

HISTORISCHE AUFNAHMEN

BEETHOVEN: Sonatas for piano--No. 1, in f, Op. 2, No. 1; No. 3, in C, Op. 2, No. 3; No. 7, in D, Op. 10, No. 3*; No. 8, in c, Op. 13; No. 13, in E flat, Op. 27, No. 1; No. 14, in c#, Op. 27, No. 2; No. 17, in d, Op. 31, No. 2; No. 18, in E flat, Op. 31, No. 3; No. 21, in C, Op. 53; No. 22, in F, Op. 54; No. 23, in f, Op. 57; No. 26, in E flat, Op. 81a; No. 27, in e, Op. 90*; No. 28, in A, Op. 101; No. 29, in B flat, Op. 106; No. 30, in E, Op. 109; No. 31, in A flat, Op. 110; No. 32, in c, Op. 111. Solomon, pianist. HMV Treasury RLS 722, 7 records. (Mono, except *stereo) Imported by Peters International 619 West 54th Street, New York City 10019.

Listening through this series, along with the two recently reissued Brahms Concerti, has given me an education in the playing of this much-admired pianist. Years ago, having heard a few of Solomon's performances, I had dismissed him as a dull pianist, very competent and adept but lacking in individuality and impulse. I have now learned two things from these recordings. One is not to write off a celebrated performer on inadequate evidence. I still do not like some of the recordings I heard earlier, but they were not the best examples of his playing. The other is that tastes do change with age. Solomon is an interpreter for mature audiences. While he is master of a wide range of expression, his chief virtues tend to be more contemplative than exciting. Some of the playing I once considered dull now seems very beautiful to me. Solomon is still not my favorite pianist--there is not enough temperament in his makeup for that--but I have learned to hear him with great respect and interest.

In general, I feel Solomon is at his best with the more classical orientation of the early sonatas and with the mature depth of the late sonatas rather than with the quirky romantic irregularities of the middle sonatas. Fortunately, he recorded all of the sonatas from No. 26 on, and most of those performances are outstanding. Also, except as I have noted, he takes all marked repeats, including the development and recapitulation of early sonatas. (Strangely, he leaves out a crucial and emphasized repeat in the "Appassionata.")

No. 1 - The first movement is very fast, so much so that triplets are blurred a bit. Solomon brings out appropriate tension, but the music is a bit under-inflected. The second movement is slow and pearly; here, as often, I am very much taken with the beautiful clarity of the pianist's tone. The minuet is good, flowing well, and Solomon makes much of Beethoven's dynamic markings. The finale is quick and animated, with some gruff fortissimos. Throughout the sonata I hear what sounds like mild LP surface noise, although it might be tape hiss.

No. 3 - This was Solomon's first Beethoven Sonata recording (May, 1948), and it is the only one made on 78s. There is some surface noise but otherwise the sound is as good as in the previous sonata. The first

movement is very fast, with much brio and a good sense of humor. I find the second movement too placid, except for a fine fortissimo. The Scherzo is kittenish, without quite enough bite in sforzandi. The finale is superb, fantastically clear for such a rapid tempo.

No. 7 - Here again in the first movement the fortissimos are weak, but otherwise I like the playing very well. The tempo is on the slow side, but it is enlivened by Solomon's clarity and playfulness. His sonority is superb. The second movement, daringly slow, achieves a complete sense of repose, although in the end I feel the tempo may be too slow. Solomon recreates the composer's mysterious atmosphere; his playing is intense and moving. The minuet is slow; dynamics are underplayed in the outer sections but the contrasts are startling in the trio. I would like a slightly quicker tempo in the finale, but the playing is poised and effective even if slightly tame. Overall I find the performance quite good, and the stereo recording is particularly pleasing.

No. 8 - The first movement is classically reserved, although not cold. I do like more excitement in this movement. Solomon has chosen an odd execution of the mordents, but he is consistent about it. The dynamics sound compressed, as though by the recording process rather than by the pianist. The second movement is slow and a bit dull, but the pianist's poise is beautiful. The crescendo at measure 50 begins two measures early, a rare mistake for this artist. The Rondo is taken at a very quick tempo and is very clear, but the playing lacks imagination. Fortissimos are disappointingly tame. On the whole I am disappointed with the performance despite some superb technical execution.

No. 13 - Throughout this is a sober and deeply satisfying performance, one of the rare successes with this piece on records. Solomon's execution is elegant, but he jars the listener with some pleasantly bangy fortes.

No. 14 - A bit of background noise intrudes here. The first movement is alive, not the dead background music we sometimes hear. The tempo is very slow, the playing beautifully controlled. Solomon allows himself just a bit of rhetorical deviation from strict tempo, and it is very effective. The Scherzo sounds amiably quirky, with a wide range of dynamics. The finale is very fast, rhetorically inflected (with a slower tempo for the second theme), full of energy and suspense. The entire performance is superb.

No. 17 - The sound quality is a bit muffled here, although the recording is not particularly early (1954). The first movement is very quick and dramatic, but the second is too placid and the third, while fast, sounds dull to me. Dynamics are underplayed throughout the performance, and I find it rather boring.

No. 18 - This performance misses the mark. The first movement is correct and animated but too dry. There is an annoying periodic tick in part of the movement which sounds like a scratch, leaving me wondering

whether the recording was dubbed from a master tape or an early pressing. The second movement, one of Beethoven's funniest, is earthbound and uninteresting, with flabby staccatos and weak sforzandi. The third and fourth movements are mild and tame, the finale in particular characterized by weak sforzandi and fortissimos and marred by the rare failing of muddy articulation. I wonder how well Solomon knew this sonata; he plays it as though he had not lived with it very long.

No. 21 - I want to hear much more weight and power in this sonata than Solomon provides. The first movement is extremely fast, light, and clean, all kinetic energy with no punch. The introduction is extremely slow, with some sforzandi missing altogether; it sounds dull. The opening of the Rondo, during which the pianist is supposed to hold down the pedal through long phrases, is played entirely without pedal, a singularly perverse execution. The movement overall is maddeningly placid, almost as though the pianist were out to prove he can toss off all this difficult writing without working up a sweat. But the sweat is the point of this music! As a final insult, Solomon opts for detached octaves in place of Beethoven's clearly indicated octave glissandi.

No. 22 - Both movements are played fast and effectively. Solomon shows a good sense of humor throughout, although the music can sound even more wacky (as in Schnabel's hands).

No. 23 - The first movement is very quick and superficially exciting. But too many details are blurred by excessive pedalling, especially chordal passages. The pianist's finger work is impressive but he spoils some of it with heavy feet. The variations are quite slow and poised. I find the interpretation too placid; I like more contrast within the movement. But playing this movement as the calm interlude between two storms is also valid. The finale is quick and well articulated, with excellent rhythm. Solomon makes the acceleration to Presto in the coda count effectively, although the very end of the piece is hectic and blurred by the pedal. Unfortunately, he leaves out the crucial repeat in the finale, clearly marked by Beethoven, "la seconda parte due volte." (Translation: "Play this part twice, dammit!") My overall impression is that this performance is too detached and cool for such fiery music.

No. 26 - While listening to the first movement I noted "moderate passion," a paradox which seems to fit the performance. The playing is beautifully poised, and as usual very clear except for one skimmed-over passage of ascending chords. The Adagio is very slow, maybe even too slow, but also expressive. The finale is somewhat disappointing; the introduction and several later passages are blurry, and fortissimos are subdued. While this is a clear and admirable performance, it lacks inspiration and fails to convince me that the sonata is a great piece of music.

No. 27 - I like the stereo recording, which adds size and depth to the piano tone. The first movement is on the sober side, but Solomon catches its shifting moods very well. The tempo for the second movement is a bit slow, but it is beautifully sustained. The last page is very

touching in its fairylike lightness. Overall the performance is excellent.

No. 28 - This performance is rather detached, emotionally cool. I might call it olympian if I liked it, but I don't, so I call it uncommitted. Oddly, Solomon omits the third repeat in the march; it seems unlikely this would be an editing mistake. The fugal development of the finale is lacking in force.

No. 29 - I have yet to hear a thoroughly satisfying "Hammerklavier" on records, but this is one of the best. The pianist's tone is a bit thin in the first movement, glassy on top, a rare failing. However, the playing has superb propulsion and dynamics, lots of drive. Some passages strain even Solomon's technique, leading to a few ruffled moments, but there are no serious flaws. The Scherzo is played well, although with no special insight. The Adagio is quite slow, and there are places where I wish the pianist had pushed ahead a bit more. This movement has more drama inherent in it than Solomon realizes for us. Still, the music is well sustained and beautifully done. The fugue is, for once, played with sufficient fleetness and weight, a rare and welcome combination. Although a few passages are blurred with pedal, nearly everything remains clear. Overall this is a remarkable and memorable performance.

No. 30 - Sound quality is, regrettably, a bit muffled. The performance itself is exceptionally beautiful. The pianist digs into the music far better than in No. 28; details are executed more forcefully, and the dynamics are good. The rapt hush at the end of the piece is deeply moving. This is satisfying playing on the highest level.

No. 31 - A friend of mine who visited Solomon said this was the pianist's own favorite of his recordings. While the playing is a bit subdued, it is very expressive, always purposeful and full of personal expression. There is a bad tape splice in the inversion of the fugue, the only one I heard in this set. Otherwise I have only praise for this wonderful performance.

No. 32 - Again a fine performance, although the recording (from 1951) shows its age more than most of the others. The playing of the first movement is powerful and very effective. One single detail bothered me, missing sforzandos in the last line of the exposition. The opening of the second movement is very slow and sounds a bit lifeless, but the pianist knows what the music is about and he builds the movement beautifully. The end result, as in all good performances of this sublime piece, is extremely moving. A brief pitch sag mars the first variation; I wish this had been corrected.

In all, this is a truly noteworthy series of recordings. Hearing all of them in a short time left me regretting that Solomon did not remain active long enough to record the remaining sonatas, although I feel his greatest achievements are with the late sonatas. This set will certainly remain in my library.

HMV has presented the eighteen sonatas economically on seven records. Only four sonatas are split between sides, including the "Hammerklavier" which must always be split anyway. The sound quality of the recordings is admirable overall, and the LP processing is exemplary. The program booklet consists only of a brief essay by Bryce Morrison on Solomon's playing of the Beethoven sonatas and a couple of photographs, but the records are what matter. Incidentally, a word to the wise collector: Before this reissue, Solomon's Beethoven Sonata recordings were among the scarcest and most valuable of LP collectors' items, and publications in this series usually do not last long, so I would advise picking up the set without delay. Some of these sonatas have also appeared domestically (Nos. 8, 14, & 23 as Seraphim 60286, Nos. 21 & 28-32 as Turnabout THS-65068/70), but I wouldn't settle for less than this complete set.

BEETHOVEN: Sonatas for piano--No. 1, in f, Op. 2, No. 1; No. 2, in A, Op. 2, No. 2; No. 3, in C, Op. 2, No. 3; No. 4, in E flat, Op. 7; No. 5, in c, Op. 10, No. 1; No. 6, in F, Op. 10, No. 2; No. 7, in D, Op. 10, No. 3; No. 8, in c, Op. 13; No. 9, in E, Op. 14, No. 1; No. 10, in G, Op. 14, No. 2; No. 11, in B flat, Op. 22; No. 12, in A flat, Op. 26; No. 13, in E flat, Op. 27, No. 1; No. 14, in c#, Op. 27, No. 2; No. 15, in D, Op. 28; No. 17, in d, Op. 31, No. 2; No. 18, in E flat, Op. 31, No. 3; No. 19, in g, Op. 49, No. 1; No. 20, in G, Op. 49, No. 2; No. 21, in C, Op. 53; No. 23, in f, Op. 57; No. 30, in E, Op. 109; No. 31, in A flat, Op. 110. Walter Gieseking, pianist. EMI (Italy) Discoteca Classica 3C 153-52384/93, 10 records. Imported by Peters International, 619 West 54th Street, New York City 10019.

These recordings, made between 1951 and 1956, reveal a puzzling, inconsistent, and frequently frustrating artist. At his best, Gieseking was certainly one of the twentieth century's greatest master pianists. His technical facility was tremendous; his tone was always clear and penetrating, beautiful in quality, never harsh. His interpretations over a wide range of music could be deeply satisfying. But too often--particularly in the music of Mozart and Beethoven--he could play like a music machine, notes entering through the eyes and exiting through the fingers without ever touching the heart.

One wonders how the pianist who made a few of these Beethoven recordings, the committed and involved performances, could have tossed off the seemingly indifferent interpretations which make up the bulk of this set. My own hunch is that Gieseking's command of the piano was so complete that he could play most music without any particular effort, and frequently did so. Some of the performances in this set are so bland that they sound like sight reading. Since Gieseking usually memorized scores visually before playing them, it's unlikely that he actually read these scores in the recording studio, but the effect is the same.

The general virtues of these performances are smoothness of execution, the consistently beautiful tone I have mentioned, and care in reading

the notes. A few minor finger slips aside, there are hardly any mistakes in these sonatas. Against these, I would set the pianist's frequent uneasiness with syncopated passages, many of which are awkwardly executed, and the way he tends to rush rests and fermatas. As just one example of this, in the Scherzo of Op. 2 No. 2 there is a five-beat rest, in a passage played three times. Not once does the pianist give the rest its full value; he cuts it to two or three beats. He is also inconsistent about repeats, observing some and ignoring others. In Op. 10 No. 2 he upsets the whole balance of the piece by ignoring the repeats in the first movement, observing both in the second movement, and taking only the first in the finale.

No. 1 - A totally superficial performance, miniaturizing this bold sonata. Giesecking takes no repeats in the first movement but repeats the exposition in the finale. Some passages in the first movement sound surprisingly clumsy, and the big crescendo in the scherzo (a startling passage when played well) goes up only to mezzoforte instead of the indicated fortissimo.

No. 2 - This is one of the best of the set. The first movement is zippy, played with plenty of life and beautifully executed. The Largo is smooth and pretty. The Scherzo is effective, with good dynamics. The concluding Rondo sounds very clever and amusing, with the difficult passages played flawlessly.

No. 3 - Another dead performance like No. 1. The first movement is careful, slow, and deadly dull, with some clumsy passages. The second movement is slow and placid; the third is killed by caution. In the finale the pianist struggles with the music as though he didn't know it at all.

No. 4 - So-so. The first movement seems to suit Giesecking well, but the playing goes downhill from there on. The second movement lacks the required sense of mystery. The third is prosaic, with gracelessly played ornaments. The finale sounds static and detached.

No. 5 - The first movement sounds draggy, with a few inaccurately played details. The second movement, marked "Adagio molto," is very "molto," clean and detached. The third movement is dry and prosaic, and the finale is killed by a conservative tempo and lack of impulse.

No. 6 - The playing is prosaic throughout, offensively indifferent in the second movement, lacking the required boisterousness in the finale.

No. 7 - The beauty of the second movement seems to have affected the pianist greatly. The first movement sounds alive. The second movement is not very intense, but it is poised and classically beautiful. Unfortunately the finale lets us down; it is too bland, with contrasts between the themes minimized where they should be emphasized.

No. 8 - The entire performance remains on the surface of the music. A meaningless rendition.

No. 9 - The whole sonata sounds like sight reading, with coolly objective playing and surprisingly awkward execution of figurations in the second movement.

No. 10 - A reasonably good performance of a relatively uninteresting sonata. The first movement goes with good continuity and impulse. The second is slow and bogs down in places, but the finale is superbly playful.

No. 11 - Very inconsistent playing. The first movement is excellent, not too smooth. The second movement is nicely understated, and lovely; I particularly admire the totally different sound produced by each hand. The third movement is just OK, less interesting than the preceding two. The finale spoils the whole performance for me; the playing is graceless, lumpy, lacking in dynamic contrast (Gieseking even ignores some dynamic markings) and in impulse.

No. 12 - The first three movements are all well played and expressive, and there is considerable feeling in the funeral march. The finale reverts to dead objectivity, and a very slow tempo drains the life from the music.

No. 13 - On the whole a good performance, expressively played, despite a few awkward details.

No. 14 - In the first movement, the pianist's repeated hesitations become an annoying mannerism; the playing is inert and boring. The quirky second movement sounds placid beyond belief. The animated, almost hectic playing of the finale is exciting, but it comes too late to save this performance.

No. 15 - Appropriate playing for this most peaceful, placid sonata. I like a little more ruffling of the surface, but Gieseking pursues his interpretation consistently and successfully. This has been the scarcest of Gieseking's Beethoven recordings; it was issued only on a short-lived French Columbia record.

No. 17 - The first movement is full of fire and brimstone, and the pianist actually makes a few rude noises from his instrument, which I greatly enjoyed. The second movement is a little too slow and is subjected to even further dragging at times, but it remains alive. The finale is slow but very good, with wide dynamics and lots of impulse. This is one of the best performances in the set, although the beautiful charged rhetoric of Schnabel or Lateiner in the slow movement is better yet.

No. 18 - This is so callously played it sounds ugly. The third movement is particularly offensive, as though the pianist disliked what he was playing, but the whole performance shows no identification with the music.

Nos. 19 & 20 - These two little sonatas are even further miniatur-

ized by bland, superficial playing and a complete lack of repeats.

No. 21 - Difficulties such as these seem to involve Giesecking, who usually plays best when he has to work hardest. This performance is animated and exciting throughout, impressive in its depth of tone.

No. 23 - The first movement is very quick and full of drama. The alternating chords in both hands near the end are superbly forceful and clear. The second movement is placid, as usual, not bad although I like a bit more color. The finale is again very quick. The syncopated octave passage is incorrectly accented the first time through (a common problem) but it goes better the second time. Giesecking does take the essential repeat in the finale. At times in the finale he plays with such abandon that a few details are messed up--a welcome relief. Alas, the coda is disappointing; Giesecking accelerates instead of hitting us suddenly with the Presto as Beethoven indicates, and his Presto is only a little faster than his Allegro ma non troppo.

No. 30 - Much to my surprise, this turns out to be a deeply committed and beautiful performance, executed with feeling throughout. Giesecking is incisive where necessary, but I noticed most the poetry of his lyrical passages. The variations may be a trifle cool, but the ending of the piece is exquisite.

No. 31 - My notes say only, "Entire performance offensively insensitive." If No. 30 is (as I believe) the best performance in the set, this one is undoubtedly the worst. It sounds to me like nothing but the sound of one note after another.

This set is the third of six volumes issued by Italian EMI as some kind of monument to Giesecking. I hate big sets like this, which are hard to handle and which force you to buy a large number of records at once. The series undoubtedly looks impressive on a shelf, though. Handle the boxes carefully; they look very sturdy but the edges and corners split easily.

The sound quality of the recordings is generally good, although several of them are afflicted with an excess of tape hiss. Eight of these sonatas (Nos. 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 19, and 20) were recorded in stereo, but most of them have been issued previously only in mono and they are in mono here. I don't understand why, but that's the way it is.

In no case is a sonata split between record sides, which makes for convenient listening. However, some relatively short sonatas are spread over entire sides, while the shortest sonatas are cut two to a side. Intelligent redistribution of the material could have reduced this set to eight records, still without splitting any sonatas between sides or cutting any sides of excessive length.

In all cases but one, these are Giesecking's latest recordings of the sonatas (where more than one exists). The one exception is No. 15, which

was recorded in 1955. Giesecking was at work on a remake in 1956 (!) when he died, leaving only three movements recorded. The only Beethoven sonata recorded by Giesecking which is not here is No. 28, which was done by him only on 78s for U.S. Columbia (X 172).

The sets come with elaborate booklets. Each one I have seen included the same article on Giesecking, by Mario Bortolotto. These Beethoven sonatas also include an article on the music by Giovanni Carli Ballola. Both essays are full of extravagant rhetoric, a style which seems unfortunately popular in European musicology these days; fortunately they are competently translated into English, so at least we get some information. The booklet also contains some good photographs of the pianist, but not one scrap of discographic information--no recording dates, no first or alternate issues, nothing. For the benefit of those who crave such information, here are at least approximate recording dates (supplied, as is all my discographic information on Giesecking, by Stephen E. Lundgren, from his forthcoming Giesecking discography):

- Nos. 1-7 - 1954
- Nos. 8-10 - October, 1956
- No. 11 - 1954
- No. 12 - October, 1956
- Nos. 13-15 - 1955
- Nos. 17-18 - 1955
- Nos. 19-20 - 1956
- No. 21 - 1954
- No. 23 - 1951
- Nos. 30-31 - 1954

All of the recordings were made in London.

On the whole, Giesecking's Beethoven is far from the most desirable segment of his recorded repertoire. I am sure this set will nevertheless attract many collectors. Many of the recordings have not been issued in the U.S., and most of the ones which were published here have long since disappeared. And, of course, there are a few performances which remind us of how good Giesecking's Beethoven playing could be, and seldom was.

MOZART: Piano Sonatas (complete); Sonata in F, K. 533/494; Sonata in F. K. 547a--Allegro & Rondo. EMI Electrola Dacapo 1C 197-03 133/7 M, 5 records.

I am not about to give a detailed report on these performances. Once in a lifetime is enough for that, and I listened through the entire series when Giesecking's Mozart piano music was reissued here by Seraphim. The performances vary somewhat, from pleasingly placid to desperately dull. In his essay, "On the Art of Playing Mozart," reprinted here, Giesecking makes his odd case for what I would call uninformed performances of the

music. "The musician who undertakes to follow Mozart's inspirations as far and closely as possible not only must be above all technical problems, but also above any kind of spiritual strain or exertion--there must be no striving for effects of any sort nor even the underlying thought that the performance is supposed to be an interpretation." Unfortunately, while his musical instincts sometimes overcome this idea, most of Gieseeking's performances here are just what he advocates, superb sight reading virtually devoid of individual insight. In short, they are dull.

Anyone wanting these sonata performances without the rest of Mozart's piano music (virtually every note of it, as included in the series now issued by Seraphim) will do well with the new set. The piano sound is excellent, virtually contemporary in quality, although the recordings are almost a quarter of a century old. (All but four of them were made in a single week in August of 1953.) The pressings are superb, and EMI's compression of the nineteen sonatas onto five records, with no degradation of sound quality, is certainly economical. But I would rather spend the money on scores and do my own sight reading. Program annotations, in German and English, are brief and inadequate.

SCHUMANN: Symphony No. 1, in B flat, Op. 38 ("Spring"). Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Frederick Stock. MENDELSSOHN: A Midsummer Night's Dream--Overture, Op. 21. WAGNER: The Flying Dutchman--Overture. Berlin State Opera Orchestra conducted by Eduard Mörke. PITTALUGA: Romeria de los Cornudos--Suite. M.T. Estremera, soprano; orchestra conducted by Gustave Pittaluga. SCHELLING: A Victory Ball. New York Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Willem Mengelberg. SCHREKER: Little Suite for Chamber Orchestra. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Franz Schreker. CHAUSSON: Symphony in B Flat Op. 20. Paris Conservatory Orchestra conducted by Piero Coppola. COPPOLA: Rondo Sous la Cloche, Burlesque; Scherzo Fantastique; Interlude Dramatique. Paris Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pierre Monteux (in Interlude) and Piero Coppola. ATTERBERG: Symphony No. 4, in g, Op. 14. Berlin State Opera Orchestra conducted by Robert Heger. Symphony No. 6, in C, Op. 31. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Kurt Atterberg. Clear TLC-2585, 4 records.

This set is Thomas Clear's "Historical Anthology of Orchestral Music (from 78's)," Volume 2. The set is available from Thomas L. Clear, 579 Second Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016, at \$16 a copy, only for a limited time, since only 250 copies have been printed.

The interest of this material varies very widely, as usual. I don't see much point in a detailed description of every item, since most readers will already have made up their minds as to whether or not they want the set by the end of the first paragraph, but perhaps a few comments are in order.

The Stock performance was famous in its day and deserves preservation.

Some of the sides end with severe whistle (common to the inner grooves of some early electrical recordings) which could have been eliminated. Some of the splices are OK, but a few are poor. Both of the Mörike performances are taken from worn originals. I suspect this conductor was merely a routenier who happened to be available for recording dates, although his Wagner is a decent enough performance. (The Mendelssohn is insensitive.)

Pittaluga's suite is an enjoyable piece, heard in good sound and with unobtrusive surfaces. We are especially lucky in the latter since it is taken from unpublished originals. Also previously unpublished is the Heger recording of Atterberg's Fourth Symphony; Clear says his pressings were a copy prepared for broadcast only. Admirers of Atterberg--among whom I am not numbered--will undoubtedly be delighted at the chance to hear two of his symphonies so expertly performed.

I still find Schelling's piece of kitsch unaccountably amusing, and the sober Mengelberg seems to present it well. Unfortunately, the splices here are bad, although the sound (from one of Victor's first electrical recordings of an orchestra) is OK. Clear feels Coppola was "one of the most distinguished conductors of our time," but I've always suspected he was able to make recordings largely because he worked as A&R director for EMI in France. His own compositions go right in one ear and out the other, but fortunately his conducting here, while hardly inspired, is not as bad as his incompetent accompaniment which disfigures Prokofieff's recording of his Third Piano Concerto.

Finally we come to Schreker's Suite, expertly conducted by the composer. This is the kind of gloomy music that makes one feel like committing suicide, so ...

REV. GARY DAVIS: The Sun Is Going Down. Folkways FS 3542.

Contents: Sun Is Going Down; Oh, What a Beautiful City; Morning Train; Fast Stepping Time; Birdhead Special; Long John; God's Unchanging Hand; We Are the Heavenly Father's Children (all anon.)

Davis, who died in 1972, was in his last years one of America's best known folk musicians. Although he concentrated almost (but not quite) entirely on religious music, he attracted the attention of many blues fans for his mastery of blues and ragtime guitar styles. Davis's voice was a hoarse croak, but he often sang with great energy and expression.

Sadly, this posthumous souvenir is the least interesting sample of Davis's work I have heard. It was recorded informally in 1966, by someone named Marzette Watts, under what must have been singularly unstimulating conditions. I doubt that it was intended as a commercial recording session.

The four items on side one are accompanied by guitar and harmonica.

Since it is obvious that Davis is not playing harmonica as he sings, I suspect he may have overdubbed the harmonica accompaniments--a suspicion reinforced by frequent instances of bad ensemble. The first three items on side 2 are harmonica solos or voice with harmonica, obviously by Davis. His playing of this instrument is not in a class with his guitar mastery. Even the concluding We Are the Heavenly Father's Children, done with voice and guitar only, sounds tired. The energy that so often illuminated Davis's performances is hardly heard at all on this record.

Davis collectors will probably pick this new release up anyway just to hear the old man toss off a few good ones, and he certainly does from time to time. To others, who will probably find this just 35 minutes of dull music, I strongly recommend almost any other Rev. Gary Davis record; Vanguard Everyman SRV-70008, Rev. Gary Davis at Newport, is a particularly good introduction at a bargain price.

Leslie Gerber