

REINER RARITIES REVIVED

MOZART: Symphonies: No. 36, in C, K. 425, "Linz"; No. 39, in E-Flat, K. 543; No. 40, in G Minor, K. 550; No. 41, in C, K. 551, "Jupiter". Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner, cond. German RCA PVM 2-9071 (26. 48073 DT) (2-record set). Imported by German News Company, 218 East 86th Street, New York City 10028. \$15.96.

In these days of frenzied enthusiasm for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and its Music Director, those of us who were also going to Orchestra Hall between 1953 and 1963 are apt to remember a class of music-making that was in a class by itself. In 1978 probably only the Berlin Philharmonic offers the equal of what the Chicago Symphony did in Fritz Reiner's time: breathtaking virtuosity in every choir and rich, powerful sonorities which never lost their clarity in the loudest or softest passages. Those were the products of Reiner's technical mastery; but he also provided tremendous emotional intensity and near-perfection of form, rhythm, and style, all contained in Orchestra Hall before the "updating" of 1966 damaged it as a concert-room and destroyed it as a recording studio.

With the exception of Reiner's massive dynamic range, those qualities were well-captured by RCA in the CSO recordings they made between March 1954 and April 1963, and they probably explain the records' extraordinary initial success and subsequent staying power. Almost fifteen years after the last session most of the discs can still be had in one form or another; in fact, of the 118 Reiner/CSO titles, only about a dozen (if we except the unissued items) now count as rarities - an amazing average. Some of the rarest of them have now been restored to circulation in this German RCA folder.

Actually, only three of the titles are scarce, because No. 41 is and has been available for some years on Victrola VICS-1366, coupled with Haydn's symphony generally known as No. 88. The others, however, are a different matter, particularly numbers 36 and 39. All four were issued for the first time in RCA LM-6035 (a two-record set which this reissue duplicates) in January 1956 as part of the company's observance of the Mozart bicentennial. Performances, annotation, and packaging were excellent and the set seemed a handsome tribute, but it soon became clear that few people needed new recordings of all four works, and once Reiner/CSO enthusiasts had bought their copies sales were poor. RCA responded in 1957 by issuing symphonies 40 and 41 on a single, LM-2114, but if they intended to do the same with the other two they never followed up on it, and in October 1960 both the set and single were deleted. Except for the first movement of No. 40 - in a Mozart miscellany on Victrola VICS-1671E - only the "Jupiter" has been back.

The "Jupiter" is also the only true stereo issue of any of the four, although the "Linz", recorded the same day, presumably exists (or existed) in a stereo master also. Numbers 39 and 40, recorded almost exactly one

year later, were issued in the 1950s on a mono prerecorded tape (CC-28) whereas the tape of No. 41 was stereophonic; the implication is thus that their masters were among the few mono Reiner/CSO recordings, and it is strengthened by the fact that the fragment of the G Minor on VICS-1671E is in electronic stereo.

The new German issue makes things worse. The back of the jacket reads "stereo", but all four symphonies are mono - including the "Jupiter".

In the original disc editions the sound was remarkably consistent: bright, warm, and spacious. That has been preserved here in numbers 36 and 41, but the others, particularly No. 40, sound muffled. Worse, the 1950-ish treble-peaking of LM-6035 and -2114 has been replaced by a mid-range plumminess which makes the winds (particularly the clarinets) sound thicker and more prominent than they should. I also detect some artificial reverberation, a needless addition which causes further sonic clouding. It is evidence of Reiner's ideas and distinctive orchestral tone that with an adjustment of the tone controls one can get a good idea of what the originals were like. The familiar Reiner characteristics are all here: propulsive rhythm, brilliant articulation, hairpin dynamics, and warmly sensitive tone. Tempos tend to follow a pattern, moderate in the first movement allegros, a bit fast in the slow movements, moderate again - but with a peasantish "stomp" - in the minuets, and breathtakingly fast in the finales. Listeners who prefer the more relaxed approach of (say) Walter, Beecham, or Böhm may find Reiner's way a bit frenetic, but he conveys such emotional intensity that they may find themselves converted (although the ritards in the "Jupiter's" finale do bring one up short!). Most repeats are omitted.

Pressings are excellent and although the packaging is of the "Bargain" variety it will do (I do wonder, though, what Reiner would say about the inside photo of Solti conducting the orchestra!). Reiner/CSO collectors won't have to be urged, but all who are interested in a great orchestra at its peak - or masterful performances of Mozart - should investigate this set while it lasts.

Dón Tait