

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 Paleněk, 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. Paleněk'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 Züggelöcklein"; "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 Züggelöcklein," "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 Tchaikovsky 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. Steinhardt, 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.

Electric Organ Blues

SINCE I AM about to discuss some recent releases by electric organists, I had better confess a predisposition against the instrument. In 1943 I had an enforced stay in South Bend, Indiana, courtesy of the U.S. Navy. In that part of the country any bar with enough pretension to call itself a cocktail lounge felt required to hire a female electric organist. These ladies all seemed to have blue hair, relentlessly fixed smiles, and a repertory which consisted of "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life," "Nola," and "Tales from the Vienna Woods," all played with wrong chord changes.

Then there's the sound of the instrument. One writer has referred to it, somewhat euphemistically, I expect, as like bubbles blown through warm motor oil on a sticky summer day. To me, an electric organ sometimes sounds like a kind of controlled "feedback"—the sort of shrieked *beep* one gets when he places a live microphone in front of a loudspeaker, or, in electronically more innocent days, the sound that came out of the family Philco when some home repairman got to work on it without remembering to pull out the plug.

All of which is not a way of disqualifying myself so much as a way of implying (with a reviewer's natural immodesty, to be sure) that *any* good words I have to say about an electric organist might indicate his work is worth hearing.

Until the 1950s, most jazz organists worked the instrument part-time and were pianists full-time, and most of them sounded like it. One exception, to be sure, was Fats Waller, who knew his pipe organ as well as its bastard electronic cousin. Another exception was Count Basie, who played the instrument with the same technical modesty he brought to the piano and, on occasion, the same glorious results—for example, "Nobody Knows," on Columbia CL 901. In the early Fifties, the instrument established itself with popular players such as Bill Doggett and Wild Bill Davis. But stylistically these men were robust, latter-day manifestations of the swing era.

Then, in 1955, came Jimmy Smith, and it seemed that in Jimmy Smith we had a modern jazz organist. Certainly, the organ was his instrument; he knew how to use its foot pedals and its complexity of stops; he had ample technique; he understood the modern idiom; and he could coax warm sound and strong individual emotion out of the burping electronic box. However, it soon ap-

peared that Smith's function was not so much to explore the idiom of modern jazz on the organ as to translate that idiom into the more accessibly popular tradition of convivial urban blues—that Smith belonged to the honorable tradition of the barroom bluesman, the "gin mill player," as former argot put it; the "soul cat," in more contemporary parlance.

Smith's first records were made for Blue Note. He has since signed with Verve, but the move seems to have both-ered Blue Note not at all, for the label apparently has an endless backlog of Jimmy Smith which it issues periodically.

Personally, I find Smith's music wonderful to hear—or perhaps to overhear—but not altogether rewarding to listen to. To put it another way, I'm always struck by his fine emotion, superb swing, and admirable touch, but after a few choruses of shouting and wailing, he often loses me. But I sometimes get back to him, for Smith usually saves his interesting melodic ideas for the climax of a performance. "Bucket," the title piece from the recent Blue Note Smith LP (4235), is the kind of energetic, gospel-derived Jimmy Smith blues that sounds marvelous coming out of a neighborhood juke box. On the same LP is a slower blues, "Sassy Mae," and a waltz blues, "3 for 4."

AS you can see, the down-home titles give the genre of the music, and so does the rest of the repertory, in traditional pieces like "Careless Love" (in a well sustained performance, by the way) or "John Brown's Body," or more sophisticated songs that lend themselves to blues-y treatments like "Just Squeeze Me" and "Come Rain or Come Shine."

A more recently recorded Smith album, *Hoochie Coochie Man*, on Verve 8667, comes with some of the paraphernalia of success—big-band arrangements (some good ones, too, by Oliver Nelson); a repertory partly borrowed from blues singers like Willie Dixon and John Lee Hooker; vocals by Smith himself; a folksy, wailing harmonica, etc. Much of the LP sounds as though Jimmy Smith were out to prove that he is earthy and funky—something which doesn't need proving, or in any case, something which could never be proven under protest.

Richard "Groove" Holmes is a West Coast organist of nearly as wide success as Jimmy Smith. His new release



Jimmy Smith—"a modern jazz organist."

on Warner Brothers's subsidiary label, Loma (5902), also features some big-band effects and re-creations of some long-established blues numbers like "I'm Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town," but Holmes is a far less interesting player than Jimmy Smith. Indeed, on "Night Train," he seems to be fudging a bit—either that or I don't know how the piece goes. In any case, Groove Holmes makes few pretenses to either musical sophistication or modernism.

Recently, an organist has come along who seems capable of doing the job for the instrument that Jimmy Smith left unfinished. His name is Larry Young, and he can be heard with a sextet on a new Blue Note release called *Unity* (4221). Young is a good accompanist and ensemble player (rare qualities in an organist), but it is his own exploratory but lucid solos that impress one. His extended reading of Thelonious Monk's "Monk's Dream" impresses one even more, and it suggests that an organ trio recital by Larry Young, with bass and drums on challenging pieces from the modern repertory, might impress one most of all, and might at last provide us with a classic recital of modern jazz organ.

—MARTIN WILLIAMS.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column One should read: 10, 8, 5, 2, 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

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