

Recordings in Review

Martinon's Valedictory

RAVEL: *Rapsodie espagnole*; *Alborada del gracioso*; *Ma mère l'oye*; *Jean Martinon conducting the Chicago Symphony. Introduction and Allegro. Martinon conducting the Chicago Symphony with Edward Druzinsky, harp; Donald Peck, flute; and Clark Brody, clarinet.* RCA stereo, LSC 3093, \$5.98.

WHEN THE Chicago Orchestra's administrators chose Desiré Defauw as successor to Frederick Stock as music director in 1943, the world's leading authority on such matters predicted it would not work out, because a "German orchestra" such as Stock had developed and a conductor of Defauw's Belgian - French background would never get along. The truth of Arthur Judson's observation was proved before half-a-dozen years had passed.

Such could hardly be said today of the orchestra Fritz Reiner reconstructed and Jean Martinon inherited. On the occasions that Martinon and the orchestra have been heard live in New York, the programming has been too diversified to prove just how well it can play French music. But this musical valedictory on the five-year career Martinon has just concluded in Chicago will stand for a long time to come as testimonial to the orchestra's greatness in one area at least.

This relates not merely to its ability to give Martinon what he desires, interpretatively, in a segment of the repertoire for which he is justly celebrated, but even more to give him the specific kinds of sonorities that he deems appropriate to it. This ranges from veiled and vibrant to muffled and dense, or crisp and dry, according to Ravelian necessity. Indeed, on being exposed to this disc (in a pre-release

form) without knowledge of the personnel involved, my listening puzzlement centered on the paradox: "What first-class, French-sounding orchestra could also play with the precision and brilliance of a first-class American one?" The answer, clearly, reposes in the aural atmosphere that Martinon brought with him from the banks of the Seine to the shores of Lake Michigan.

In terms of this disc, that atmosphere may be truly termed heady, for it is uncommon even by high standards of excellence in Ravel. The pervasive quality that links the four works is clarity, a transparency of texture that reveals all, leaves nothing murky or opaque. In his liner comment on the works of the man he knew well (as a violinist and orchestral player in his younger days), Martinon says: "It is amazing how little—if at all—his music has aged." It helps, for a verdict of non-aging, to have an intermediary as capable of restoring youth and freshness as Martinon.

Those versed in recordings and the aural results therefrom will have concluded by now that the producing partnership must have worked some special magic. Credit for one of the best-sounding discs RCA has ever offered belongs to producer Joseph Habig and recording engineer Bernard Keville. This applies not only to the big sonorous imagery of *Rapsodie espagnole* but equally to the intimate, beautifully detailed solo vignettes of the Introduction and Allegro.

Semkov on Scriabin

SCRIABIN: *Symphony No. 2.* Georg Semkov conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Columbia stereo, MS 7285, \$5.98.

IT IS A boon for Scriabin fanciers (of whom there are more about than may be generally recognized) that there is a conductor of Georg Semkov's capabilities to plead his sometimes less-than-airtight case. For the most part, those who take on this or that work out of a sense of obligation to a man who had more genius than talent tend to minimize the consequential and accentuate the obvious.

No such solecisms can be detected in Semkov's treatment here of the work which he conducted in several cities during his recent initial guest engagements in the United States. Even in the first movement, in which Scriabin's method is less secure than it gradually grows to be in the succeed-

ing sections, he is at pains to accentuate—subtly and in no way obviously—how Scriabin's way differs from those who had done somewhat the same things previously. If he fails always to make his point, it is not for lack of perception, but for want of the musical means with which to be convincing.

In the warmly expressive Andante—by much the best section of the work, to this taste—Semkov sustains both mood and line beautifully. Unfortunately for the total effect of the symphony, the ending lets down what had preceded, with an inevitable sense of non-conclusiveness. To judge from the response Semkov arouses from the London Philharmonic, he has as much influence on orchestral musicians as he has on the singers with whom he has recorded opera, and should be heard from regularly. The sound is open and clear without overplaying sonority for sonority's sake.

Frick auf Der Jagd

SILCHER: "*Droben im Oberland.*" WERNER: "*Heideröslein*"; "*Begrüssung*"; "*Auf, Auf zum fröhlichen Jagen*"; "*Hunderuf*"; "*Ein Jäger aus Kurpfalz*"; "*Ich ging durch einen grasgrünen Wald*"; "*Es blies ein Jäger wohl in sein Horn*"; "*Wagenruf*"; "*Der weisse Hirsch*"; "*Waldhornlied*"; "*Wer hat dich, du Schöner Wald*"; "*Ein Schütz bin ich*"; "*Im grünen Wald, da wo die Drossel singt*"; "*Ein Tiroler wollte jagen*"; "*Aufbruch zum Jagen*"; "*Im Wald und auf der Heide*"; "*Sau tot*"; "*Ich schiess den Hirsch im wilden Forst*"; "*Das grosse Halali*"; and "*So scheiden wir mit Sang und Klang.*" Gottlob Frick, basso; with Konrad and Heinrich Alfing, Erich Penzel, and Josef Bähr, horns; the Mühlacker Hunting Horn Ensemble; Peter Schwarz, zither; the Bielefeld Youth Choir; Bavarian State Opera Chorus; Helmut Reger conducting the Graunke Symphony Orchestra; and Gerd Berg conducting the Detmold Chamber Orchestra. Angel stereo, S-36610, \$5.98. (*Indicates a hunting signal.)

THOSE WHO have enjoyed Gottlob Frick as Caspar in *Der Freischütz*, Landgrave Hermann in *Tannhäuser*, or even Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* (among other hunt-minded operatic characters) will need no assurance of his fitness for the task indicated above. The assurance they will require, rather, is whether the task is fit for the kind of competence he brings to it.

The answer to that, regretfully, must be equivocal. It is all interesting, in the sense that no record similar or quite like it has come to attention



Jean Martinon—"justly celebrated."



Leon Kirchner—"a creative effort to realize a creative purpose."

previously. There have been records of hunt calls, and Richard Tauber, among others, is one who has recorded "Im Wald und auf der Heide" (with its "heileh, heiloh" refrain arousing echoes of Berg's chorus in Act II of *Wozzeck*). But a combination of the two has considerable inbuilt appeal.

Presumably arranger Christfried Bickenbach has researched the subject thoroughly and selected the most engaging specimens he could find. If so, it would appear that there is just not enough arousing material to be worth Frick's kind of vocal talent or his artistic time. Too many are of the simple chordal character akin to the post-Storm "Song of Thanksgiving" in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. The quality improves considerably about midway on Side 2, and is sustained through to the end—if there are those who will be drawn to it by this promise.

Somewhat involved with the less than wholly satisfactory outcome are the arrangements of Bickenbach. What with violins and children's choruses, an occasional bird song and symphony orchestra background, it gets to be rather cluttered, aurally, for my taste. Less arty settings and a more authentic woodland atmosphere might have served the simple material better. For his part, Frick serves it all perfectly, but he cannot invent what is not present or disengage himself from that which is.

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The New Quartet Player

In a time when any order of activity must have a prefatory "new" to merit consideration—i.e., the "new" left, the "new" politics, etc.—there seems to be developing a need for a "new" musician. By the evidence of the works contained on a new Columbia disc (stereo, MS 7284, \$5.98), he must be willing to accept a tape as an equal partner, thus making a new kind of quintet of the "old" quartet, if he is willing to follow Leon Kirchner's lead; or he must convert himself into a kind of counting machine, if he acquires a fancy for Henry Weinberg's Quartet No. 2.

To be sure, the utilization of taped information (to provide it with its properly scientific name) as an adjunct to, or a soloist with, a conventional ensemble is not all that new (there's that word again). The Dutch Henk Badings did it day before yesterday, the Ussachevsky-Luening team has included it in their ruminations as a matter of course, and it has even come under concert hall scrutiny in the esthetic of Stockhausen (among others).

Kirchner's endeavor strikes me as somewhat more probing and, in a limited sense, more productive than those of most predecessors. That is to say, he has obviously undertaken to arrive at a new (pardon!) formulation of the quartet in which the sonorous extremes available by electronic means are utilized to strengthen, enlarge, and extend the registers available to the composer working with two violins, viola, and cello. Whether this can be realized as part of a valid creative concept rather than merely as a source of novel content is the point at issue.

In the present state of my listener awareness and reaction to so unconventional a sound source, I confess to finding in this project much of what Kirchner describes in his notes as "a certain listener's fatigue . . . it could be boredom" with even "an exemplary electronic piece" by others. This, if I interpret him correctly, he has sought to overcome in his own work by combining "instruments with electronic sounds and filters. The instrumental qualities are then somehow reflected, extended, and enlarged." But there is that old bugaboo, for me, still: the impersonality of the electronic sound, its persistency in tinging—after awhile—almost any context in which it is utilized with the mawkish assault of a

horror sound track. I honor Kirchner for a creative effort to realize a creative purpose and hope that I can, someday, hear it as he does. But I wonder when?

The players of the Beaux-Arts Quartet (Charles Libove and Bernard Eichien, violins; John Graham, viola; and Bruce Rogers, cello) perform their part of this Pulitzer Prize-winning work (1967) with devotion, fine tone, and what sounds to be a real sense of re-creative participation.

Weinberg's quest for a new result leads not only to (in his own words) "the replacement of the usual three or four closed movements by twelve interconnected short ones," but also by "uninterruptedly shifting textures, constant changes of tempo, and elastic rhythmic movements" which allow "the sense of continuity to operate subliminally." Proceeding from the intention to its execution, Weinberg states: "The flexibility of rhythmic flow in my Quartet is controlled subliminally by an enlarged system of rhythm. The rhythm of individual lines and of the ensemble result from combinations drawn from the simultaneous occurrence of the beats of many different tempi." The uneven and interrupted sequences of sound that result are the basis of my reference to its players (Matthew Raimondi and Anahid Ajemian, violins; Bernard Zaslav, viola; and Seymour Barab, cello) as "counting machines."

It is Weinberg's hope that he has created in this Naumburg Foundation Award work (1967) "a meaningful totality—one that will reveal more of its detail with each hearing." At my first three hearings I was still in dogged pursuit of an ear-line relating one splash of sonority to the next, determined—if I possibly could—to ascertain the basis for Weinberg's "challenge to the listener." That is "not only relating contiguous sections, but of cross-relating backward and forward to everything else." If Weinberg has, in fact, achieved *that*, he has achieved a musical result. It is reassuring at least to know that he accepts the *need* for such interrelationship, and includes a listener among his calculations. The Composers Quartet, as it calls itself, goes about its task with composure, good sound, and unanimity of purpose. More than that I cannot say, save to praise the recording also.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

Recordings Reports I

Orchestral LPs

Data

Bassett: Variations for Orchestra. Radio Zurich Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jonathan Sternberg. **Donovan:** Passacaglia on Vermont Folk Tunes; *Epos*. Polish National Radio Orchestra, Jan Krenz conducting. CRI stereo, SD 203, \$5.95.

Dessau: *In Memoriam Bertolt Brecht*; Bach Variations. Paul Dessau conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Philips stereo, PHS 900-208, \$5.98.

Kraft: *Contextures: Riots—Decade '60*; Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra. Zubin Mehta conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. **Copland:** *Lincoln Portrait*. Mehta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic; with Gregory Peck, speaker. London stereo, CS 6613, \$5.98.

Pergolesi: *L'Olimpiade* (Overture). **Handel:** *Il Pastor Fido* (Overture). **Grétry:** *Le Jugement de Midas* (Overture). **Scarlatti:** Sinfonia in B. **Rameau:** *Pygmalion* (Overture). **Bononcini:** *Polifemo* (Overture). **Sacchini:** *Oedipe à Colone* (Overture). **Méhul:** *La Chasse du Jeune Henri* (Overture). Raymond Leppard conducting the New Philharmonia Orchestra. Philips stereo, PHS 900-235, \$5.98.

Smetana: *Bartered Bride* (Overture). **Weinberger:** Polka and Fugue (*Schwanda*). **Dvorák:** *Carnival Overture*. **Mendelssohn:** *Fingal's Cave Overture*. **Strauss:** "Dance of the Seven Veils" (*Salome*). Fritz Reiner conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Victrola stereo, VICS 1424, \$2.50.

Report

The addition of the Bassett Variations to the list of other Pulitzer Prize winners on records is a contribution to the documentation of that series for which the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters are entitled to grateful thanks. It identifies Bassett as a composer of decided competence and imaginative powers whose concept of "variations" is both original and stimulating. To some extent it relates to germ cells and tonal colorations more than to thematic elaboration (he professes not to be concerned with thematic matter in any ordinary sense), but the structure that evolves is sizable, in any case. Donovan, working with materials clearly re-

lated to those emerging from his past, has created a fresh-sounding, aurally absorbing reworking of the passacaglia procedure. It has considerable architectural appeal, as well as a pervasive character of its own that parallels, without in any way being indebted to, certain works of Vaughan Williams. *Epos*, which precedes it, also conveys Donovan's devotion to substance rather than easy effect. Sternberg's leadership of the Bassett is expert, clarifying, and explicit; Krenz's of the Donovan works not quite as serviceable to the composer's purpose. Both mark a continuation in the upgrading of recorded quality for this label.

Best known here as the musical collaborator in Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Dessau's output has had little attention otherwise (save for the production of his Brecht-derived *Lukullus* at the Juilliard a few years ago). This is not only a special reason for greeting this coupling, but an occasion for directing attention of performing groups to Dessau's output and its interests. In the works herein offered, those interests are variable, for his idiom bears some becoming accus-

To write the "concerto" part of a percussion work is no great problem, especially for one—such as Kraft—whose vocation is playing the timpani in an orchestra. The question is, rather, what does one do with the orchestra while the timpani is being expounded? On the whole, Kraft has succeeded best in the lighter, more lyric sections, where he can utilize to advantage a considerable sense of delicate sonorities and swift-moving patterns. In the necessary sections of contrast, Kraft inclines to outbursts and interjections that are superficially vigorous, but lack real intellectual drive. The later *Contextures* fulfills the implications of its subtitle ("Riots—Decade '60"), which is decidedly "percussionable." It is all put together with a sure hand, for Kraft is at all times keenly aware of what he is doing with sonorities. What I listen for, but do not hear enough of, is an idea-

This is a collection far more notable for inclusiveness than exclusivity: that is to say, not everything is of equal quality, but everything is worth hearing and having. This applies especially to the Grétry Overture, the Scarlatti Sinfonia (a rare instance, on records, of an instrumental work by him not for a keyboard instrument), and Méhul's *La Chasse du Jeune Henri*. Handel's *Il Pastor Fido* music is a known quality, and welcome whenever available. Leppard,

who is harpsichordist for these performances as well as conductor, is an excellent scholar and skilled leader. There is a variation, in interpretative quality, from one work to another, but the norm is never less than good. This is one of those records to buy and put away, for its life in the catalogue is not likely to be prolonged, and when it is gone, the matter on it will go also. Excellent recording.

In addition to the expectably high quality of orchestral performance embodied in them, these reissues bear exceptional testimonial to the quality of re-creative art Reiner was achieving in the 1954-57 period that they represent. This may be noted, successively, in the uncommon definition of basses, etc. in the *Bartered Bride* Overture, the seemingly perversely leisurely tempo in the Weinberger Fugue (which only enhances its climax), the subtlety and fi-

ness of the *Carnival Overture*, the surpassingly imaginative *Fingal's Cave* (with every resonant wave overlapping the other), and, of course, the completely controlled, sinuously exciting "Dance of the Seven Veils." One would have to search far among orchestral records originating these days to find a comparable quality in so diverse a miscellany of styles as that represented here. Early but satisfactory stereo.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

The Other Side

Thomas Heinitz

Berlioz in the Strand; Songs by Prince Albert

FOLLOWING a comparative lull in June, when there was only one all-Berlioz concert on the centenary front (Régine Crespin and the Orchestre de l'RTF under Jean Martinon in Royal Festival Hall), the opening of the Promenade Concerts with the *Grande Messe des Morts* under Colin Davis's direction has served to demonstrate that the French not only care less than we do for one of their few composers of real genius, but also tend to perform his music less well than do their British counterparts.

Before this reaches print, Davis will also have directed a concert version of *Béatrice et Bénédict*, *Le Damnation de Faust* will be staged by Sadler's Wells under the musical direction of Charles Mackerras, and Covent Garden will be preparing for its mid-September opening with the first of eight performances of *Les Troyens*. Once again the conductor will be Colin Davis, and the project will eventually appear on discs bearing the Philips label.

Previously, Berlioz's great musical idol, Gluck, held sway at the Royal Opera, where Solti directed a new production of *Orfeo* with the talented and personable young Australian mezzo, Yvonne Minton, in the title role. Though sung in Italian, it incorporated much of the additional music Gluck wrote for the French version in order to involve the Royal Ballet more fully in this venture. The performance lacked stylistic consistency due to Solti's fundamentally romantic approach and Miss Minton's want of power and solidity in the lower reaches of her voice. Nevertheless, there was a great deal to enjoy, both musically and visually, whereas the earlier revival of Verdi's *Macbeth*, marking the Covent Garden debut of soprano Elena Suliotis, was an occasion best forgotten save as a warning that exceptionally high seat prices offer no guarantee of commensurate artistic rewards. True, the title role was admirably sung and acted by the Greek baritone, Kostas Paskalis, but Miss Suliotis—whose singing in the Decca recording of *Nabucco* a few years ago suggested a major talent in the making—had little to offer save some exceptionally loud notes in certain parts of her voice and a fairly striking physical presence. Of genuine musical or histrionic ability, she failed

to provide any convincing evidence.

In the sphere of recorded music, much the most important news of recent weeks was the complete abandonment by all Britain's record manufacturers of Resale Price Maintenance. Although the law abolishing RPM as a general principle was passed by Parliament more than five years ago (under the last Conservative Administration), an amendment had been incorporated to placate certain commercial interests under which a judicial tribunal would decide whether particular industries might be allowed, in the public interest, to continue to operate RPM. Throughout these years the major record manufacturers, acting in concert, repeatedly declared their intention to put their case before this tribunal and purported to be confident of success. The hearings in question were scheduled for the coming autumn, but they will not take place now since the companies have decided "on legal advice" to withdraw their application and henceforth comply with the provisions of the 1964 act.

Since the record industry's case for continuing RPM was probably as strong as any (the average price of discs had been steadily diminishing over the past decade, rising rates of purchase tax had gradually whittled down retailers' profits, and any cut-price creaming off of pop-disc sales by drugstores and supermarkets would inevitably put a high proportion of specialist record shops out of business), it now appears that the setting up of the tribunal was little more than a piece of political chicanery. Its creation allayed the fears of the business community, but its terms of reference can now be seen to have been so loaded—requiring proof positive

that the continuance of RPM would operate in the public interest—as to ensure that no one might be allowed to escape.

What the long-term outcome will actually be, only time can tell; certainly the audio field, where RPM ceased some while ago, is no real guide since those who seek to buy equipment generally need expert advice, specialist technical help, and after-sales service. Even here, however, plenty of cheap-jacks are sure to flourish at the expense of those who seek to provide a genuine service to the public, and, with records, the situation could easily become much more serious since present margins of less than 25 per cent already make it difficult for shops to keep a comprehensive selection of classical discs on their shelves. Already on the day following the manufacturers' announcement, the national press carried front-page stories of price slashing by several chains of shops. Along with recent, disturbing accounts that some manufacturers were engaged in surreptitious cut-price "dumping" of surplus stocks, record retailing as we have known it in the past may well be in the melting pot, with long-term consequences from which the industry as a whole can hardly hope to remain immune.

After a barren period, EMI has come up with a fairly substantial release for this month, containing among other things a number of Russian-made recordings. Tchaikovsky's First Symphony is played by the U.S.S.R. Symphony Orchestra under Svetlanov (the disc also containing some pieces by Liadov); two further albums by the same orchestra and conductor, both of them admirable, offer Rachmaninoff's First Symphony and his *Isle of the Dead*, the latter coupled with Scriabin's extraordinarily eclectic *Poem of Ecstasy*.

Last, from Argo, we have a program of early nineteenth-century German songs which may well delight many listeners by their undoubted melodious charm, besides providing a rich fund of suitable material for collectors who like to subject family and friends to musical guessing games. For this music was composed, mainly in his late teens and early twenties, by Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha who later became Queen Victoria's Prince Consort. The timing of this issue may not be wholly unconnected with the recent Investiture of Britain's cello-playing heir apparent as Prince of Wales, but the music, excellently sung by members of the Purcell Consort and beautifully recorded, is attractive enough not to require any extra-musical reasons in order to arouse our interest.

