

Salvaging the Past

By HERBERT WEINSTOCK

LONDON Records has issued a two-disc set entitled *A Festival of Baroque Operas* (OSA 1270 stereo, \$11.59), with Richard Bonyngue conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ambrosian Singers, and a group of soloists headed by Joan Sutherland. It consists of excerpts from two eighteenth-century operas: Karl Heinrich Graun's *Montezuma* (1755) and Giovanni Battista Bononcini's *Griselda* (1718). Internal evidence strongly suggests that the two records were not at first intended to be yoked together (the individual record numbers are not contiguous; two separate brochures quite unlike in typography are provided, one for each opera). Thus associating them may not have been a good idea. For, at least as represented by these disjunct excerpts, the Bononcini is a dull run-of-the-mill representative of early-eighteenth-century idiom, whereas the Graun is astonishingly original, moving, and beautiful.

Bononcini was, of course, with Nicola Piccinni, one of Handel's two most publicized London "rivals." His setting of the story of "Patient Griselda" used a libretto by Apostolo Zeno, at least when it was first performed in Milan (Teatro Regio Ducal, December 26, 1718). When the opera was staged in London under the auspices of the Royal Academy (March 5, 1722), however, the text had been revised by Paolo Antonio Rolli. *Griselda* became well enough known so that Richard Steele put conversation about it into his 1723 comedy, *The Conscious Lovers*. For this recording of its overture and nineteen of its vocal sections, Mr. Bonyngue edited it and brought in two harpsichords and two recorders. His soloists are—in addition to Mrs. Bonyngue (Joan Sutherland)—Margreta Elkins, Monica Sinclair, Lauris Elms, and Spiro Malas. The performances are prevailingly stylish and convincing, though Miss Sutherland does not always distinguish between the sounds of Italian vowels or articulate consonants clearly, and Miss Sinclair often produces peculiar hollow tones, particularly in her middle register. I should not call this successful restoration—partly because not much to restore seems to have been available. One number—Rambaldo's "Eterni dei," well sung by Mr. Malas—so closely resembles Polyphemus's "O ruddier than the cherry" in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* that one won-

ders who was borrowing from whom.

Graun's *Montezuma* appears to have been something altogether different. The opera is itself of peculiar interest. The libretto was written by Frederick the Great in French and then translated into Italian for Graun's use. Furthermore, the King had derived its action from his friend Voltaire's *Alzire*—which was also to be the source (with Peru and Incas replacing Mexico and Aztecs) of Salvatore Cammarano's libretto for Verdi's *Alzira* (1845). To the royal text, Graun—to judge on the basis of the overture, battle music, and vocal numbers of this recorded performance—composed an intensely dramatic, varied, and highly original score. With stage settings by Giuseppe Galli Bibiena and with two of its roles sung by the great soprano Giovanna Astrua and the castrato Giovanni Tedeschi (called Amadori), *Montezuma* was a notable success when first staged in Berlin (January 6, 1755), and was played often thereafter.

This time, Mr. Bonyngue again employs two harpsichordists, Miss Sutherland, Miss Elms, and Miss Sinclair; but the other singers are different, being Rae Woodland, Elizabeth Harwood, and Joseph Ward. Miss Sutherland and Miss Sinclair again demonstrate their remarkable capabilities and especially irritating faults; the others are superb. Miss Woodland's singing of the extraordinary "Erra quel nobil core" and Miss Elms's of the stirring "Ah, d'inflessibil sorte" tell us how mid-eighteenth-century Italianate opera seria really worked. What a refreshing relief from constant repetition of "standard repertoire opera" could be provided by a reasonably complete staged performance or a recording of so striking a musical drama (the score is available in Volume XV of the *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*). For introducing us to *Montezuma*, Mr. Bonyngue and his colleagues deserve real gratitude.



Your favorite
record reviewer
probably owns a Dual
automatic turntable.

19 out of 20
hi-fi experts do.
They appreciate,
as you will,
Dual's smooth,
quiet operation
and many precision
features. One is
the flawless 1/2
gram tracking of
its friction-free
tonearm. Others
are constant-speed
motors, accurate
adjustments for
stylus force and
anti-skating, auto-
matic cueing and
variable pitch
control.

The Dual 1019,
\$139.50.

Other models
from \$79.50.

For full
information and
lab test reports,
write United Audio,
535 Madison Ave.,
New York,
N.Y. 10022

Dual
1019

LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR

The Johansen Timetable

WITH REGARD TO the recent Johansen *affaire* and Irving Kolodin's statement in MUSIC TO MY EARS [Feb. 1] that "the quest led, not much more than thirty-six hours before concert time, to Gunnar Johansen," I can tell you the following.

On Monday, January 13, one of our secretaries handed me a note at 12:50 p.m. and said, "This is urgent." The note read: "Call Roger Hall right away—Operator 430 in Philadelphia—517-3784." I did, and Mr. Hall briefly described the Peter Serkin/Ormandy predicament, asked whether I knew the Beethoven D-major Piano Concerto (I did, but only as a listener), told me that Arrau, Frager, Johannesen, Lateiner, Wild, and Claude Frank all had turned him down, and asked whether I knew anyone who might save the day. "What about Gunnar Johansen?" "Can you get him for us?" (Mr. Hall knew that Johansen and I were friends.) I told him I would try. After many long-distance calls, Johansen finally was located. He called me at 2:45. I explained the situation and, with characteristic understatement, he said that it seemed "a sportive proposition." I gave him the number to call in Philadelphia and cautioned him to call it *before* leaving for the airport. I knew no more until 6:30 when Mr. Hall called again, this time from New York, to say that he had just heard the news but was astounded that Johansen had agreed to play the work for the first time in his life on such short notice.

Thus, the text properly should have read, "the quest led, not much less than nineteen hours before concert time, to Gunnar Johansen."

FRANK COOPER,
Professor of Piano,
Butler University,
Indianapolis, Ind.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Shouldn't an hour be deducted for Central Time vs. Eastern?*

Browning's Ravel

IN THE REVIEW of John Browning's RCA Victor recording of the Ravel *Sonatine*,

etc. [MISCELLANEOUS LPS, Jan. 25], it is mentioned that this seems to be the first recording of music of Ravel made by Mr. Browning.

Actually, a fine and much-admired performance of the Left Hand Concerto was released by Capitol (SP 8545) in 1961 with Mr. Browning, Erich Leinsdorf, and the Philharmonic Orchestra. This recording is still fine, still much-admired, and still very much available.

MARK STERN,
Angel Records
New York, N.Y.

Down with Rock

SHAME ON SR. You should be more than a cultural weather vane, responding to every fetid breeze that blows off the polluted waters of rock 'n' roll. ["The Rolling Stones: Beggars' Triumph," SR, Jan. 25.]

Were it not for the enormous economic power of teen-agers, there would be no rock groups. Were it not for a very few adults—nostalgic or bitter about their own youth, but, at any rate, insecure about their present—there would be no one to review these groups.

Could it be, gentlemen, that you don't even yet suspect that the rock 'n' roll kings aren't wearing any clothes? Rest assured: they are entirely naked—of both taste and talent. The myth of their clothes is entirely economic in origin, and more's the shame to SR for having been duped.

WILLIAM C. SCOBLE,
Stephenville, Tex.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The purpose of the column is to seek out the naked and the dead from the live and the meaningful.*

Down, Down, Down with Rock

IT IS INDEED unfortunate that no one aided me when rock 'n' roll enthusiasts disputed so warmly my effort to keep the RECORDINGS section free of encroachment with lesser stuff. They seized upon my word, "garbage," to define the corpus of their art, saying there's substance to it, citing certain palatable morsels; by their sleekness, alley cats bear witness to the fact that the cans contain some nourishment.

Those who appreciate our heritage, musical or otherwise, by their silence accept the alloyment that an unconscionable mi-

nority foists upon them in the guise of modernity. We are told to seek the nuggets in a cloaca of amplification, animalism, and amorality.

My sincere thanks for limiting reviews of other than classical music to the very few pages allocated in the last two RECORDINGS sections.

JULIUS B. KAISER,
Jamaica, N.Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *See above—and below.*

Up with Pop

I CONGRATULATE you on the inception of your "Pop in Perspective" [SR, Oct. 26, 1968]. Pop music is indeed becoming hard to ignore. I realize that the column is aimed at the older readers of your magazine. And your attention to them is appreciated. But, please try to tone down some of Miss Sander's overblown conclusions. In the future it would be nice to see less attention paid to pretentious verbiage and more to actual content.

JAMES FIKEJS,
Missouri University,
Columbia, Mo.

Stones and Doors

I THOROUGHLY enjoyed Ellen Sander's review of the Rolling Stones album *Beggars Banquet* ["The Rolling Stones: Beggars' Triumph," SR, Jan. 25]. I find fault with only one statement in an otherwise flawless evaluation of the Stones. I do not feel that Mick Jagger "is the prototypical sex symbol of rock." For that Dionysian distinction, I feel only Jim Morrison of the Doors adequately qualifies.

LARRY WATTERS,
University of Washington,
Seattle, Wash.

Slavic or West Indian?

I FOUND Ellen Sander's article on the Beatles' new album to be, on the whole, an accurate appraisal of their new work ["The Beatles: Plain White Wrapper," SR, Dec. 28, 1968]. I would, however, like to take issue with Miss Sander as to the origin of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da." Miss Sander called it "a Slavic gypsy folk song à la Beatles." Actually, it is a West Indian ditty à la Beatles. And to be more specific, it has a Jamaican origin. The music is based on the "ska," a musical style popular a few years ago in Jamaica. The most telling evidence supporting its Jamaican origin is the first line of the third verse—"Happy as a Rasta in the marketplace." A Rasta is short for a member of the Rastafarian cult, native only to the island of Jamaica. Therefore, it would seem to me that Miss Sander jumped the gun in labeling this particular tune before making inquiry into its true nature.

MAYNARD CALNEK,
Chicago, Ill.



Compliments of the house

GARRARD would like to send you the just-published, 24 page, full color Comparator Guide which includes an explanation of the remarkable synchronous Synchro-Lab Motor.™

Garrard®

Mail this coupon to:
Dept. EB4-9, Westbury, N.Y. 11590.

Please send Comparator Guide.

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....Zip.....

British Industries Co., division of Avnet, Inc.

