

RECORDINGS REPORTS II: Miscellaneous LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Bartók: Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celesta; Concerto for Two Pianos, Percussion, and Orchestra. Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, pianists; Saul Goodman, timpani; and Walter Rosenberg, Elden Bailey, and Morris Lang, solo percussion; with Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic. Columbia stereo, MS 6956, \$5.79; mono, ML 6356, \$4.79.

The Music for String Instruments, etc., has always ranked high among works for which Bernstein has a special sympathy, and the sympathy has now evolved into a profound understanding of the processes and procedures which caused Bartók to write the work just as he did. That is to say, while many conductors still perform it as a kind of super-creation for hi-fi definition, Bernstein conveys a sense of structure and tonal relationships rarely set forth by any other interpreter. The Concerto is also powerfully performed with a special credit to the peerless Saul Goodman, but it is a work of less content, and not, to my way of feeling, as much motivation as its disc mate. Very accurate reproduction of the special kinds of color values involved.

Beethoven: Sonata in B flat (Op. 106). Beveridge Webster, piano. Dover stereo, HCR 7009, \$2.00; mono, 5009, \$2.00.

Webster has lived with this work for decades, and has the best sort of credentials: sound grounding (with Artur Schnabel) and long searching experience on his own. The result is a recording which sounds less like the usual succession of takes than a performance with a point of departure, climax, and conclusion. There is no lack of impetus; indeed, if anything the first movement moves almost precipitously in terms of Beethoven's request for mere *allegro*. He also performs the scherzo compellingly, and the final fugue with a strong sense of direction. The movement with the least appeal to me in this performance is the *Adagio sostenuto*, which doesn't convey the kind of emotionalism it contains. It warms rather than melts, and reaches out toward but does not engage the emotions. Taken all together, this is one of the most thorough performances of the work now available in a recorded performance. Strong, clean piano reproduction.

Chopin: Waltzes. Adam Harasiewicz, piano. Philips World Series, PHC 9034 (mono-stereo), \$2.50.

It may be premature to characterize Harasiewicz as the Brailowsky of tomorrow, for he is in his mid-thirties and his qualities are not (necessarily) fixed permanently. But the playing of the younger Pole has much in common with that of the older Russian, including inbred fluency, a habit of playing over the keys rather than really digging into them, and a reliance on the formalities of "good taste" rather than the informalities of a truly personal expression. It makes for pleasant enough listening, except when one is aware that there is, in more than a few of the waltzes, a deeper undercurrent of meaning than Harasiewicz conveys. It is the kind of undercurrent that Rubinstein conveys effortlessly and Lipatti with somewhat greater effort in his own way. The World Series compatible groove sounds pretty much like mono on my stereo.

Janáček: *Nursery Rhymes*. Julius Rudel conducting the Caramoor Festival Chorus and instrumental ensemble. Youth. Same chorus and wind ensemble. Deste stereo, DST 6428, \$5.98; mono, D 428, \$4.98.

Julius Rudel has rendered a sizeable service to the better understanding of Janáček's artistry in his meticulous preparation and spirited performance of these works and those listed in RECORDINGS IN REVIEW, March 25] Fiorentino shows himself to be a cultivated guide to the scenes tonally evoked here. Included are "Au bord d'une source," "Au lac de Wallenstadt," and several others which attained an identity separate from the context in which they were finally arranged by the composer. Fiorentino plays them all with clarity, purpose, and a fine sense of the special tonal qualities appropriate to them. Most to the point is his avoidance of the rhetorical or purely virtuosic in his exposition of the poetic essence of the pieces. It is, in short, done with steady artistic intent and no sense of exhibitionism. As in other recent issues, Dover's standard of piano reproduction remains gratifyingly high.

Liszt: "Années de Pèlerinage" (*Première Année-Suisse*). Sergio Fiorentino, piano. Dover stereo, HCRS-ST 7009, \$2.00; mono, ST 5009, \$2.00.

As in the encounter with his treatment of the late works of Liszt's creative career [RECORDINGS IN REVIEW, March 25] Fiorentino shows himself to be a cultivated guide to the scenes tonally evoked here. Included are "Au bord d'une source," "Au lac de Wallenstadt," and several others which attained an identity separate from the context in which they were finally arranged by the composer. Fiorentino plays them all with clarity, purpose, and a fine sense of the special tonal qualities appropriate to them. Most to the point is his avoidance of the rhetorical or purely virtuosic in his exposition of the poetic essence of the pieces. It is, in short, done with steady artistic intent and no sense of exhibitionism. As in other recent issues, Dover's standard of piano reproduction remains gratifyingly high.

Nicolai: *Te Deum*. Singakademie of Berlin; Evelyn Lear and Marina Türke, sopranos; Raili Kostia and Kathleen Basler, altos; Heinz Hoppe and Martin Vantin, tenors; and Thomas Stewart and Manfred Schenk, basses; with Mathieu Lange conducting the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin. DGG stereo, 139170, \$5.79; mono 39170, \$5.79.

The consideration here is not so much what, but who. Nicolai's reputation as a composer is so much related to a single work—his setting of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—that the mere thought of a *Te Deum* by him is arresting. What is more, the work of the twenty-two-year-old composer has size and substance. It does not, in the end, summon the eloquence to put itself in a lasting relationship to its models, but it does show a remarkable aptitude for making music. The performance is rather better as a totality—for the quality of the choral work and the orchestral playing—than it is for the accomplishment by the individual singers. Miss Lear is the best of them, Stewart next best. But the tenors are hard pressed to get their notes out and the mezzis are not distinguished. Very good reproduction.

Schubert: Quartets in D (Op. 125, No. 1) and B flat (Op. 168). Allegri Quartet. Westminster stereo, WST 17122, \$4.79; mono, XWN 19122, \$4.79.

Neither the best nor the most popular of Schubert's quartets, these are, nevertheless, full of his most distinctive qualities. I am especially partial to the B-flat, which is a product of the same year (1814) as "Gretchen am Spinnrade," a sufficient testimonial to the musical maturity he had achieved at the age of seventeen. So far as the craft of composing quartets is concerned, Schubert clearly derived his from Haydn-Mozart (a reference to the celebrated six by the latter in tribute to the former). The thinking and feeling, however, are all his own, in an interchange of gaiety-sadness so typical of him. There is interest also in the E-flat, which is attributed to the year before the B-flat, and is unquestionably precocious. Both are beautifully performed by the Allegri ensemble, an English ensemble that has some of the qualities of the Amadeus when it was first heard. Exceptionally true-to-life sound.

—I.K.

Powell, Pianists, and Saxophones

AN IMPROVISING jazzman knows no absolutes. There is no "best" way of playing a piece. Each day—each moment—has its own version, which is to say that each moment has its own meaning. That does not mean that our improviser has no standards. Today's variations on "I Want to Be Happy" may be better than yesterday's or not as good, and they may be better than tomorrow's, and he may be quite clear about the differences. But today's variations are today's, and this moment's are this moment's.

For that reason, phonograph records are almost a contradiction of the meaning of the music. They preserve and make permanent and absolute what was never meant to be permanent. At the same time they are a test of the music and they show that music intended for the moment, made up on the spur of the moment, can survive that moment, even survive the years.

They are also the only way of preserving a jazz musician's work. Bruckner survives if his scores survive and if they are played. Fats Waller's scores might be interesting but they are not his music; neither is a rendition of Waller's music by someone else. Waller truly survives only if his records survive and if they are played.

I pick Waller because it seems to me that quite a bit of Waller does not survive, however much I would not wish to part with the best of Waller. And I pick him also to compare him to Bud Powell. With Powell what does not survive is far less a matter of taste or opinion than with Waller. Bud Powell made records when he was in such bad health that he failed to meet not only his own best standards of creativity but failed even to meet some of the commonplace and elementary standards of piano performance.

Powell did four LPs for Verve Records. The first two, *The Genius of Bud Powell* (V-8115) and *Jazz Giant* (V-8153), contain essential Powell. The other two do not. *This Was Bud Powell* is a recent reissue album on Verve's low-priced VSP label (VSP 37). It contains nine selections. Five of them—"Get Happy," "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm," "Sweet Georgia Brown," "Hallucinations," and "Celia"—come from the *Genius* and *Jazz Giant* albums and are thus representative of his best work for the label.

I do not wish to dwell on the flaws

in the others; the subject is painful, and by almost any standards the subject would be pointless were it not for the presence of this album. Suffice it to say that Powell's inability to maintain tempo, the stiffness of his fingers in keeping pace with the crisp rapidity of his still fertile musical mind on "Willow Grove," and his mistakes in the bass that mar his obvious plans for "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" are heartbreaking. The appearance of a set like *This Was Bud Powell* in 1967 is shameful.

New Look! (Capitol ST 2637) is by George Shearing, his Quintet, and a "multicolored orchestra." It certainly gives off a lot of lavender. The leader picks all the right Las Vegas tunes ("On a Clear Day," "Strangers in the Night," "Call Me," etc.). On the Beatles's "Yesterday" Shearing starts with an intro that is almost worthy of Art Tatum, but he shortly swathes himself in strings and gets off a few runs that would be worthy of Peter Duchin. The surprising thing is that Shearing doesn't seem bored with this sort of thing. Oh, a little noncommittal maybe.

Intermodulation (Verve 8655) is an intimate musical conversation between pianist Bill Evans and guitarist Jim Hall (their second), and the kind of record that greatly pleases musicians. I have high respect for both men and for most of what they play here—considering the intricate cooperation involved, also for

what they *don't* play. For one example, Evans has a particularly good chorus on "I've Got You Under My Skin." But there were times when I felt like an intruder during a private discourse.

Evans meets drummer Shelly Manne (also for the second time) on *A Simple Matter of Conviction* (Verve 8675), and here I felt not at all like an eavesdropper. Manne has always known there's an audience out there and that if there weren't he wouldn't be sitting behind that drum set. Still, he knows that *he's* the one who can play, not the people. Evans responds to him appropriately. But I have a reservation about Evans's tendency to get hung up on his own rhythmic clichés; a single accent pattern, underlying about half of his phrases, turns "Laura" into a kind of virtuoso's singsong. I think the earlier Evans-Manne *Empathy* (Verve 8497) is a better recital.

Charles Lloyd plays tenor saxophone and flute and leads a quartet through five numbers on *Forest Flower* (Atlantic 1473), recorded at last September's Monterey Jazz Festival. Listening to Lloyd is rather like running across John Coltrane at a tea dance and then discovering that the whole affair is a masquerade and it isn't Coltrane at all. Lloyd's pianist, Keith Jarrett, shuffles through most of the currently fashionable styles, letting us peek at Horace Silver, Bill Evans, and Herbie Hancock, but when he goes after Cecil Taylor he somehow ends up sounding more like Keith Jarrett and I find myself wanting to hear more. Lloyd's manager wants us all to know that his client is very big in Europe. So maybe Coltrane's manager should book his client on the next flight.

—MARTIN WILLIAMS.

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