kind of phrase pulse that gives shape and direction; the sound here is relatively clear and proportionately grateful.

THE Suites, on the other hand, are treated as orchestral music and are often submerged in the resultant sonorous pomp. The opening adagios are uniformly unsuccessful, lacking as they do repeats, double dots, general rhythmic and harmonic incisiveness and clarity; the allegros generally work out better. The dances, too, are treated in terms of a big orchestral sound which, in many cases, dampens their dance-rhythm vitality.

The B-minor Mass is, tragically, the least successful of all and this in spite of a really excellent group of soloists and plenty of brilliant ideas. First of all, the chorus is not first-rate at all and that is handicap enough. (Who is to blame? Maazel? Philips? Berlin radio? No matter; it still puts this performance out of the running.) As if to cover this up, the engineers have manufactured a cathedral reverberation which is so extended that the disc often cuts off at the end of a band before the sound has actually completely died away.

These factors, plus the use of a large ensemble of strings and some eccentric interpretive ideas, effectively blur the great outlines of this work. Yet there are remarkable things therein. Try the "Et in unum Dominum" without listening to anything else and you will probably be sold immediately. Again when the scale is small and the rhythmic impulse strong, Maazel—here he has some exquisite vocal help—is able to sketch out a kind of twisting, vibrant, articulated Baroque line which is remarkable enough to make one doubly regret the rest.

—ERIC SALZMAN.

RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Chopin: Preludes (opus 28). Ivan Moravec, piano. Connoisseur Society CM 1366, \$4.79; stereo, CS 1366, \$5.79.

Moravec performs some of the quieter preludes with composure, good piano sound, and a warming insight into the character of the music. However, those of a more animated or dramatic character tend to elude his complete control and blur tonally or be marred by wrong notes. This sounds to be less a matter of technical resource than of a quest for "temperament" of a sort that is more external than internal. Unlike several other issues in which additional material is included on the second side (in one instance, a complete sonata), Connoisseur limits the content of the two sides to the preludes alone. The quality of the performance hardly warrants this "premium" treatment.

Janáček: Concertino; Sonata in E-flat minor. Josef Palenický, piano, with Václav Kólouch and Jiří Baxa, violins; Jaroslav Motlík, viola; Karel Dlouhý, clarinet; Vladimír Kubát, horn; and Karel Vacek, bassoon. Jarmil Burghauser conducting. Bartók: Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion. Vera Lejskova and Vlastimil Lejssek, pianos, with Bohuslav Krška and Zdeněk Mácal, percussion. Crossroads 22 16 0073, \$2.49; stereo, 22 16 0074, \$2.49.

There are somewhat more thorns than roses in this bouquet, but no lack of aroma nevertheless. The Concertino is a "little" concerto both in scope and length, but it develops some aspects of the Janáček aesthetic that are not commonly encountered in his more familiar vocal writing. Palenický's pianism is both forthright and dependable, his associates of the instrumental ensemble well qualified to carry out the by no means conventional tasks assigned to them by the composer. The performers of the Bartók can hold their own, dynamically, with any who have previously recorded it; and if the recording itself does not have as much definition as some others, it is clear and well balanced.

Mozart: Divertimento No. 17 in D. Louis Lane conducting members of the Cleveland Orchestra, with Rafael Druian. Columbia ML 6324, \$4.79; stereo, MS 6924, \$5.79.

As well as serving capably as George Szell's associate conductor in Cleveland, Lane has commended himself with the results he has achieved in a number of prior recording ventures (mostly of the "Pops" variety). The present one is of another sort, and the results are variable. This is not for lack of technical resource or musicianship, for in both respects Lane sustains the quality level expected of him. It is, altogether, more a matter of what he fails to do—define, mark, outline, underscore—in fulfillment of Mozart's purpose, than what he overdoes, or does *against* that purpose. This becomes even more critical in this category of work, which could well be entrusted to the able performers themselves without intercession of a leader. In other words, the negative effect of Lane's participation also thwarts what the players might be inclined to do on their own. Druian treats the elaborate (but uncomplicated) first violin parts of movements two and six as soli, somewhat in the manner of the version of the Forties in which Joseph Szigeti participated. Of recent versions, the Karajan remains preferable for character and definition.

Rossini: "Viva l'amore, viva il piacer," (*Il Turco in Italia*). Mozart: "Zum Leiden bin ich auserkoren," and "Der Hölle Rache" (*Die Zauberflöte*). Verdi: "Caro nome" (*Rigoletto*). Delibes: "Où va la jeune Hindoue" (*Lakmé*). Donizetti: "Regnava nel silenzio... Quando rapito" and "Il dolce suono... Spargi d'amaro pianto" (*Lucia*). Jeanette Scovotti, soprano, with the Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma conducted by Nicolas Flagello. Scope V-0002, \$4.79; stereo, V-0002S, \$5.79.

All the performances are creditable to Scovotti's standing as a singer of taste and a musician of discrimination, though she imperils respect for her judgment as well as pleasure in the best sound of which she is capable by undertaking matter that is too heavy for her voice (especially the aria of the Queen of the Night). In the more suitable excerpts from the roles of Gilda, Lakmé, and Lucia, Miss Scovotti sets and sustains a very high standard of intonation, accuracy, and musicianship. Nor does she stint on spirited delivery of a flourish up to F in the "Bell Song" or the traditional excesses of Lucia (also zeroing on F). Her particular limitation is a smallish output of quality sound: When pushed, it becomes wiry and hard. However, even when the resonance is sacrificed, the basic discipline is a remarkable tribute to long conscientious work. The Rossini air (sung by Fiorilla) is described as its "first known recording." Scovotti traces its intricacies with assurance and appropriately high spirit. The Rome-based recording is highly successful.

Schubert: "An die Entfernte"; "Auf dem Wasser zu singen"; "Der Schiffer"; "Der Wanderer"; "Das Zügenglöcklein"; "Der Jüngling und der Tod"; "Das Heimweh"; "Das Lied im Grünen"; "Der Tod und das Mädchen"; "Der Winterabend"; "Der zürnende Barde"; "Der Strom"; and "Litanei auf das Fest Aller Seelen." Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone, with Gerald Moore, piano. Angel 36342, \$4.79, stereo, S-36342, \$5.79.

How many of Schubert's nearly 600 songs have now been recorded would be an interesting research project—something over half would be my guess. Perhaps "Das Zügenglöcklein," "Der Winterabend," and "An die Entfernte" have been recorded in performances of this quality previously, but if so, I have not encountered them. They are also among the best specimens of Fischer-Dieskau's art on this record, not blemished by the tendency toward over-emphasis that mars the better known "Das Lied im Grünen" and "Auf dem Wasser zu singen." Indeed the beautiful "Winterabend"—which William Mann happily describes in his annotation as "almost a *Moment Musical* with voice obbligato"—is a summation, in microcosm, of the qualities of Fischer-Dieskau and Moore. The dark quality summoned by the baritone for the following (at least, according to this placement) "Der zürnende Barde" is a major tribute to the domination he has achieved over this aspect of the singer's problem. On the other hand, his very well-sung "Tod und das Mädchen" leaves some doubt with me that it is a "Man's" song. An absorbing disc, by any standard, and splendidly reproduced.

Schubert: "An die Musik"; "Im Abendrot"; "Ständchen"; "Abschied"; "Im Frühling"; "Der Lindenbaum"; "Sei mir gegrüßt"; "Wanderer's Nachtlied"; "Geheimes." Schumann: "Mondnacht"; "Wer machte dich so krank?"; "Alte Laute"; "Erstes Grün"; "Die beiden Grenadiere." Strauss: "Ach, weh mir unglückhafter Mann" and "Ich trage meine Minne." Hans Hotter, bass, with Gerald Moore, piano. Seraphim 60025, \$2.49; stereo, S 60025, \$2.49.

Those to whom Hotter is familiar only from some recent Wagner ventures may be surprised to discover that he ever commanded the richness of sound or the ability to control it that he does here. As noted when the record first appeared in 1960, he uses only part of the voice that was once so eloquently his, and here and there the signs of strain are audible. However, it may be doubted that any singer of his low voice category ever accomplished so fine and flowing a performance of "An die Musik," and his "Lindenbaum" and "Ständchen" are comparably profound. In the Schumann and Strauss songs, as well as in the Schubert, Moore's backgrounding is as much a part of the total result as the composer intended. An indispensable record for the lieder collection of any who does not already own it.

Tchaikovsky: Sextet (opus 70). The Guarneri Quartet, with Boris Kroyt, viola; and Mischa Schneider, cello. RCA Victor LM 2916, \$4.79; stereo, LSC 2916, \$5.79.

This memento of the composer's three months' stay in Florence (in 1890) while he was composing *Pique Dame* is more Tchaikovskyan than Florentine, but it honors its nickname (*Souvenir de Florence*) nevertheless. It begins somewhat awkwardly, as if the composer were not quite sure what he was going to do with the six strings, but once underway, it shows that he had quite clearly decided to write a smaller scaled but no less compelling "Serenade for Strings" akin to his opus 48 of ten years before. The scope is smaller, tonally, but much of the contrapuntal intertwining is of the same order, likewise the rise and fall of the melodic line in the Adagio. Concluding the work is a finale that develops much the same momentum as the similar movement of the Violin Concerto. Steinhart, who was on the verge of a brilliant solo career when he affiliated himself with John Dailey (violin), Michael Tree (viola), and David Soyer (cello) to form this excellent ensemble, has more technical virtuosity than is common with even the best quartet leaders. Thus he can engage such problems head-on rather than trying to turn them away. It all comes off so well, indeed, that one wonders why there has not yet been a Balanchine ballet on the work and its Florentine associations, so pertinent now.

—I.K.