

RECORDINGS REPORTS I: Orchestral LPs

WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

REPORT

Bartók: Concertos Nos. 1 and 3. Peter Serkin, piano, with Seiji Ozawa conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor stereo, LSC 2929, \$5.79; mono, LM 2929, \$4.79.

The Bartók No. 1 may well be the first example of a work recorded by father and son, with the version of each offered in competitive sale (Father Rudolf's performance, joined with the Fourth of Prokofiev in partnership with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, may be found on Columbia MS 6405, ML 6215). This might be a provocation for some learned comment on the difference in viewpoint of the two pianistic generations, but the fact is that young Serkin's approach is rather different from that of most of his own pianistic generation. It is more lyric and less percussive, which appeals to me as the right way to go about achieving an individual result, especially in No. 3. There is, however, no want of animation and impulse, for Ozawa has enough to serve a pianist even less equipped with both than Serkin II. The orchestra takes a suitably conspicuous part in the results, which are vividly reproduced.

Bruckner: Symphony No. 7. Hans Rosbaud conducting the Orchestra of SWDR Baden-Baden. Turnabout stereo, TV 34083S, \$2.50; mono, TV 4083, \$2.50.

Rosbaud's version from the early days of stereo (formerly available on the Vox label) doesn't match some more recent ones in volume of sound or resonant quality, but it pursues its objectives resolutely and with great probity of style. As with virtually everything else he conducted from Haydn to Boulez, Rosbaud managed to keep the personality of the composer in the foreground, his own in the background. That did not mean, as it might with some others, that Rosbaud was either a neuter personality or utterly lacking in that quality. Rather it was his strong personal characteristic to make music in a selfless but wholly self-absorbed way. The consequence, in this instance, is for Bruckner to sound neither bumptious nor embarrassingly naive, but simple, honest, and straightforward.

Prokofiev: Quintet, Op. 39. N. Menshkov, oboe; I. Mozgovenko, clarinet; A. Futer, violin; M. Mishnayeysky, viola; and Y. Pimenov, cello; with Gennady Rozhdestvensky conducting. Stravinsky: *L'Histoire du Soldat* (Suite). I. Belensky, violin; G. Vyunkovsky, clarinet; I. Laptev, bassoon; L. Volodin, trumpet; K. Ladilov, trombone; A. Gegin, bass; and R. Nikulin, percussion; with Rozhdestvensky conducting. Melodiya-Angel stereo, SR 40005, \$5.79; mono, R 40005, \$4.79.

This item from the first list of Melodiya-Angel releases (see page 78) is less absorbing for content than for the execution of it. The two works were created between 1918 and 1924, and share some identities of style and purpose (the Quintet, created for the balletic purposes of Boris Romanov may have been modeled on the earlier *L'Histoire*, which was intended for a traveling theatrical troupe). In each, the members of the ensemble function as soloists, and the score is sprinkled with the close part writing and clashing lines then *à la mode*. Thus, the problems of performance for Soviet musicians, who have only recently been exposed regularly to writing of this kind, would appear to be greater than for their opposite numbers elsewhere. Despite any such considerations, the performance is meticulous, precise, and full of verve under Rozhdestvensky's compelling direction. The very good recording makes this, immediately, a dividend on Angel's venture into documentation of present-day Soviet music making. For me (and I am sure, many others) *L'Histoire* exists most satisfactorily in its full-length form with narrator. In this mode, the Cocteau-Ustinov-Markevitch version for Philips excels.

Rodrigo, J.: *Concierto de Aranjuez*. Castelnuevo-Tedesco: Concerto in D. Siegfried Behrend, guitar, with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Reinhard Peters. Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft stereo, 139 166, \$5.79; mono, 39 166, \$5.79.

Those who have missed the previous pairing of these works by John Williams (on Columbia) or the several duplications of the Rodrigo by Julian Bream, Narciso Yepes, and others should no longer deny themselves the pleasure contained in both. It is hardly possible that the composers who brought them into being in the late Thirties (the two works were written within a few years of each other) could have imagined a time when the guitar would be as acceptable an orchestral adjunct as any other instrument, but that is one of the better by-products of the electronic age. It would be difficult to find two more economically scored works of recent date, or two more complementary to each other. Behrend is in full command of all the problems, and the little known Peters (he has been heard from previously on a disc of operatic arias by Rita Streich) weights the aural scales discreetly.

Strauss: *An Alpine Symphony*. Rudolph Kempe conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. RCA Victor stereo, LSC 2923, \$5.79; mono, LM 2923, \$4.79.

Of all the Strauss tone poems later than *Macbeth*, the *Alpine Symphony* has been the least frequently recorded (indeed, a fairly ancient one directed by the composer himself is the sole version listed in a recent Schwann). Thus the order of challenge to the excellent new rendering by Kempe is not severe. Beyond that, however, it is a much more convincing exposition of the score than the average of those heard from time to time in the concert hall. Kempe does not bear down unduly on those massively scored passages for which Strauss specified the most gargantuan of his orchestral complements, giving suitable prominence to other, more modestly conceived effects. The usual complaints about it—overblown, repetitious, self-imitative—remain valid, but it is remarkable the extent to which Strauss invented counter moves to vary his customary gambits, especially in the eloquent "Epilogue" and concluding "Night." The orchestra and conductor function as though they had never heard the word *passé*, and Charles Gerhardt has supervised a tonal production that echoes the enthusiasm for the work expressed in his succinct annotation. Those with an interest in the Strauss-Bavarian State Orchestra (1941) recording will find it in a reissue on the Seraphim label (60006, mono only, of course).

Stravinsky: *Jeu de Cartes* and Symphony in C. Colin Davis conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. Philips stereo, PHS 900-113, \$5.98; mono, PHM 500-113, \$4.98.

The general qualifications of Davis are as applicable to the general requirements of Stravinsky as they are to those of other composers from Handel and Mozart to Britten, with whom he has been productively associated. However, it has been Davis's sensitivity to their *special* requirements which has produced the results for which he has been admired. Such sensitivity is not in strong supply here, either in matters of pace, emphasis, or tonal values. Thus, if one does not accept the composer's own versions as the last word on both of these, I would cite the Munch-B.S.O. performance of the first and the Ansermet-Suisse Romande of the second as preferable. The orchestral execution and recording are very good in themselves, if not altogether suitable to the matter at hand.

Wagner: "Ride of the Valkyries" (*Die Walküre*); "Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla" (*Das Rheingold*); "Forest Murmurs" (*Siegfried*); "Rhine Journey" and "Funeral Music" (*Götterdämmerung*). Leopold Stokowski conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. London SPC 21016, stereo only, \$5.79.

For ultimate historic service to the consumer, London should have included the "Closing Scene" from *Götterdämmerung* with which Stokowski challenged the new electrical pickup methods of the late Twenties and proved that a trombone could be reproduced. However, what is contained herein is proof that he has lost neither his curiosity nor his ability to take infinite pains to produce a truly superior-sounding recording. Each of the excerpts has its share of flamboyance and a tendency to overstatement, but also a plenitude of excellent orchestral execution. Of special note is the succession of woodwind and brass solo passages in the "Forest Murmurs" section. The printed content of the album espouses a rather old-fashioned approach to the subject not only in its use of Arthur Rackham illustrations but also in its superficial, sometimes misleading annotation. —IRVING KOLODIN.

“Orfeo” out of “Orphée”

By HERBERT WEINSTOCK

CHRISTOPH Willibald Gluck cared much too intensely about the interrelationships of libretto and music to allow another musician to make the adjustments of accent, note-values, and emphasis which would have been inevitable if he had simply allowed someone to translate the text of his two major Italian operas into French. When the 1762 *Orfeo ed Euridice* and the 1768 *Alceste* were staged in Paris in, respectively, 1774 and 1776, he himself largely remade their scores to the new French librettos and otherwise adjusted them closer to Parisian taste and custom. He would have been astonished and disturbed could he have foreseen what time and heedlessness would do to those operas, and particularly to the 1774 *Orphée et Eurydice*.

The central problem that Gluck solved when preparing *Orphée* from *Orfeo* was that he had originally composed the role of Orpheus for the contralto castrato Gaetano Guadagni. Castrati never had been as beloved in France as in Italy and England, and were almost extinct in Paris by 1774. So Gluck recomposed the role of Orpheus for a tenor, Joseph Legros. But when Hector Berlioz, that foremost Gluckian of the next century, prepared *Orphée* for production at the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris in 1859, he restored Orpheus to his original vocal range by adapting the music for the great contralto Pauline Viardot-Garcia. He did so not by going back to the original Vienna *Orfeo*, but by wholesale transposition of the 1774 *Orphée*.

Largely because of Viardot-Garcia, the 1859 restoration was an impressive success. And since then nearly all performances of Gluck's opera, even including those sung in Italian, have been versions of Berlioz's adaptation. Curiously, this has been true whether the role of Orpheus has been sung by a contralto (as most commonly), a baritone (as with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau), or a tenor (as with Léopold Simoneau). Meanwhile, both the original 1762 *Orfeo ed Euridice* and the 1774 *Orphée et Eurydice* have gone mostly unheard. For more than a century, few people have heard either of Gluck's own versions of his most popular opera with the vocal ranges and the pitch relationships as he intended them.

Now the Bach Guild has issued a recording (stereo, BGS-70686/7, \$11.96;

mono, BG 6867, \$9.96) that can be described as the original three-act 1762 *Orfeo ed Euridice*, with the role of Orfeo sung by a female contralto and with some interpolations of music that Gluck added to the 1774 *Orphée et Eurydice*. The result is at once scholarly and (certain “interpretations” of Gluck's intentions being inescapable) imaginative. The additions from the 1774 version are the “Dance of the Furies,” the “Dance of the Happy Spirits,” and (in whose translation?) Euridice's aria with chorus beginning “E quest'asilo ameno.” In the recording, Charles Mackerras conducts the Akademic Choir and the Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera, with Maureen Forrester (Orfeo), Teresa Stich-Randall (Euridice), and Hanny Steffek (Amore). The performance is fascinating and very welcome as a document, but disappointing as opera (which does not mean that it ought to sound like Wagner, Verdi, Puccini, or Strauss!).

Its regrettable aspects are both technical and artistic. The words sung by the chorus are much of the time so bathed in orchestral reverberations as to be incomprehensible, whether because of miscalculated conducting or faulty engineering. Charles Mackerras's rather spir-

itless and unmodulated conducting frequently produces inappropriate tempos—as, for example, when he misses the rapt, ecstatic quality of “Che puro ciel”—one of the musically most compelling of all operatic arias—and of the “Dance of the Happy Spirits.” One need only listen to Toscanini's now aged recording of the latter to recognize the purely musical quality that Mackerras has failed to produce. Maureen Forrester's rich contralto is at the command of too placid a temperament and too undulating a sense of musical phrasing to evoke the tremendous intensity of dramatic emotion latent in the music of Orfeo. Why, one asks, all those apparently unmotivated variations of volume, those slightly delayed or slurred attacks? On the other hand, Teresa Stich-Randall's excessively vibrato-less tones rob Euridice of her very human femininity. (The final outcome is that Orfeo sounds robustly female, Euridice sexless.) In the small role of Amore, Hanny Steffek's expertly handled but somewhat acidulous voice utterly fails to suggest the god of love.

Reconstructed with loving care and high musical intelligence, but not illuminated by equally imaginative performance, this recording of *Orfeo ed Euridice* leaves one hoping for recorded and live performances of both the 1762 *Orfeo ed Euridice* and the 1774 *Orphée et Eurydice*. For either, however, we shall have to demand interpreters with more appropriate equipment and a much surer sense of wherein the greatness of Gluck resides.



“Can I help it if I get the giggles?”