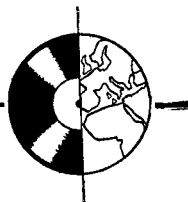


THE OTHER SIDE



Perlemuter, Pianist—"Homage to T.S."

LONDON.

OF ALL the concerts that have taken place during recent weeks, a comparatively sparsely attended Chopin recital at the Royal Festival Hall left the most abiding impression upon this listener. It was given by Vlado Perlemuter, an elderly French pianist of Polish origin (not a bad background for a Chopin interpreter), and consisted of the F-major Ballade, a group of Mazurkas, the B-minor Sonata, and the Op. 25 Etudes. With his short white hair and wholly undemonstrative keyboard manner, M. Perlemuter is far removed from the popular image of the romantic virtuoso, yet what I heard—after a slightly disappointing account of the opening Ballade—was Chopin playing of the most exalted kind, combining exquisite refinement with passionate grandeur. From a technical point of view these performances, though not wholly flawless, were remarkable enough from a man who must be nearing seventy, but what really mattered was the extraordinary range of beautiful piano tone, the subtle feeling for true rubato, and a sense of linear and harmonic structure that is given to only the greatest of interpreters.

Fortunately the Concert Hall Record Club has lately issued three Chopin LPs by Perlemuter—a mixed recital (which was recently awarded a Grand Prix du Disque in France), the Preludes, and the complete Waltzes—and these fully confirm the impressions gained at his concert. The Waltzes, in particular, sound altogether new-minted; gone are accumulated layers of surface brilliance and sentimentality to reveal a subtle and potent distillation of a dance form both gay and tender, ebullient and melancholy.

Two other Concert Hall discs that have recently come my way also deserve special mention, a pair of Mozart Piano Concertos in which the soloist is Friedrich Gulda, and a magnificently vital account of Handel's *Water Music* in which the Hague Philharmonic is conducted by Pierre Boulez. While Concert Hall's current refusal to issue stereo versions is to be deplored, the Handel—performed in its original scoring, arranged into three suites—is far too good to be ignored; the orchestra may not be among Europe's finest, but the playing under Boulez's perceptive direction is tinglingly alive and marvelously stylish. As for the Gulda disc, it represents a fascinating attempt to fill in the details

of the solo parts where, as is widely acknowledged nowadays, Mozart noted down a basic framework to which the performer, be it the composer himself or one of his pupils, would add extemporized embellishments. The concertos in question are K.467 in C and the last of the series, K.595 in B flat, and Gulda is seconded in this interesting adventure by the Vienna State Opera Orchestra under Hans Swarowsky.

Other performers, from the late Wanda Landowska onward, have been known to add a few flourishes or to decorate the odd repetition, but Gulda really takes the bull by the horns right from the start. Not only does he embellish the solo parts far more extensively than any pianist in my experience, but he also adds the piano's voice to many orchestral tutti in the manner of a very positive continuo player. No doubt many people hearing these performances will throw up their hands in horror at such spoliation of Mozart's "divine simplicity," and it might well be that, here and there, Gulda is overstating his case deliberately in order to provoke some healthy argument. Yet while I liked some of his ideas less than others and would argue with certain aspects of his readings that have nothing to do with the question of embellishments (thus the K.595 Larghetto sounds rather trite at Gulda's pace), I found the disc as a whole immensely stimulating and thoroughly worthwhile—a sign of the times, one hopes, like the Sadler's Wells production of *Figaro* about which I wrote last spring and which is to be revived after Christmas.

As usual, this is a comparatively lean and patchy month as far as the main record companies are concerned, bringing us all manner of odds and ends but little of real substance. Nonetheless, each of our main groups has produced one album that is outstanding by any standard: Decca offers Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* and *Dance Suite*, while HMV releases an important addition to its popular series of Elgar recordings under the baton of Sir John Barbirolli. The Bartók coupling is notable for the brilliant, highly charged playing which Solti obtains from the London Symphony, as well as the predictably stunning quality of the sound. On HMV's Elgar disc, the same orchestra responds with great sensitivity to Barbirolli's direction and the recording is admirable, but the main interest lies

in the contribution of the two soloists: Jacqueline du Pré, in the Cello Concerto, and Janet Baker, in the *Sea Pictures*.

For some years now the youthful Miss du Pré, possibly the most gifted string player this country has produced for a generation, has been performing this fine concerto to mounting acclaim from critics and public on both sides of the Atlantic, and her inevitable recording of the work has been eagerly awaited. The result will certainly not disappoint her many admirers. Supported with unusually sympathetic skill by Sir John—himself a highly talented young cellist before conducting claimed most of his time—she performs this beautiful but by no means obvious work with a relaxed mastery and inborn musicality such as one rarely encounters in a person barely out of her teens. Janet Baker's exceptional talents have been recognized for some time, but her performance suggests that Britain's finest young contralto is approaching her vocal peak.

Among EMI records that defy normal classification—all of them, incidentally, limited to mono editions—I note especially *Homage to T. S. Eliot*, a performance that took place at the Globe Theatre one Sunday last June and featured poetry readings by, among others, Sir Laurence Olivier, Paul Scofield, and Groucho Marx, as well as a stage version of "Sweeney Agonistes"; a recital of Celtic Songs featuring the Irish soprano Veronica Dunne; and *City Gulls and Country Swains*, a miscellany of music, verse, and prose, described as "an Elizabethan panorama in sound," whose purpose seems educational rather than entertaining in the conventional sense.

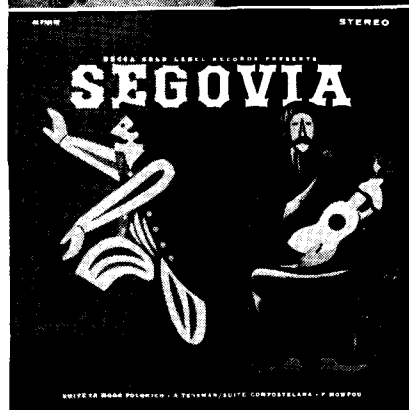
MUCH more interesting, despite marked didactic overtones, is an Argo anthology entitled *Medieval English Lyrics* and covering a period of almost 300 years—from "Sumer is icumen in" (ca. 1240) to a song by Henry VIII. Under the supervision of two distinguished scholars, Frank L. Harrison and Eric J. Dobson, a talented group of singers and players here performs a fascinating collection of songs with great skill and zest, and the disc is excellently annotated. Other Decca group arrivals include a "highlights" disc from *Götterdämmerung*; a further Brahms record from Julius Katchen, devoted to the Hungarian Dances in their original piano-duet form (Katchen is here assisted by Jean-Pierre Marty), and a thoroughly unexpected coupling by the Vienna Octet. Hitherto this ensemble has never ventured beyond the most obvious Austro-German repertoire, from Mozart to Brahms, but the latest record brings us early Britten (the *Sinfonietta*, Op. 1) and late Hindemith (the Octet of 1957-58).

—THOMAS HEINITZ.

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audacity and imagination. But for Béjart "all music is danceable," and he does just that; it is an achievement of a rare order, a *total* ballet you experience in dimensions beyond the audio-visual. When I first saw its three panels together in January in Brussels, I was most struck by the choreographic inventiveness and the breathtaking decors, which retain their erotic-mystic force of evocation, but this time I also perceived in the decelerated orchestration of Wagner a musical knowledge and sensitivity Béjart brought as well to the Ninth Symphony last year. The opening *Venusberg* episode with the original choreography Béjart overhauled for *Tannhäuser* in 1961, just a century after its famous premiere at the Paris Opéra, is a space-age bacchanal with little resemblance to the coquettish Second Empire era. The curtain rises on an immense cobweb of ship's rope on which the dancers, clad in leotards of different colors, are poised. They climb, descend, clamber, and then thirty or forty feet above the ground they join, arms crossed, and, borne earthward, form a massive block around the principal soloists. Jaleh Kerendi seductively dances the strange woman whose beauty leads a fascinated youth (Vittorio Biagi) into a surrealist marine grotto and eternal enchantment. The angular, sculptured moving patterns enacted remind one of nothing so much as Giacometti in the majestic calm at the center of anatomical power.

The *Siegfried Idyll* celebrates the birth of Wagner's son and his love for Cosima. Choreographer Paolo Bortoluzzi assimilates the gymnastic forte of his master, but not his genius of transmutation and vision; but it is a splendid vehicle to display Duska Sifnios's talent.

With *Mathilde* we enter the exquisite universe of Tristan and Isolde and the Wesendonck Lieder, permeated by mystification: ominous heavy hangings, bizarre busts of weeping women on huge vertically rising pedestals panoplied with spears, a giant peacock. Both in conception and technique, this ballet is the closest to *le nouveau roman*, suspended in an area between anecdote and abstraction. Who is the solitary voyager in this winter garden of Nordic lust, what is the meaning of the mysterious rococo villa (or theater?) he has penetrated, why do the three personages (past, present, future?) meet, how is the music that eerily arises related to the recurring inferences of memories? These enigmas are kinetically expressed through half-sketched yet precise movement that algebraically distances itself from any semblance of semantic content.

—MORTON SEIF.



Denby on Dance

AMONG AMERICAN WRITERS on dance, Edwin Denby has a special place reserved for those whose reactions are not immediately felt, but may have the greater impact for being delayed. Though he has, in his long career of writing about dance, spent only a relatively small time on a newspaper (the New York *Herald Tribune*, during the war years), this lack of immediate exposure has not restricted his audience or reduced his influence. It has, indeed, contributed to the kind of continuing effect that asserts itself even when read much later in such a book as the new collection of writings from the Horizon Press titled *Dancers, Buildings, and People in the Streets* (\$5.95).

As might be expected from a book with so inclusive a title, the subject matter is far-ranging. It takes in not only many varied forms of dancing, but observations also on music, films (dance-oriented, mostly), and painting. But, as is the case almost invariably in one with a gift for the essay and a developed technique in its writing, the subject is very often the writer himself.

He has, for example, the ability to make you enjoy what he doesn't wholly admire—which is, as writing goes, far from easy. Most of the time a writer describing what he doesn't wholly admire tends to make it a subject either of a diatribe or a burlesque. When, in writing about a certain celebrated dancer (who shall be nameless here) Denby says, "She was at her worst: careless feet, limp and wormy arms, brutally deformed phrasings; in allegro she was a hoyden, in adagio it was a bore waiting for her to get off that stubby toe; she waddled complacently, she beat time, she put on a tragically wronged stare (Second Avenue style—Lower Second Avenue), she took absurdly graceless and completely unconvincing bows. It upset me while I was in the theater; but the next day it seemed only ridiculous, I'd half forgotten it, and it had no connection with moments I couldn't help remembering the grandeur of," he is indulging neither in hyperbole nor satire, but in the cruelly accurate kind of description that makes the reader a *participant* in the thing he has experienced, seeing it through his eyes, experiencing it through his mind. It even prepares one for the next observation: "At those moments she had so much vitality she made everyone else look as if they merely crept or scuttled about her while she danced . . .," which suggests that, underneath it all he has respect if not admiration for the thing he is describing, a kind of key value in itself.

Denby is not alone, among writers on the dance, in being able to describe what