

A Burst of Berlioz

At long last, after years of being more discussed than listened to, Hector Berlioz has reached the stage of being heard almost in full. His representation on stereo up till now has been spread but sketchy. The overtures; several versions of the *Requiem*, *L'Enfance du Christ*, *Nuits d'été*; *La Damnation de Faust* in the less than satisfying versions by Markevitch and Munch; a good *Mort de Cléopâtre* (Tourel-Bernstein) and *Lélio* (Boulez); the four symphonies, three of them copiously duplicated but with no really satisfactory performance of No. 4, the *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*; *Béatrice et Bénédict*, lightweight among his operas; and a few scenes from *Les Troyens*, arbitrarily assembled and cut. Three important works that form an entire wall of the Berlioz edifice—*Les Troyens* (complete), *Benvenuto Cellini*, and the *Te Deum*—have been overlooked, leaving a deplorable gap in our concept of the composer's "monumental" style. The massed trumpets and trombones of the *Requiem* have had to make do, in popular fancy, for that infinitely more sober and complex approach of Berlioz's later years exemplified in *Les Troyens* and the *Te Deum*.

Fortunately, the picture has begun

to change with a complete cycle, in preparation for Philips, conducted by Colin Davis. The entire *Troyens* will be released before long. On the more intimate side we have already been given a *Mort de Cléopâtre*, with the soprano Anne Pashley, as well as much of the seldom heard *Tristia*. And now the mighty *Te Deum*, previously available only on a grandly performed (Sir Thomas Beecham) but dimly reproduced version in mono, has been issued by Philips (stereo, SAL 3724, \$5.98) in what, with the exception of the tenor solo, may well be the finest Berlioz on discs.

Much has been made of the work's alleged similarity to the earlier *Requiem*: its huge dimensions and resurgent approach to the Last Judgment. Even Berlioz, in writing to Liszt after the first performance of the *Te Deum*, declared: "The *Requiem* has a brother." And yet their substance differs. The *Requiem*, nonconformist, emphasizes the vaulting, the rhapsodic. The *Te Deum*, boldly classical, enjoys an interaction of sweeping line and sober detail on the plane of the traditional masters. I should not hesitate to place it alongside the *Missa Solemnis* in architectural strength and perhaps ahead in communicability. Consider

the proportions, the texture (did Berlioz ever spin a more poetic melody than the organ theme of the "Tibi omnes"?), the irresistible rhythmical pulse. As the concluding "Judex crederis"—that juggernaut of terror and salvation—rolls along, the *ostinato* throbbing relentlessly, one is drawn in its wake until (with the final flashing of trumpets, the transfigured reappearance, telescoped and affirmative, of the organ theme) the realization comes that this has been a unique experience in music.

Two instrumental movements not essential to the score as a concert piece—an interlude leading to the "Dignare" and a final "March for the Presentation of the Colors"—have been omitted; and it appears that Berlioz himself set the precedent for this deletion. Thus his *Te Deum* has been integrally recorded, and the result is glorious. The London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, the Wadsworth School Boy's Choir, and organist Nicolas Kynaston fill out a perfect ensemble. Colin Davis gives new and shining proof of his mastery. In the face of such an achievement, I must note a single flaw: the singing of that Gluckian tenor solo, "Te ergo quaesumus," by Franco Tagliavini, who brings to its astringent measures an alien, override flavor. He does not exaggerate; nowhere does he stray from the letter of the score; but his timbre is disturbingly inappropriate.

Not only has Philips come through with the Berlioz "monumental" style. Angel (S-36695) is offering the final act of *Les Troyens* (uncut) with a cast headed by Janet Baker as Dido and including an unspecified Anna, Iopas, Narbal. Alexander Gibson conducts the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. The *raison d'être* for this new recording would seem to be Miss Baker, who is also heard on the disc's reverse side in *La Mort de Cléopâtre*; and in many ways she justifies the choice. Owing to a strange decision on the part of Angel a few years back, Régine Crespin recorded the first part of this act—notably the aria "Adieu, fière cité"—but never got to sing the wonderful closing scene. On the basis of the pages that overlap, I must express a preference for Crespin—she is more womanly, sumptuous, operatic. Yet Baker's "Adieu" comes off quite touchingly; and, although her voice may lack the opulent tone one associates with Dido, it has strength and amplitude at climactic moments. The star aside, this recording works a public service in that it enables us to make contact (before the impending complete *Troyens*) with those magnificent choruses of the final scene. A study of the piano-vocal score can reveal only the music's bare

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—Gérard Neuvecelle.

Studio set up for "Damnation of Faust"—"excellent cast and superb group of players."

Bonynge's "Don Giovanni"

Nearly two hundred years' worth of esteem has been lavished on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Many consider it the perfect opera. Any conductor approaching it must feel the weight of this reverence and attempt to reveal its beauties as best he can. Richard Bonynge, the conductor of the new London recording of the work (stereo, OSA 1434, \$23.92), pays it homage by taking a fresh look at the score. Considering his well-known interest in singing styles of the past, it is not surprising that he has re-examined Mozart's melodic lines—not only as they are written down, but as a singer of Mozart's time might have interpreted his notation.

Five years ago, Charles Mackerras took the same kind of look at *Le Nozze di Figaro* in preparing and conducting performances of the opera at London's Sadler's Wells. His performances may go down in history, eventually, as having marked the beginning of the end of the early twentieth-century style of performing Mozart's operas—a tradition that began in Germany. This *Don Giovanni* recording, by reaching a much larger audience, may prove to be a more important experiment, and the second step in a trend.

All of Mozart's unwritten appoggiaturas are honored in this performance. Hearing them makes it clear that they must be performed if Mozart's melodies are to have their intended grace. For a simple sample of an appoggiatura's elegance, try singing "Deh vieni, non tardar, o gioia bella" (from *Figaro*) as written, with the "bel" of "bella" on the same note as the final syllable, and then try it, as intended, by raising the "bel" a tone so that it is the same note as the "ia" of "gioia." A bumpy ending is replaced by a graceful fall when the appoggiatura is performed. It is difficult to understand how the practice of not performing them ever gained favor. The established Glyndebourne tradition of ignoring them has been, without doubt, an influential factor, since Fritz Busch's performances and recordings were such models of lively, graceful Mozart conducting in other ways. But styles change, and every period must develop its own preferences in performers and the music of the past.

Bonynge's singers also introduce ornaments. These are very discreetly applied and are limited to modest little

cadenzas—made up of just a few notes—at appropriate *fermatas* (pauses which ask for some filling in), and to simple decoration of the melody when an opening theme reappears at the end of an aria. It is possible that Mozart might have expected more elaboration than this, but it is likely that Bonynge consciously (and wisely) decided not to overdo things.

Bonynge makes another bow to eighteenth-century practices when he employs a small chamber orchestra of the size Mozart probably had at his disposal for the opera's first performance in Prague. He could not have found a better one than the English Chamber Orchestra, and he balances its strings and winds nicely. He also turns his attentions to the problems of correctly interpreting Mozart's rhythmic intentions. The other elements of style—tempi, dynamics, and the use of *rubato*—do not seem to concern him as much. His tempi are well judged for the singers' comfort, but frequently tend to be on the bland side. And the manner in which he slows down at the end of some sections is too reminiscent of the ways of the "romantic" conductors. His leadership is controlled and precise within the confines of many individual arias, but he gives the impression of not having charted the superstructure of the opera's two long acts sufficiently well. His concern with detail also appears to blur his view of

the big picture. Dramatic values are underplayed, momentum is not generated from piece to piece, and tension sags. When *Don Giovanni* begins to seem long and tedious (as it does here), something is seriously wrong. Other conductors have planned and shaped this music better. It is Bonynge's lack of dramatic flair that makes this performance so tame and, ultimately, so disappointing. In this respect, he does a disservice to Mozart, notwithstanding the honor he shows him by trying, in other ways, to be ultrafaithful to his intentions.

The cast is made up of virtuoso singers; it had to be. Singers with limited technical skill would not have been able to execute such a vocally elaborate edition of the score. It is a credit to all that they perform in this uncommon style with such authority and without traces of self-consciousness. It is obvious that the performance was painstakingly prepared and rehearsed.

For me, the star of the performance is Pilar Lorengar as Donna Elvira. The slight flutter in her tone may trouble some listeners, but this is a minor matter in view of the excellence of her singing. It is always poised and vibrantly alive. Lorengar, properly, gives us an Elvira who is neither shrewish nor ridiculous, but rather a passionate young woman who has personality—and troubles—enough not to care about her public image (unlike the up-tight Donna Anna, who seems to care for nothing else). For me, she is the best exponent of the role since Schwarzkopf.

Joan Sutherland deserves praise for keeping the difficult but unspectacular role of Donna Anna in her active repertoire. She contributes a well-sung performance, but lacks Lorengar's gift
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"You know what I wish? I wish I belonged to a species that got a new mate every season!"