

Orchestral LPs

Data

Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique*. Leopold Stokowski conducting the New Philharmonia Orchestra. London stereo, SPC 21031, \$5.79.

Dvořák: *Slavonic Dances* (Op. Nos. 46 and 72). George Szell conducting the Cleveland Orchestra. Columbia stereo, MS 7208, \$5.98.

Handel: *Organ Concertos* (Op. 7, Nos. 1-6). Carl Weinrich, organ; with Arthur Fiedler conducting. RCA Victor stereo, LSC 7052, \$11.98 (two discs).

Lalo: *Symphonie espagnole*. Ravel: *Tzigane*. Itzhak Perlman, violin; with André Previn conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. RCA Victor stereo, LSC 3073, \$5.98.

Mozart: *Concerto in C* (K. 314). Leon Goossens, oboe; with Colin Davis conducting. *Symphony No. 34 in C* (K. 338). Davis conducting The Sinfonia of London. Victrola stereo, VICS 1382, \$2.50.

Mozart: *Serenata Notturna* (K. 239); *Divertimenti* (K. 136, 137, 138). Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. DGG stereo, SLPM 139003, \$5.79.

Report

Despite the alphabet of conductors who have been associated with this work, and the long years of phonographic effort associated, under S, with Stokowski, there is no ready recollection of a predecessor for this partnership with Berlioz (or, really, of any history of a concert hall affiliation). Thus it has interests for either Stokowski or Berlioz enthusiasts, as well as for those who are both. These interests ebb and flow in the first three sections, which are characterized by the kinds of liberties Stokowski has always indulged where tempi and dynamics are concerned, also by the finesse of performance

Those who wonder a) whether these fine performances are the same as those which originally circulated in a two-disc set and b) whether they should be aggrieved at their appearance now on a single disc are c) both right and d) wrong. They are basically the same fine performances included previously in M2S 726, but the transfer to a single disc has been achieved at the elimination of the *Carnival Overture* included on Side 4 of the original issue, and also by the suppression of most repeats in the sixteen

According to the liner comments of J. Merrill Knapp, professor of music at Princeton, Handel's organ concertos are "essentially happy, improvisatory music. . .," an opinion with which no one would be disposed to quarrel. It would, indeed, have yielded more engaging results had something of the "happy" and the "improvisatory" found its way into these performances, which are, for my taste, rather strait-laced and slow moving. The best results occur on the last of the four sides, where the character of No. 5 in G minor and (especially) No. 6 in B flat accord

If there has been a more beautifully played, fully satisfying version of Lalo in recent years, it hasn't made its way to my turntable. This applies not only to the uniformly admirable Perlman, whom I have yet to hear give an off-hand or indifferent performance of anything, but also to the orchestral support directed by Previn. The partnership presents the work in full five-movement form, and, if the "Intermezzo" is not a work of arresting individuality (for which reason it is customarily omitted), it has its place in the sequence. For that matter,

There is nothing on the sleeve of this issue to date its time of recording, though its attribution to The World Record Club is a clue of sorts. To judge from the cover picture of Goossens and Davis, the conductor therein represented is rather a younger man than one just named to succeed Georg Solti as musical head of Covent Garden. Whatever the age, the consequential fact is that this is vintage Goossens, showing him in command of all the finesse, facility, and taste that made his name a legend prior to his unfortunate lip accident in 1962 (another

Prior experience has taught that Karajan's adventures into this literature are apt to be something special, and this is no exception. As is his wont, Karajan's view of the delightfully scored (two string ensemble, and timpani) *Serenata* is very much his own, with a broader, more ceremonial tempo than the "Menuetto" is usually accorded, and an accordingly broad statement of the concluding "Rondo." Unconventional as it is, it conjures up pictures—as one Salzburger to another—of a social scene that may well have been in Mozart's mind. The three earlier "Salzburg" *Divertimenti* provide relatively less for the sophistications of Karajan to concern themselves with, but No. 3 in F

which has long equated LS/MFT with "Leopold Stokowski Means Fine Tone." It is on Side 2 (the "Scène aux champs" is split across the turn-over) that the real focus of the recording becomes apparent, with the contrabassoon plucked out of context and brought to the ear as a solo instrument, percussion over-prominently displayed, and the gimmickry of London's "Phase 4," which makes some pop records entertaining, misapplied. Thus, the match of Stokowski and Berlioz is a tie, with the engineers casting the deciding vote against the composer.

dances. Chances are that neither will detract from their appeal to those who want as good a performance as there is of these irresistibly appealing and enduringly refreshing works. At one time, that would have meant the festival of dance conducted by Václav Talich, but Szell's command of substance has grown steadily in the last two decades, and the finesse with which he achieves his objectives is beyond most competitors. For all the crowding, the sound remains excellent.

with Weinrich's disposition, and the result, if not happy in the jolly sense, is happy in the match of music and manner. The Fiedler Sinfonietta, as the accompanying group is called, does a performance well worthy of Commonwealth Avenue, though it strikes me that Fiedler had gotten better, even happier, results in such music on a prior occasion (with E. Power Biggs). The organ is the Holtkamp instrument in the General Theological Seminary in New York. Sound clean, balance good.

both Ps regard the orchestra as legitimately entitled to more prominence than it commonly enjoys, and the work is much the better for it, especially as Previn's blending of solo and orchestral sounds shows that he is attaining much more command of such niceties than he formerly possessed. The Ravel is also well played, though not with quite the flair and dash of the Lalo. The production team headed by Peter Delheim, with Alek Rosner as recording engineer, merits mention for an uncommonly vivid, well-balanced presentation.

fact omitted from the liner copy, which offers a biographical sketch both scanty and inadequate). The lingeringly exquisite phrasing of the slow movement suggests that Goossens is savoring every moment of fulfillment. The C-major ("ohne Minuet") is capably performed, but without the decisiveness of thrust which characterizes Davis's work these days. Both works are attractively reproduced and, at the quoted price, decidedly in the bargain category. (Late word is that the year of this vintage Goossens is 1960.)

takes a surprising turn, as it progresses toward a maturity of thought and expression in which Mozart, at sixteen, was anticipating the "older" Mozart—say seventeen, or seventeen and a half. The playing throughout is a model of the meticulous and the finely cut (in a tailoring sense). However, it is clear that, in this music, Karajan aspires to make the Berlin Philharmonic sound as much like the Vienna Phil. as possible. In this he succeeds to the extent of disguising the normally more incisive Berlin Philharmonic string sound. The question is: Has it been done in the actual playing itself? Or is it a function of specially selected microphones and a filtering arrangement? A clear answer would be welcome.

—IRVING KOLOBIN.

Music's Debt to Ernest Ansermet

Arthur Haddy, Chief Engineer, London-Decca, talks with Thomas Heinitz.

WITH THE DEATH of Ernest Ansermet, at the age of eighty-five, Decca has lost a friend of long standing and an outstanding musician whose later career was intimately bound up with the company's spectacular progress in recording techniques since the end of World War II. Although our permanent association with the great Swiss conductor began in 1946, when he came to London and led the London Philharmonic in the first of several famous recordings of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, Ansermet's name first appeared on Decca labels as long ago as 1929.

This was almost a decade before I joined the company, and the music he then recorded with a scratch ensemble (described as the Decca String Orchestra) at the Chenil Galleries in Chelsea comprised six of Handel's Opus 6 Concerti Grossi. When Ansermet came to London in 1946, we had already used our freshly developed ffr technique on a number of recordings by the National Symphony Orchestra under Sidney Beer, but it was Ansermet's set of *Petrouchka* that first brought home to critics and collectors that recording techniques had taken a dramatic step forward.

At those sessions it soon became clear that Ansermet, with his remarkable ear for textures and inner balance, his stimulating yet businesslike approach, and his keen interest in what we were trying to achieve, was the collaborator we needed. Orchestra and recording crew found him most congenial to work with, and the records that were produced at these Kingsway Hall sessions set a standard that was not surpassed until the arrival of LP. But it was not only new concepts in hi-fi which Ansermet brought to us in 1946; for I recall how, at a sandwich lunch between sessions, he astonished all of us present by producing a tin labeled Nescafé that he had brought from Switzerland and regaled us with our first sight, smell, and taste of instant coffee.

Although Ansermet had founded his own Geneva orchestra, the Suisse Romande, as long ago as 1918, his first postwar recordings for Decca were made with the London Philharmonic and Paris Conservatoire orchestras. However, when we established Decca Europe in Zurich in 1947, the way was opened for us to record Ansermet on his home ground.

At that time, the Suisse Romande was still a comparatively small ensemble, based on six cellos and four basses, but after a rare outburst from Ansermet in reply to a control-room demand for "more bass"—"How can I make four basses sound like eight?"—steps were taken to enlarge the establishment to normal symphonic proportions. From that time onward Geneva became our most fruitful location for orchestral recordings, and it is surely no exaggeration to claim that Ansermet and his polyglot orchestra (which includes not only Swiss players but also musicians from France, Italy, Germany, and Britain) owed their international reputation very largely to the records they made for us.

I have already mentioned Ansermet's very special qualifications as a conductor who pursued the very ideals of tonal fidelity and clarity of texture toward which we were striving. As a former mathematician, he was always keenly interested in the technical means we employed; and, whenever a new piece of equipment was installed at the Victoria Hall, "Uncle Ernie" demanded a full explanation from our engineers. He was always ready to help us by adjusting the dynamic range of his performances to the requirements of the medium, thereby avoiding arbitrary compression from the control room wherever possible; yet, unlike some conductors, he never sought to usurp the producer's and engineer's functions. Indeed, our relationship with Ansermet largely owed its happy and fruitful nature to the complete confidence each felt in the other's skill and expert knowledge.

Ansermet exercised absolute authority



Ernest Ansermet—"quickly grasped the enormous musical potential of the new medium. . . ."

over his orchestra, and the players respect—no doubt reinforced by the knowledge that he had the power to fire anyone on the spot—expressed itself in a degree of discipline rarely found in the recording studio. Whenever we listened to playbacks during or after a session, as many of the players as could be accommodated would join us and offer valued suggestions, and Ansermet's own overriding loyalty to the orchestra he had created showed itself when he rejected the possibility of replacing Charles Munch in Boston after his disabling heart attack in 1953.

It was characteristic of Ansermet's musical approach that, when we began to use tape for our master recordings, he welcomed the opportunity this gave him to extend the length of his "takes" to nine or ten minutes. At the same time, his feeling for musical pace was incredibly precise—when he recorded Ravel's *Boléro*, the discrepancy between different takes never exceeded two seconds—and this greatly facilitated any splicing that had to be done.

When we began to make stereo recordings in 1953—in a separate, experimental control room, while mono recordings were made, as before, in the main control center—Ansermet would listen to the experimental tapes and provide much valuable criticism, though he tended to be disturbed initially by the fact that the orchestral balance differed markedly from that which he experienced on the rostrum. Yet, unlike some of his colleagues, he quickly grasped the enormous musical potential of the new medium, and, by the time stereo discs were launched in 1958, Ansermet had already provided us with a sizable stereo repertoire.

Although his early Decca recordings established his international reputation as a specialist conductor of early Stravinsky and the French impressionists, this was not entirely due to Ansermet's own predilections but also to the fact that our own advances in recording techniques were shown to best advantage when applied to the more colorful music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, Ansermet resented the widely held notion that his musical sympathies were narrow in range, and in later years he insisted that we give him the opportunity to prove his mettle in a much wider repertoire—Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and even some Wagner and Sibelius.

Among his fellow practitioners he admired Toscanini most unreservedly: Few things gave him so much pleasure in his career as the invitation to conduct the NBC Symphony and the opportunity his New York visits gave him of attending the Maestro's own rehearsals. I also recall the unusual sight of Ansermet on
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