

RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Bartók: Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2. Hyman Bress, violin, with Charles Reiner, piano. RCA Victor mono LM 2853, \$4.79; stereo LSC 2853, \$5.79.

Bress has more musicianship than the average virtuoso, and more virtuosity than most performers with his musical impulses. This puts him in a favorable situation to challenge the twin difficulties of these works, especially as Reiner is a pianist altogether qualified to bear a major share of responsibility where Bartók has arranged it that way. Interpretively, Bress and Reiner have a more productive relationship in the second sonata, where Bartók is always Bartók, than in the first, where he is sometimes Debussy, and even Stravinsky. (They are separated by only a year, but the second is much more individualistic than the first.) The heavily written piano part is particularly well reproduced.

Beethoven: Quartets in E flat (Op. 74) and F minor (Op. 95). Weller Quartet. London mono CM 9431, \$4.79; stereo CS 6431, \$5.79.

Walter Weller has been concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic since 1959, at which time the present group of players began to work together. He was then twenty. Among his associates (Alfred Staar, second violin, and Helmut Weiss, viola) the oldest, Ludwig Beinhorn, cello, is now in his mid-thirties. This would suggest a zestful, abandoned style of performance, but the opposite is the case here: the two "middle" Beethoven quartets are reserved, almost constrained in style, with little urgency or momentum to make up for a lack of probing or insight. The sound is good and the quartet manners are admirable, but it is all a little tentative and unready to be introduced in this literature against the rich heritage of it already contained on records.

Montsalvatge: *Sonatine pour Yvette*. Rodrigo: *Danzas de España*. Falla: *Fantasia Bética*; *Quatre Pièces Espagnoles*. Gonzalo Soriano, piano. Angel mono 36281, \$4.79; stereo S 36281, \$5.79.

While Xavier Montsalvatge waits for the outside world to discover him, some of his Spanish colleagues are doing their part to keep a line of communication open for those who regard him as one of the consequential composers of the day. This "sonatine" presumes to no Olympian height of importance, but it does achieve its objective with finesse and a superior sense of keyboard suitability. As for Rodrigo, those who have taken advantage of the enterprise of Zabaleta and Segovia in sponsoring his larger works will know what to expect in these smaller ones (which have been previously recorded by de Larrocha). Others will make the acquaintance of a composer whose art is in the finest Spanish tradition—combining ingenuity with warmth, originality with charm. In these small-scaled pieces as well as in the more elaborate pianistic layout of the Falla *Fantasia* Soriano affirms again his claim to be considered the foremost exponent of this literature now among us. Good piano sound, too.

Mozart: Divertimento in D (K. 205); Cassation in B flat (K. 99); March in D (K. 290). Members of the Vienna Octet. London mono CM 9433, \$4.79; stereo CS 6433, \$5.79.

Both the Divertimento and the Cassation are examples of a familiar type of Mozartian writing, if not the equal of the best known, or of the best (not necessarily the same thing). Of the two longer works, the Cassation has the greater interest, as an example of Mozart's musical imagination—fresh, spontaneous, unpredictable—at the age of thirteen. Of course, the comparative values are also relative ones: no one else ever wrote "social" music of this quality, though on occasion Mozart excelled the average that prevails in these works. The names Breitenbach, Hübner, Krump, Veleba are mostly those long associated with the Vienna Octet, though the leader is now Anton Fietz. Highly suitable sound.

Mozart: Serenade No. 9 in D (K. 320); Marches in D (K. 335 Nos. 1 and 2). Mladen Basic conducting the Mozarteum Orchestra, with August Nowicki, posthorn. Eurodisc 71-406 KK, \$4.98 (mono only).

There have been other recordings of this work (including one in stereo by Victor Desarzens on Westminster) but Basic's strikes me as the best of all. This may be attributed in part to his own superior grasp of the style (commended, in the instance of K. 203, in *Recordings*, 1965), but also to the fine quality of the performing group and the bright, open reproduction. For those who may be skeptical of the appeal of a "serenade," it may be described as a combination of the distinctions Mozart achieved in his symphonies, concerti, and dances, blended into a totality quite different from any of its prototypes. The addition here of the posthorn (beautifully played by Nowicki) imparts a character to this serenade that sets it apart from all other serenades as well as the body of Mozart's works in general. A joyous experience.

Nielsen: *Commotio*; Little Preludes. Grethe Krogh Christensen, organ. Lyricord mono LL 148, \$4.98; stereo LLST 7148, \$5.95.

Nielsen's unremitting search for new tonal resources, and his ability to "hear" in a way distinctively his own, are affirmed in this recent addition to his recorded literature. The reference is to the *Commotio* (a word whose meaning the annotation unfortunately fails to clarify). It is a lengthy, three-part construction with much the character of an improvisation. Much of its interest derives from his use of organ points as the underlying support for chromatic lines and contrapuntal textures derived from them. It is a product of 1929 (he died in 1931) and suggests a more than laggardly attitude on the part of the those who have failed to advertise its merits before this. The preludes are smaller in scope and of lesser interest. Miss Christensen is not merely a comprehending but an imaginative intermediary, and the reproduction of the two excellent organs (in Copenhagen and Aarhus) is highly satisfactory.

Paganini: Sonata Concertante; Brand Sonata; Sonata (Op. Post.). Marga Bäuml, guitar, and Walter Klasinc, violin. Mace M 9025, \$2.49.

Contrary to the suggestions of the composer's name, there is nothing in the least flamboyant or exhibitionistic about these works. And, again, it is the unexpected that prevails in the relationship of the two instruments. The guitar is, for the most part, the *primo*, the violin generally *secondo* (one work is designated as "for guitar with violin accompaniment . . .") an outgrowth of Paganini's fondness for the fretted instrument. In type, the works might be described as "early, unknown Schubert"—for the constant flow of melody, the simple but clearly defined structure, the even disposition of interest between the two instruments. Both performers are capable, and the results are eminently pleasant, if nothing more consequential. The annotation is of little help in relating the works to Paganini's other production, or in fixing them in time. Good sound.

Weber: Concertos No. 1 in F minor (Op. 73) and No. 2 in E flat (Op. 74). Alois Heine, clarinet, with the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra conducted by Paul Walter. Dover stereo 5246, \$2.00.

Just how old these performances are is anybody's guess, but they were already in the supplement to the first WERM, which would put them back to the early Fifties at least. There is hardly the breathtaking excellence in the performance to make a reissue at this time mandatory, but the clarinet playing of Heine is fluent if not excellent, and the accompaniments are faithfully performed by the orchestra under Walter's direction. As for the works themselves, neither is the one for this solo instrument by Weber which is most performed—that is the Concertino Op. 26. But each has abundant evidence of his feeling for the clarinet that is familiar from *Der Freischütz*. By current standards, the recording is just about tolerable.

—I.K.

Berlioz


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ants of a single love impulse—to be taken ideally by one versatile soprano; neither are they partners in a psychological duel, like Venus and Elisabeth (who, oddly enough, never appear on stage at the same time) in *Tannhäuser*. Olive Fremstad is reported to have played both roles years ago in England as the shifting subconscious of an alternately guilty and penitent hero; and Birgit Nilsson is awaited by New York this season in what is presumed to be the same approach. Singing these two Wagnerian parts in one evening may stretch a point but involves no eccentricity. Some purpose has been served. In the Cassandra-Dido tour de force, only one motive is clear: a massaging of the prima donna's ego.

With the gathering of the huge forces needed to record these ensembles from *Les Troyens*, and the engagement of so able a conductor as Georges Prêtre, the new discs, though satisfactory, might have come off with more eloquence. The orchestra plays well, the sound is generally good; yet the dispersed effect of the three stage bands in the Trojan processional lacks the glint and intensity of Berlioz's scoring. Mme. Crespin is broadly effective as Cassandra, singing with big voice and vigorous line. She does better as Dido, investing the part with carefully molded phrasing and tonal beauty, along with a touch of Transalpine *morbidezza* not always right for the style. It is in the scene culminating with Dido's aria "Adieu, fièvre citée" that this artist really comes through, bringing diversity of color and richness of imagination to her work.

Of the supporting singers, when they are given a chance, Marie-Luce Ballary is adequate as Anna, and Guy Chauvet does well in the great monologue of Aeneas, "Inutiles regrets," though he falls short of the breathtaking standard set by the old Georges Thill recording of this piece. The conducting of Prêtre is brilliant, sometimes more flaming than poetic; and the engineer rides gain at the climax of the Royal Hunt and Storm, damping the roar of the tempest. When one considers that aside from these new *Troyens* excerpts and various recent recordings of the Royal Hunt there exists on LP only Acts III, IV, and V (*Les Troyens à Carthage*) as performed somewhat erratically under the direction of Hermann Scherchen and not a single note of *La Prise de Troie*, there is cause for regret that so massive and important a project should not have come through as something other than a personal vehicle.

—ROBERT LAWRENCE.

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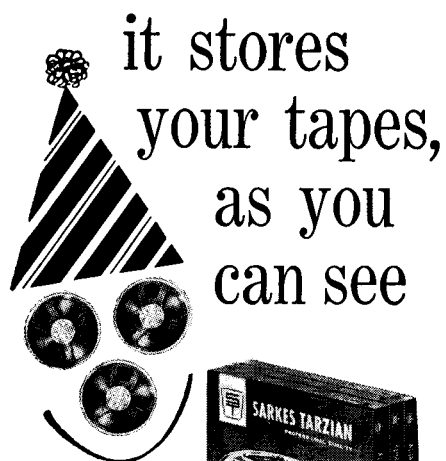
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MOSTLY MODERNISTS

Yesterday's Monk—Again

THERE WAS a time when a recording date by Thelonious Monk might mean four new Monk compositions. But that was in a period of the worst public neglect of Monk's talents, a time between the late Forties and early Fifties when it was almost impossible for Monk to earn his living as a musician. Monk himself had faith in his talents, and he bore those years with a rare productivity and a patient stoicism.

Monk bears his current years of success somewhat differently, and a new Columbia release called *Misterioso* (CL 2416, \$3.79; stereo CS 9216, \$4.79) is evidence at hand. The performances are all by quartets, and they were culled from "live" nightclub and concert performances here and abroad. Of the numbers included, neither the Monk originals nor the standards are new to his repertory. The title piece (the blues "Misterioso") and "Evidence" are two of his great works, and the former particularly is one of the most influential in all modern jazz. But, as may surprise his more recently acquired followers, Monk first recorded both of these pieces at a single session in 1948, in versions that are still classic. (Those versions are on Blue Note 1509 and 1510 in the current catalogue.)

I'm not saying that I find the performances on the new LP dull, but I do not think that they add very much to our knowledge of Monk technically or emotionally. Only "Honeysuckle Rose" is a real disappointment; the piece was once a vehicle for Monkian high comedy but this reading is on a fairly lightweight level. And there are fine moments like the musical conversation between Monk and his tenor saxophonist Charlie Rouse on "Well, You needn't," the expansive Monk piano solo on "Light Blue," and the very inventive Monk solo on "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You."

If Monk is resting on his laurels for the moment (or one hopes it is only for the moment), he has the laurels to rest on. In the immediate background of his current fame and popularity was an engagement at a Lower East Side New York club called the Five Spot in the summer of 1957, with a quartet featuring John Coltrane's tenor saxophone, Wilbur Ware's bass, and Shadow Wilson's drums. That engagement was one of the most significant events in recent jazz history, but for a long time it was assumed that this group made no recordings. Then, about four years ago, three



—Columbia Records.

Thelonious Monk — "exploratory daring."

selections appeared rather obscurely on a label called *Jazzland*. These have now reappeared on the newly revived Riverside in a collection called *Monk and Coltrane* (RLP 490; stereo 9490).

To fill out the LP, the company has included an excellent alternate version of the extended Monk blues solo, "Functional" (it is so very different from the original that it might well have been given another title). And there are two septet rehearsal versions of Monk's "Off Minor" and "Epistrophy," originally recorded for another album, with a Coltrane solo only on the latter.

But the most important music is, of course, the three selections by the Monk-Coltrane quartet. Perhaps the importance of that ensemble lay not only in the exploratory daring of the music it made, but in the fact that its members were an admirable collection of foils and counterfoils to each other. Coltrane's hard, bursting virtuosity fled into the hidden or elusive corners of Monk's