

RECORDINGS REPORTS I: Orchestral LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Bach: *Brandenburg* Concerti. Karl Ristenpart conducting the Chamber Orchestra of the Saar. Nonesuch B 3006, \$2.50; stereo HB 73006, \$2.50.

Ristenpart's effort is plainly directed at authenticity, which is achieved by use of recorders, harpsichord, clarino trumpet, etc., at the appropriate places. In this respect he has evolved a remarkably consistent texture among the six works which may, in some treatments, come out not only as different from each other, but almost as the product of several different musical intellects. To this extent, then, Ristenpart's effort is worthy of admiration. However, it doesn't go too far beyond this in animating, clarifying, and humanizing the patterns of sound as they were born in Bach's brain. His disposition to "bright" (if not actually fast) tempi tends, in such movements as the finale of No. 2 and the first of No. 5, to make an aural blur of the interrelated patterns, especially in the latter where the harpsichord, played well by Robert Veyron-Lacroix, is consistently treading on its own tail, acoustically. Others associated in the venture are Jean-Pierre Rampal, flute; Pierre Pierlot, oboe; and Georg-Friedrich Hendel (a violinist, not a typographical error). They are typically excellent, and when functioning as a unit (in the slow movement of No. 5) satisfying to hear together. However, in the ensemble movements led by Ristenpart, mere pace too often takes the place of momentum and a dry, note-perfect outline of inflection and variety. Very good detail in reproduction.

Bruckner: Symphony No. 3. George Szell conducting the Cleveland Orchestra. Columbia ML 6297, \$4.79; stereo, MS 6897, \$5.79.

Few conductors have done as well with this work as Szell (and none better) in a performance that is all compact of understanding, sensitivity, and technical command. However, well begun is not always half done with Bruckner, whose inclination to repetition and over-elaboration is more pronounced in this work than in most others. It is also a liability that the Adagio is divided between sides 1 and 2, with five minutes left over from the 9:57 of the beginning. As the same procedure prevails (almost to the choice of separation points) in the versions of Knappertsbusch (London CM 9107) and Haitink (Philips 500-068; stereo, PHS 900-068), the conclusion must be that no other procedure is feasible on disc. Let us hope that the tape version of the Szell will not merely reproduce the limitations of the disc.

Dvořák: Symphony No. 6 in D (formerly No. 1). London Symphony conducted by Witold Rowicki. Philips World Series PHC 9008, \$2.50.

This may well be the best recording yet of a work which embodies many of the most cherishable qualities of the composer (the compliment is not too inclusive, for earlier issues known to me were limited to a poorly reproduced Cleveland Orchestra performance directed by Leinsdorf and another of limited fidelity by Sejna and the Czech Philharmonic). It shows Rowicki (whose activities in this country have been limited to appearances with the touring Warsaw Philharmonic) as a conductor with a fine ear for orchestral sound and a lively instinct for its productive use. In this work, for example, which retains much of the folk flavor in the Slavonic Dances and Rhapsodies, he resists the temptation to drive the orchestra, keeping the texture light, the spirit high throughout. The recording, which is proclaimed as a compatible stereo-mono made possible by "phase control" strikes me—at first hearing—as more mono than stereo. That is, the quantity of "difference" audible when one stereo channel or the other is cut in or off doesn't amount to very much. It is well known that a mono groove can be reproduced by a stereo stylus: now they have given us not much more than a mono groove and called it "compatible" stereo. A good enough sound, but not, to my ear, real stereo, in this instance.

Mozart: *Sinfonia Concertante* in E-flat (K. 297b). Václav Smetáček conducting the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra with František Hanták, oboe; Milos Kopecky, clarinet; Karel Váček, bassoon; and Miroslav Stefek, horn. Concerto No. 3 in E-flat. Karel Ančerl conducting, with Stefek, horn. Crossroads 22 16 0035, \$2.49; stereo 22 16 0036, \$2.49.

This version of the great *Sinfonia Concertante* is not the best sounding on record (that honor would belong to either the Karajan-Philharmonia on Angel or the Ormandy-Philadelphia on Columbia), but it has engaging qualities of enthusiasm, musicianship and integrated ensemble to commend it. Smetáček provides a shapely frame in his statement of the introductory section and the quartet of winds fits it snugly throughout. Stefek, who is able enough for his part of the ensemble work, hardly measures up to international standards as soloist in the horn concerto. That has much to do, in the first instance, with the kind of horn sound favored—a heavier, less agreeable quality than that of his colleagues of England and America, nor does he manipulate it too well.

Nielsen: Symphony No. 4; *Maskerade* Overture. Max Rudolf conducting the Cincinnati Symphony. Decca 10127, \$4.79; stereo, 710127, \$5.79.

Of the several Nielsen symphonies which have been recorded and rerecorded, this strikes me as among the less durable on rehearing (despite its subtitle "The Inextinguishable"). It shows, on closer acquaintance, more kinship with the method of Sibelius (who, by the time of its completion in 1916, had created his first five symphonies) than had hitherto been apparent. That includes an emphasis on churning strings and churning brass in fragmentary proclamations of themes eventually revealed in all their total unimportance, and other devices to delay rather than hasten clarification of purpose. None of this has anything to do with the performance, which is strong, well shaded, and forward moving. The preceding *Maskerade* Overture is lively and travels well. By contrast with some other recent recordings from Cincinnati, this one seems to have more "room sound" in it, and not a very good "room" (Music Hall?) at that. The result is to open up the acoustic frame, so to speak, and convey a sense of emptiness around the orchestra.

Reicha: Symphony in E flat. Voříšek: Symphony in D. Prague Chamber Orchestra. Crossroads 22 16 0007, \$2.49; stereo 22 16 0008, \$2.49.

Those who might have idly speculated where the Haydn-Beethoven kind of symphony went when the latter went on to expand it into the *Eroica*, the C minor, the *Pastorale*, etc., will find at least part of the answer on this disc. It didn't go underground, but rather, over ground, to the flourishing musical community of Bohemia, where both of these composers were born. In the case of Reicha (who gravitated to Paris, where he had twenty years of prominence as a professor at the Conservatoire—and taught, among others, Berlioz, Liszt, and Gounod), the discovery is not new, for he has a variety of works recorded previously. None, however, was as good as this springy, admirably propulsive symphony, which has an ideal performance by the apparently conductorless Prague ensemble. What Voříšek might have accomplished had he not died in 1825 at the age of thirty-four is unpredictable, for he was clearly a composer of exceptional impulses and highly refined technique. Those who are partial to such works of Beethoven as the Second and Fourth Symphonies will find much more to their taste in this concise, dynamically varied work. It, too, is brilliantly set forth by the Prague ensemble, which is much more than just a group of efficient executants. Among themselves, they develop more of a personal statement about the music they play than sometimes emerges from a so-called "name" conductor. Good sound, which appears to have added "echo" tastefully supervised.

Smetana: *Má Vlast*. Karel Ančerl conducting the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. Crossroads 22 26 0001, \$2.49; stereo 22 26 0002, \$2.49.

As long as there have been means of communicating the results, the best interpreters of this majestic series of tone poems—either individually or collectively—have been Smetana's countrymen. This includes both the home-based Václav Talich and the émigré Rafael Kubelik, when he was recording in Chicago for Mercury. The sequence is eloquently extended by Ančerl, who learned his lessons at the source. For those to whom Smetana's orchestral work is symbolized by the much played "Vlatava" ("Moldau"), the opportunity provided by this inexpensive pair of discs to become acquainted with "Sarka," "From Bohemia's Woods and Fields," and "Blaník" (among others) should not be overlooked. The "Moldau" is undoubtedly the one in which Smetana's qualities are present in their most concentrated form, but all the others have their quota of interest. The orchestral performance is up to expectations, the reproduction equal to current standards.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

Recordings in Review

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cause of present recording activities, Miliza Korjus is postponing all concert activities throughout the world."

"Les Noces" by Boulez

STRAVINSKY: *Les Noces*, Pierre Boulez conducting the chorus and soloists of the Orchestre du Théâtre National de l'Opéra de Paris, with Jacqueline Brumaire, soprano; Denise Scharley, mezzo; Jacques Pottier, tenor; and José Van Dam, bass; with Geneviève Joy, Ina Marika, Jacques Delécluse and Michel Quéval, pianists. *Pribaoutki*; *Four Russian Songs*, Brumaire, soprano; *Berceuses du Chat*, Scharley, mezzo; *Four Russian Peasant Songs*, *Women's Chorus with four horns*, Boulez conducting. Nonesuch H 1133, \$2.50; stereo H 7T133, \$2.50.

NOT only for his general abilities as a conductor but for his specific insights into the works of Stravinsky, a new Boulez devoted to that composer is a command to the attention. What this one has to offer is not nearly so arresting nor musically provocative as his version of *Le Sacre du printemps*, for the reason that the content hardly lends itself to such exposition, not to say exploitation.

In utilizing a French text, the version of *Les Noces* falls rather short of the mark that one would have assumed that Boulez set for himself. This is not a usual case of preferring one language over another for reasons of "authenticity"; but rather that the French syllables introduce an element of time and place that strikes me as foreign to the flavor and spirit of the work. At the same time it must be noted that one must go back to the Vanguard version by Mario Rossi to find one in Russian (Ansermet also uses French, and the composer himself, a text in English). In a basic musical dimension, Boulez does not develop the rhythmic propulsion or the dynamic force to release the clangor and drive in this score.

The four tracks on side 2 are another and better story, if only because the material has rarely been duplicated and, if the present Schwann listings are reliable, is not available in such juxtaposition on any contemporary record. They were all originally composed between 1911 and 1919, though some of the material has been reworked in more recent times (the Peasant Songs were originally a *cappella*). All the performances are admirably supervised by Boulez. Eric Salzman's pertinent annotations do not make up for the lack of texts for any of the material.

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RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Britten: Serenade. Charles Bressler, tenor; Ralph Froelich, French horn; and the Music Aeterna Orchestra conducted by Frederic Waldman. Barber: Concerto. Raya Garbousova, cello, with Waldman conducting. Decca DL 10132, \$4.79; stereo, 710132, \$5.79.

The light quality of Bressler's voice, against the persistent instrumental colors, produces almost a "reorchestration" of Britten's cycle, as if the Barber Concerto, for example, were to be performed with a viola rather than a cello soloist. It undoubtedly contributes to a simpler solution of the vocal difficulties, especially those florid passages in which Britten chose to indulge, but one wonders whether it is not really a case of begging the question rather than answering it. He articulates cleanly, and makes a sizeable percentage of the text audible, but, in the end, the dislocation of color values subtracts more than the other benefits add. Garbousova, of course, is the long-time proponent of Barber's expressive work, and her command has only increased since she introduced it twenty years ago. Waldman surrounds both soloists with congenial opportunities for them to do their best, and hornist Froelich is in every way equal to the virtuoso task he undertakes.

Elgar: Quintet in A minor, Op. 84. Aeolian Quartet, with Leonard Cassini, piano. Bax: *Legend*. Watson Forbes, viola, and Cassini, piano. Dover HCR 5260, \$2.00; stereo, HCR 7012, \$2.00.

Were it not for such an enterprise as Dover, it is improbable that American listeners would have the opportunity of hearing such a work as the Elgar Quintet and judging for themselves whether it is something with which to live. For it hardly rates so high on the scale of the world's masterworks that it would invite sponsorship by a group not native to the composer, or distribution through ordinary, mass channels. It is nevertheless a work of many fine qualities, all of them germane to the medium Elgar has chosen. To be sure, profound originality is not among those qualities, but, like the gentleman he was, Elgar repaid with interest everything he borrowed in the way of structural concepts and musical point of view. And everything has the stamp of his own musical personality, which means that it will appeal to any to whom the Violin Concerto or the *Enigma* Variations are congenial. Cassini is a first class pianist, and performs admirably with Watson Forbes, violist of the Quartet, in the Bax *Legend* as well as in the Quintet.

Ferguson: Sonata No. 1. Khachaturian, K.: Sonata No. 1. Jascha Heifetz, violin, with Lillian Steuber, piano. RCA Victor LM 2909, \$4.79; stereo LSC 2909, \$5.79.

This disc introduces a Heifetz who is not quite the old Heifetz, a Khachaturian who is not the usual Khachaturian, and a piano collaborator who is new to both. The "new" Heifetz is one who has sought out contemporary chamber music which is congenial to him, and performs it with conviction; the Khachaturian is not the well known Aram, but his nephew Karen. Of the two works, the Ferguson has the greater substance and individuality, but both mount in interest when performed as they are here. Miss Steuber, who is a fellow instructor of Heifetz's at the School of Music of the University of Southern California, improves the opportunity afforded to her here with strong outlines, firmly controlled execution, and the kind of musical subtlety that complements his own. Also a factor of consequence is the quality of sound she produces, with a kind of *matte* quality to go well with her partner's. Chivalry also has its yield in musical results, for Heifetz's lady associate gets a place closer to the microphone than most of her male predecessors and the resulting balance is much better than in some earlier sonata recordings by him.

Hummel: Septet in D minor, Op. 74; Quintet in E flat, Op. 87. Melos Ensemble, with Lamar Crowson, piano. L'Oiseau—Lyre OL 290, \$5.79; stereo, OLS 290, \$5.79.

The Septet is what might be called second generation Hummel, which is to say a descendant of the original recording of the Fifties on Westminster, with a Viennese ensemble. This English product profits not only from that valuable example, but also by the possession of a more animated performing style by the Melos ensemble (Richard Adeney, flute; Peter Gracme, oboe; Neill Sanders, horn; Cecil Aronowitz, viola; Terence Weil, cello; and Adrian Beers, double bass). Those who have heard the earlier edition will require no urging to improve their knowledge and enjoyment of the work with this one: Others may be advised that it has a quality all its own, which is admirably synthesized by Crowson, a pianist of fleet fingers and informed taste. However, even those satisfied with their previous version of the Septet should take note of the Quintet, which has more of the spirit of Mozart's G-minor piano quartet than anything after Beethoven (Mozart was one of his mentors, of course). It offers the double bass as the fifth member of the ensemble in place of the second violin, which adds more than a little to solidity of sound. The violinist is Emanuel Hurwitz; the others of the string-piano group are identified above.

Janáček: Quartets Nos. 1 and 2. Janáček Quartet. Crossroads 22 16 0013, \$2.49; stereo, 22 16 0014, \$2.49.

Those who are attracted to the chamber music literature as a special, absorbing phase of the whole literature will find these two works alive with interest though it is now nearly forty years since the composer's death in 1928, and he pointed no way for a successor to pursue. The interest is, rather, of the same order as has been discovered lately in several of his operas, the *Slavonic Mass*, etc.—the expressions of an intensely musical man whose urge to communicate transcended considerations of technique or formal finesse. There is a seizing originality and drive here, whether in the relatively known No. 2, which bears the subtitle "Intimate Pages" and bears a more than slight relationship to Smetana's *Aus meinem Leben* Quartet, or in the all but unknown No. 1, which takes its thesis from Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*. This makes it a fair kind of oddity—a musical work derived from a literary work derived from a musical work. Freewheeling and formally impulsive rather than reflective, they make an absorbing experience as recreated by the Czech ensemble bearing the composer's name. Excellent sound too.

Mahler: *Kindertotenlieder*; *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. Christa Ludwig, mezzo-soprano, with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. Seraphim M 60026, \$2.49; stereo, S 60026, \$2.49.

As the designation suggests, these performances belong to the mezzo phase of the Ludwig career, which is to say when the voice did not yet possess its current lighter, brighter character. Thus it is altogether suitable for the melancholy and tears of Mahler's settings of Rückert's texts and the *Knaben Wunderhorn* material. An intelligent, aware performer, Ludwig may be counted upon to solve most of her problems seriously and in the composer's interest. The one objection to be entered in the instance is to her preferred tempi, which incline to a deliberation that sometimes verges on suspended animation. Where so much emotion is inherent in the subject matter itself, the addition to it of more, externally motivated, can do the desired result a disservice. Boult does his work expertly, and the able orchestra responds in kind. Very satisfactory sound.

Mozart: Divertimento in E flat (K.563). Trio à Cordes Français. Nonesuch 1102, \$2.50; stereo H 71102, \$2.50.

Why there should be a French tradition in the performance of this work is hard to say, but one of its greatest interpreters for the record as well as in the concert hall was the trio of the brothers Pasquier, and another fine version had as its violinist Jean Pougnet. The standard suggested by both references has a welcome echo in this cultivated ensemble, whose members are Gerard Jerry, violin; Serge Collot, viola; and Michel Tournus, cello. They have not quite the same identity of sound as the memorable entity which was united by ties of blood, but they manage well enough. The interpretative effort is also on a high level though the finale does not quite sustain it. Taking all things together, it is the preferable value among the versions now available. I.K.