

RECORDINGS REPORTS I: Orchestral LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA	REPORT
Albrechtberger: Concerto. György Zilcz, trombone, with György Lehel conducting the Hungarian Radio Orchestra. Concerto. Hedvig Lubik, harp, with same conductor and orchestra. Sonata in D. Same conductor and orchestra. Qualiton stereo, FLPX 1237, \$5.98; mono, LPX 1237, \$5.98.	For those who know it at all, the name of Albrechtberger is imperishably identified with the early studies of Beethoven, whose mentor he was for a time. These specimens of his compositional talents make that relationship even more incongruous than it has hitherto appeared, for they follow the "rules" not only with no hint of deviation, but with no suggestion that he even knew the possibility of deviation existed. The work for harp is pleasantly innocuous and well performed; the one for trombone more than a little affected by the kind of manipulation required. Both are played on instruments from the Hungarian National Museum which are contemporary with the works' composition. The Sonata—really a prelude, fugue, and finale—shows why Albrechtberger was considered the leading theoretician of his time.
Bartók: <i>The Wooden Prince</i> . János Ferencsik conducting the Budapest Philharmonic. Qualiton stereo, FLPX 1164, \$5.98; mono, LPX 1164, \$5.98.	This version of the work which stands between <i>Bluebeard's Castle</i> and <i>The Miraculous Mandarin</i> in Bartók's catalogue of compositions for the stage is a little late in reaching the American market. That is to say, there are at least two others available in stereo, of which the Dorati, on Mercury, has some instrumental details not so well clarified by Ferencsik. On the other hand, the latter has a warm feeling for the remnants of Romanticism latent in Bartók's treatment of the legend, and realizes them well. Orchestrally the performance is admirable, the reproduction of it satisfactory.
Debussy: <i>La Mer</i> ; Nocturnes. Jean Fournet directing the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus. Crossroads stereo, 22 16 0092, \$2.49; mono, 22 16 0091, \$2.49.	Fournet's conception of both works is acute and full of relevant detail, but he does not get the kind of results from the Czech Orchestra to give back all the colors imparted to pieces by Debussy's palette. For a detail, the flute solos are played with such a broad and almost reedy sound that it might well come from another instrument than the one Debussy had in mind. This kind of complaint aside, it is vital and fresh-sounding orchestral playing that he draws from the players and at the climaxes it is powerful. The Nocturnes are presented complete, with the choral elements in <i>Sirènes</i> that add to the totality of effect. Fairly good sound.
Janáček: Capriccio (1926); Concertino (1925). Hilde Somer, piano, with Julius Rudel conducting the Caramoor Festival Orchestra. Desto stereo, DST 6427, \$5.98; mono, D 427, \$4.98.	Neither of these is exactly what the title suggests, especially if the suggestions conjure impressions of formal relationships. Each is highly individualized, full of the vagaries of impulse which characterize this creator. My preference is for the Capriccio which Janáček wrote for the Czech pianist Ottokar Hollmann, who, like the more celebrated Paul Wittgenstein, had been wounded in World War I and lost the use of his right arm. There is a surprising amount of antiphonal writing for the single hand and chamber orchestra (really a wind ensemble of trumpets, trombones, tuba, and flute-piccolo). The accompanying element for the Concertino is similarly small (two violins, viola, two clarinets, French horn, and bassoon). It strikes me, however, as being even more disjointed than the Capriccio, and not as rewarding in its subject matter. Miss Somer plays both splendidly and Rudel gets much out of his highly qualified group of players. The recording is bright, full, and cleanly detailed.
Khachaturian: Concerto. Claire Bernard, violin; with the composer conducting the Bucharest Symphony. Prokofiev: Concerto No. 1. Bernard, with Constantin Bugeanu conducting the same orchestra. Philips World Series PHC 9046, \$2.50.	Claire Bernard, who won two consequential prizes before she was out of her teens, is the same sound, poised technician and uncommonly proficient interpreter in both of these works, but the results are decidedly better in the Khachaturian than in the Prokofiev. This may well derive from the participation of the composer, whose conducting gives an impetus and direction lacking in its milder counterpart by Prokofiev. The orchestra also acquits itself with distinction in the woodwind soli and ensemble response to Khachaturian. If Miss Bernard, who was born in Rouen in 1947 and acquired her skills at the Paris Conservatory, plays with something of the strength and strong sense of outline that characterize the sound of Henryk Szeryng, there is a reason: Szeryng has been one of her pedagogical influences. This is a fair recording, with the truncated top and bottom response that now seems a characteristic of this compatible groove.
Mozart: Sinfonia Concertante (K. 364). Arthur Grumiaux, violin, and Arrigo Pelliccia, viola, with Colin Davis conducting the London Symphony. Concerto No. 2 in D (K. 211). Grumiaux, with same conductor and orchestra. Philips stereo, PHS 900-130, \$5.79; mono, PHM 500-130, \$4.79.	Perfection is a practical impossibility in such a work as the Sinfonia Concertante but this performance comes within inches of it, thanks in the first instance to the artistry of Grumiaux. I wouldn't say that he is the finest violinist who ever put his mind to the task—Fuchs, Druian, Menuhin, and Heifetz are some who also qualify—but he combines a fine violinist's manual skills with the discretion and sensitivity that make him as much a junior as a senior partner to Pelliccia when the best interests of Mozart are so served. (That is more than can be said for the liner copy, which offers no information whatsoever about this excellent collaborator.) Davis is a musician of the same cut as Grumiaux and together they make a singing, soaring match of Mozart's singing, soaring score. Though the associated Concerto (K. 211) is one of Mozart's earliest, it has a degree of interest quite equal to the better known D- and A-major works. Very good sound.
Sibelius: Symphonies Nos. 5 and 7. Lorin Maazel conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. London stereo, CS 6488, \$5.79; mono, CM 9488, \$4.79.	As was the case with his excellent recordings of Tchaikovsky symphonies, Maazel tends to deliver a truer measure of a composer's content in a studio than he consistently does in the concert hall. Or it may be that, as is the case with certain other conductors, he loses effect when seen as well as heard. These are two fine sounding, well-proportioned performances, with special credit to Maazel in No. 7, which is not the easiest of the sequence to make coherent. He does just that, and also makes a richly varied thing of its tapestry of orchestral values. No. 5 doesn't strike me as being quite so successful but it is, orchestrally, absorbing to hear. Very good reproduction.
Strauss (arr. Dorati): <i>Graduation Ball</i> . Offenbach (arr. Rosenthal): <i>Gaité Parisienne</i> . Charles Mackerras conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra. Capitol stereo, SP 8654, \$4.79; mono, S 8654, \$3.79.	Mackerras is not only a knowing man-about-potpourris (he made a very good one himself titled <i>Pineapple Poll</i>) but also a conductor who is constantly improving in his command of orchestral discipline and finesse. The Philharmonia (note, not <i>New Philharmonia</i>) was a fine orchestra at the time of this recording, but it was neither self-starting nor self-disciplining, which means that credit for getting them to play these works as well as they sound here belongs to Mackerras. He fills in their outlines with a deftness and precision that testify to sound taste and sure means for articulating it to an orchestra. The Offenbach is, of course, the abbreviated "suite" from the ballet rather than the whole score. I do not care particularly for the recording which sounds as if it were made in a big studio with a rather remote pickup. In other words, it has too little presence or definition. —IRVING KOLODIN.

How High the Hi-Fi Sights

HOW MUCH should an audio system cost? The catalogs show a bewildering variety of component prices — speaker systems from \$49.95 to \$1,170, FM stereo tuners from \$84.95 to \$750, stereo pickup cartridges from \$10.95 to \$80, tape recorders from \$17 to \$2,720, and so on.

The obvious answer: as much as you can (and care to) afford, and, if possible, a trifle over that. For good sound grows on you and your ability to hear it will grow in direct relation to the quality of the system you listen to. The \$100 phonograph will sound like “high fidelity” compared to the \$29.95 monster in your kids’ room; but expose yourself to a \$200 sound system and you’ll soon be ready to appreciate the superior sound of a \$500 component sound setup.

Where does it all end? Does every additional dollar spent on sound make an equally substantial difference in what reaches your ears? No. Once your ear has been trained to high fidelity, the limited range and (what’s worse) high distortion of cheaper systems will probably render stereo phonographs costing less than \$200 unlistenable to you. A \$500 investment should bring excellent sound that even the most golden-eared can at least live with. And anything over \$1,000 spent on a phonograph system (less tape or FM) brings you convenience, status, and genuinely measurable sound improvements that you probably can’t hear.

Speakers should rate first consideration in your budget. With stereo requiring two speakers the old guideline of spending half your budget on them still makes sense, despite the rise in quality of lower-priced speakers. Spending one-third the cost of a phonograph system on its speakers would seem a sensible minimum, since no other component will affect the system’s sound to as great a degree.

There are no industry-wide standards for rating speakers. Price and your ears must be your primary shopping guides. Listen for the most natural—not the most spectacular—sound. As to price, speakers start getting really good at about \$100; above \$200 to \$250 each dollar spent makes comparatively little difference. There are good speakers between \$50 and \$100, but they won’t suffice for intense, extended listening—you can buy them as stopgaps when you start your system, and relegate them someday to extension duty elsewhere in the house.

As to speaker types — bass reflex, acoustic-suspension, electrostatic and the like — each tends to color the sound in a characteristic way. But the better the speaker, the less its coloration; each type can give good sound if properly designed and made.

Your speaker selection should influence your choice of amplifiers. A less efficient speaker calls for a more powerful amplifier. So does a large room, or one with very “dead” acoustics. Fifteen watts (IHF) per channel (30 total) is about the minimum in good quality amplifiers; 70 IHF watts (35 per channel) will suffice for even the least efficient speakers; and power beyond 120 watts or so is significant mainly in terms of a further reduction in already negligible distortion. You may, however, find it necessary to buy more power than you really need to get the best circuits and widest selection of features. Aside from the extra cost, there’s no harm done.

Distortion, hum, and noise are at least as important as power. Distortion should be under 1 per cent *at the amplifier’s full rated power* and should not rise at lower power levels. Hum and noise should be at least 50 dB down with reference to the *phono* input.

An amplifier’s frequency response is less revealing than its “power band width,” the frequency range over which it maintains substantially full-rated power output. An amplifier’s frequency response at an output level of perhaps one watt is almost always smoother and more extended than its power band width. Neither figure should be less than 30-15,000 Hertz, ± 3 dB (a figure reached by virtually all of today’s component amplifiers); and wider frequency ranges, varying within fewer dB, are both desirable and attainable.



As to amplifier features, there is space here only for the most common ones. Separate bass and treble controls are still a must, though each may operate on both stereo channels simultaneously. A tape monitor switch is a necessity if you have or plan to buy a “three-head” tape recorder, but it’s of negligible value otherwise. Today’s turntable quality being rather high, scratch filters are probably more valuable than rumble filters, but both are good to have. A front-panel headphone jack is next door to useless without a switch to cut the speakers off. For truest listening, a “loudness” control should be accompanied by a “loudness contour” or “defeat” switch that converts the control to straight “volume” operation when desired. Most other features are either inevitable (as volume and stereo balance controls) or frosting on the cake (as remote speaker switches) that are handy if you need them, but can be done without.

Depending on their power, good amplifiers run about \$120 to \$150 up (and up!), with \$250 to \$300 a practical ceiling. But many seductive units await the perfectionist at prices well above these figures.

FM tuners should be equipped with a stereo/mono switch, a tuning knob, a station dial, and a meter or “magic eye” tuning indicator (either type does nicely). Other features are again just frosting, though they may appeal effectively to your particular tastes. As to the relative merits of AM/FM versus FM-only tuners, let your listening habits be your guide. If you now listen to your AM radio, by all means include AM in your audio system.

Tuner specifications are complex and varied enough to warrant an article of their own. A few of the more important ones include: “crossmodulation rejection,” or resistance to strong-signal overloads; “alternate channel selectivity,” the ability to reject interference from strong stations on frequencies adjacent to the desired one; “capture ratio,” or ability to reject the weaker of two stations on the same frequency.

IN urban areas the ability to reject cross-modulation, AM, images, spurious response, and other forms of electronic garbage are the paramount virtues; in fringe areas, sensitivity and capture ratio gain importance. Sensitivity, though the most widely quoted of tuner specs, is relatively unimportant where reception is even reasonably good. An “IHF usable sensitivity” rating of 3 microvolts is pretty good, and 2.5 microvolts or less is good enough for virtually all but the weakest signal areas. A practical price range would be \$120 to \$150 at one end of the scale to \$200 to \$250 at the other, again with a few tempta-

(Continued on page 79)