

HISTORISCHE AUFNAMEN

BRAHMS: Hungarian Dance No. 1, in g--exc. Johannes Brahms, pianist. Waltzes, Op. 39--Nos. 2, in E, & 15, in A flat. Ilona Eibenschütz, pianist. GRIEG: Sonata in e, Op. 7--finale. Edvard Grieg, pianist. SAINT-SAËNS: Africa--improvised cadenza. Camille Saint-Saëns, pianist. DEBUSSY: Pelleas et Melisande--Mes longs cheveux. Mary Garden, soprano; Claude Debussy, pianist. LISZT: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 (abridged). Arthur Friedheim, pianist. Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15. Percy Grainger, pianist. La Campanella. Josef Hofmann, pianist. CHOPIN: Waltz in D flat, Op. 64, No. 1 (arr. Michalowski). Aleksander Michalowski, pianist. Nocturne in f, Op. 55, No. 1. Vladimir de Pachmann, pianist. Nocturne in F, Op. 15, No. 1. Ignacy Jan Paderewski, pianist. Scherzo No. 2, in b flat, Op. 31. Leopold Godowski, pianist. SCHUMANN-Tausig: El Contrabandista; BEETHOVEN-Busoni: Ecossaises; TCHAIKOVSKY: Trepak, Op. 72, No. 18; RACHMANINOFF: Prelude in g, Op. 23, No. 5. Josef Lhevinne, pianist. IPA/Desmar 117.

The listing of contents of this record makes it apparent that this is one of the most interesting and valuable collections of piano recordings ever assembled on one LP. It looks even more interesting when you realize that six of the recordings were previously unpublished (those by Eubenschütz, Grainger, Hofmann, Pachmann, Paderewski, and Godowski). Further, to the best of my knowledge, only the recordings by Brahms, Debussy, and Michalowski have been on LP before.

Unfortunately, there is a rather large fly in the enriching ointment. IPA's dubbing engineer, Ward Marston, has done some excellent work with electrical recordings, but he seems to have neither the knowledge nor the equipment to do justice to such early recordings as these. The dubbings are wildly variable in quality, with some sounding OK and others being, in my opinion, unlistenable. I will discuss the recordings individually, as they deserve. But I must also say that the proper use of good filtering, equalizing, and de-clicking equipment could have done wonders for this record.

The notorious Brahms cylinder (here dubbed a half-tone sharp) is one of the most noise-obscured recordings in existence. In his program notes, Gregor Benko says the recording is now more listenable than before thanks to "Marstonization." He then goes on to tell us that the recording has no musical value, and that it's no loss anyway because "Brahms' piano playing was characterized more by intent than skill." Finally, he takes sarcastic pot-shots at "an ex-sound archivist" (a collector of former sounds?), presumably Jerrold Moore, for his lectures on the Brahms performing tradition based on this recording.

To dispose of these points in order: 1. This presentation of the Brahms cylinder is far from optimum. I gave it to a recording engineer, who removed a good half of the extraneous noise after five minutes of

fiddling with filters. Much more could be done. 2. The description of Brahms's playing can be applied only to the end of his career, after he had stopped regular practice and concertising. All contemporary descriptions of Brahms in his prime agree that he was one of the greatest pianists of his time. 3. Having also indulged in "repeated and presumably masochistic hearings of the cylinder's musical portion" (Benko's words), I feel strongly that it has much of musical value to offer. What one can hear of the performance is striking. Brahms's playing is impulsive, marked by rapid passagework, drastic bending of tempo, and powerful accents. Even in 1889 he must have been an exciting if inaccurate pianist.

By comparison, I find Ilona Eibenschütz, a friend of Brahms's who premiered some of his late piano works, cautious and dull. The basic sound of her 1903 recording is beautiful, although some horrible noises intrude occasionally. (I suspect these may be due to mistracking; probably a larger stylus was needed.) Despite the pianist's poise, I find her playing uninflected and uninteresting.

Grieg was a magnificent pianist, and what one can hear of his performance is greatly exciting. Again, the sound of the recording is good, but there is much wow in the piano tone and the noise intrudes fearsomely.

Saint-Saens was another exciting pianist. I have never heard one of his early records before, and this one, from 1904, is extremely impressive. Again, there is quite a bit of distortion and the loudest playing is all encrusted with fuzz. Better stylus match might have helped with this obviously worn record. There is also a fearsome crunch at the beginning of the record which fortunately does not last long.

IPA makes much of a claim that previous LP reissues from Debussy's records were made from IRCC dubs, not the original G&T issues. I do not believe this is true of La Voix de Son Maître OVD 49.323, which contains two of the Garden and Debussy recordings including the present sample. At any rate, we hardly learn much of Debussy's pianistic style from this horribly wobbly and noise-ridden recording, although Garden's voice comes across beautifully and is wonderful to hear.

The Friedheim recording is, I believe, the first LP representation of this important Liszt pupil, not counting piano rolls (which I usually don't count). I think the playing is very good, but it's really hard to tell. The piano sound is exceptionally dull, and the surface noise is so heavy that some passages are virtually obscured. This selection is also in need of de-clicking.

Grainger's commanding performance, extremely impressive playing, is also marred by too many clicks. Otherwise the surface noise is low enough so that I can enjoy the recording. A few wrong notes probably prevented this selection from being published when it was new, but I

have heard many less interesting and accurate published records.

Hofmann's recording is marred by shrill, tinny piano sound. This is a poor equalizing job and it could have been greatly improved. The playing itself is very fluent, although a shade perfunctory to my ears, and the surface noise is not too bad.

The second LP side opens with the corny but thrilling Michalowski arrangement, which turns Chopin's waltz into a circus act with all kinds of added difficulties. It's extremely entertaining if you don't take it too seriously. The playing sounds even faster than it actually was originally because the recording is dubbed almost a half tone sharp. The recording is a bit tinny and could have been improved, but it's certainly acceptable for 1905.

Pachmann's performance, previously unpublished, would certainly be worth the price of the record to me. It is lovely, poised playing, relatively straight rhythmically (especially for this artist) and exceptionally beautiful. The sound quality is good, but there is a fierce overlay of surface noise (much of which can be removed with a notch filter) and the end of the piece is disfigured by a horrible flaw in the record, which I presume was irremediable.

Legend has it that Paderewski was persuaded to play for his first HMV recordings with a minimum of pedal, so that the recordings would sound clearer. His performance here is thus dry-sounding and unrepresentative of his playing at its best. However, while the recording needs de-clicking, it is an otherwise adequate dub of an unpublished item.

Godowsky's recording is also unpublished, but I feel the artist is very poorly served by this selection. The abridgement of the piece (to fit on one 78rpm side) makes nonsense out of it, and Godowsky, perhaps aware he was involved in a worthless enterprise, plays as though he had no interest in the proceedings. This one should have been left unpublished. The dub is about $\frac{1}{2}$ tone sharp and needs de-clicking; there is also some odd flutter towards the end of the piece. The basic piano sound is good.

Finally we come to the complete series of four sides made by Lhevinne for American Pathe in 1921. In the context of this collection I don't understand why Lhevinne is four times as important as any other pianist, but I'm glad these selections were all included because I'm happy to have them on LP. Unfortunately, the surface noise is rather heavy although not overwhelming, and flutter intrudes in the Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky pieces. Also the dubs are almost $\frac{1}{2}$ tone sharp. But the performances are all superb, each one certainly worthy of inclusion in this august company.

I have more negative than positive comments about this anthology, particularly in evaluating the technical work. Nevertheless, the LP

obviously recommends itself to any serious record collector as the only current opportunity to hear some very important, valuable, and beautiful recordings. To me, the Pachmann selection alone, or any of the Lhevinne records, would justify purchase of this LP, and other listeners will undoubtedly have other favorites. While acknowledging the value of the material, I must express my frustration at IPA's refusal to share these priceless treasures with us through the medium of state-of-the-art technology.

It pleases me to be able to conclude with a note of commendation for IPA's documentation, which includes recording dates (some of them approximate, but all, I am sure, the best available information) and matrix numbers. I wish more reissue producers would include such vital data in their program notes.

GLUCK-Sgambati: Orfeo--"Melody;" CHOPIN: Waltzes, in A flat, Op. 64, No. 3; in G flat, Op. 70, No. 1 (two performances); in e, Op. posth. Etudes, Op. 10, No. 5; Op. 25, No. 1; Preludes, Op. 28, Nos. 1, 7, & 23; Nocturne in c, Op. 48, No. 1; Ballade in A flat, Op. 47; LEVITZKI: Waltz in A (two performances); Valse de Concert; TCHAIKOV-SKY: The Months--Troika; PAGANINI-Liszt: La Campanella; GLUCK-Brahms: Gavotte; MOSZKOWSKI: La Jongleuse (two performances). Mischa Levitzki, pianist. International Piano Archives IPA 114.

The first side of this record is dubbed from Columbia acoustic records of 1923/25; side two comes from electrical HMV recordings of 1927/29. I believe all of the items are new to LP; the Chopin Nocturne is previously unpublished.

IPA's annotator Edward Blickstein provides what seems to me a thoroughly accurate assessment of Levitzki as a highly superior salon pianist. I'm not sure that the pianist's "apparent inability to ever be 'carried away' by the music" is an indication of a modern approach; it seems more likely, to me, a product of the pianist's temperament, or lack thereof. I certainly agree with Blickstein that the Sgambati transcription is Levitzki's "most imaginative recording," and it is virtually the only item on this record I thoroughly enjoyed, since the music responds well to the pianist's clear, detached, poised playing.

For the most part, sad to say, I find Levitzki's playing extremely boring, not only in the current selection of material but on the other recordings of his I have heard. Further, his own compositions are such trivia that not even the composer's artistry can hold my attention through them. However, those wanting to investigate Levitzki's reputation with their own ears will find this a thoroughly representative sampling, containing some extremely rare recordings. IPA's dubbings are quite good, even the acoustical records emerging in presentable sound.

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 3, in E flat, Op. 55, "Eroica;" BERLIOZ: Roman Carnival Overture; SIBELIUS: En Saga; Op. 9, Kuolema, Op. 44-- Valse Triste; WAGNER: Die Walküre--Ride of the Valkyries. London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Victor de Sabata. London Treasury RS 62022, 2 records.

These recordings, all made in May of 1946, were all that de Sabata recorded for English Decca. They represent an important segment of his small discography, and Decca has done collectors a fine service by making them available on LP for the first time.

Unfortunately, the major work in the collection, the "Eroica," is to me de Sabata's least satisfactory recording. I would have expected a rapidly paced, volatile performance from this conductor, but that is certainly not what he gives us. The first movement is slow and heavy. There are some moments of impressive power, but the music drags a bit. The orchestra's playing is not precise--a very unusual failing for this conductor-- and some passages are oddly balanced. The Funeral March is so slow the orchestra simply cannot sustain the phrases, and the tempo is not kept consistent. De Sabata's phrasing sounds more operatic than symphonic, including some exaggerated swells. This movement, so deeply affecting in a good performance, seems interminable. There is also one bad splice between 78rpm sides in this movement, the only such problem in the set.

The remaining two movements are better but hardly memorable. The Scherzo is pleasant but too mild, and the horns in the trio sound far too distant. The finale is episodic and rather static, although the orchestra's playing is, at last, adequate.

The remaining material in the set is much, much better, and gives us a good idea of why the conductor remains a legend. The Berlioz is a stunningly powerful performance, tense and crackling with energy. Both Sibelius performances are beautiful. And although the Wagner excerpt is marred by the common failing of accents in the wrong phrases (at the top of the phrase instead of on the downbeat), the fierce power of the playing is irresistible.

The early postwar FFRR recordings were noteworthy in their time, and they remain quite listenable today. Unfortunately, the "Eroica" sounds as though it has been dubbed from Decca's commercial pressings, which were notoriously noisy. Too much surface crackle intrudes on the sound. The remaining pieces must have been dubbed from masters; they are virtually noise-free, and the orchestral sound is so exciting it is difficult to believe these are pre-tape recordings.

I will continue to remember De Sabata's Beethoven from his marvellous "Pastorale," and I'd just as soon forget this "Eroica" entirely. However, many collectors, myself definitely included, will find this set worthwhile for the shorter works.

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 5, in c, Op. 67; MOZART: Symphony No. 40, in g, K. 550. Concertgebouw Orchestra (in Beethoven) & London Philharmonic Orchestra (in Mozart) conducted by Erich Kleiber. London Treasury R 23232.

This is the third U.S. publication of Kleiber's Beethoven Fifth (but the first one complete on one LP side). Evidently it has been published, at least in part, in response to the interest generated by Carlos Kleiber's recent recording of the same work, which was very widely praised as a fit successor to his father's recording.

My own minority opinion is that Carlos Kleiber's performance, while beautifully controlled and balanced, is driven and inexpressive. The father's performance is also hard-driven, especially in the first movement. But it has a great deal of expression, and even some rhetorical bending of tempo. Combined with the magnificent playing of the Dutch orchestra and a superb, wide-range recording, this performance gives us an ultimate experience of one approach to Beethoven's Fifth. There are other valid approaches, of course, but this one demands to be heard.

I have not been fond of Kleiber's Mozart Symphony in the past, but I find it more attractive on rehearing. One reason for my more favorable impression is the improvement in recorded sound. It seems hardly possible that this excellent-sound could be dubbed from 78s. London's new equalization has removed the shrieky quality from the strings heard in former LP editions, and there are only a few mild patches of surface noise. The performance is controlled, with a "classical" reserve far removed from the fervency I love in performances by Furtwangler and Casals. Yet this too sings out in its less obvious way. This is not the ultimate Mozart 40th, but it is a beautiful performance, and a welcome bonus to the Beethoven.

Decca in England and London in the U.S. need some better coordination. The jacket, printed in the U.S., lists only the London Philharmonic, while the labels on the English pressing credit the orchestras properly. The jacket lists itself as London Treasury Series, while the label says Richmond.

BRAHMS: Violin Sonatas--No. 1, in G, Op. 78; No. 2, in A, Op. 100; No. 3, in d, Op. 108. Georg Kulenkampff, violinist; Georg Solti, pianist. London Treasury R 23213.

London presents this as "Sir Georg Solti--His First Recordings!!" Otherwise there is not a word about the performers or the recordings. They were made in Switzerland in 1947 and were issued only in Europe as Decca 78s. In 1965 they were published on LP, along with two other recordings made by Kulenkampff and Solti at the same time, Beethoven's "Kreutzer" and Mozart's K. 454. This new issue is the

same transfer made in 1965, which is a pity; English Decca's transfer techniques have been greatly improved since then. The recordings are listenable enough, but the piano sounds muffled and there is quite a bit of surface noise, varying greatly from one 78rpm side to the next.

Kulenkampff was considered one of Germany's major violinists until his death in 1950. I respect his playing, which is extremely well controlled and beautiful, but I do not like him as an interpreter. These performances excel in lyricism but they are largely devoid of impulse or incisiveness. Even in the intensely dramatic outer movements of Op. 108, where I hear Solti attempting to push the violinist into showing some muscle, the performance remains too placid. The other sonatas become downright boring. I realize my opinions of Kulenkampff are far from universal, and some knowledgeable listeners revere him as a great artist. So be it.

As for Solti, the then-young man proves himself a formidable pianist--not at all to my surprise, as he won several prizes as a pianist before concentrating on conducting. He plows through Brahms's formidable piano writing--relatively more difficult, I suspect, than the violinist's part--with ease, clarifying the texture and dropping hardly a note in this pre-tape recording. He is no "accompanist" but an active collaborator, and in fact I care more for his work than the violinist's. I appreciate his attempts to strike a spark in Op. 108 and regret his failure.

On the whole, the record is an interesting curio but not one I would return to often. Despite the presence of all three sonatas (65 minutes of music) on one budget-priced record, I don't consider the result much of a bargain.

BACH: Violin Concerto No. 2, in E, BWV 1042; Partita No. 3, in E, BWV 1006--Prelude; TCHAIKOVSKY: Violin Concerto in D, Op. 35. Mischa Elman, violinist; orchestra conducted by Lawrence Collingwood (in the Bach Concerto); Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Paul Paray (in Tchaikovsky). Educational Media Associates RR-453.

These are taken from totally different sources. The Bach pieces were originally issued on prewar HMV 78s, DB 1871/3. The Tchaikovsky comes from a postwar broadcast transcription, previously unpublished.

Elman's Bach is surprisingly tasteful, for Elman. The romantic mannerisms are kept to a minimum, although there are some inappropriate slides and Collingwood takes a huge ritard at the end of the second movement. Tempos for all three movements are much too slow for my taste, and the tempo of the unaccompanied Prelude fluctuates more than I'd like. Still, these are acceptable performances and many violin fanciers will enjoy them.

The Bach playing is a model of good taste in comparison with

Elman's noxious version of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, which contains a whole catalogue of musical offenses. I'd send the Music Police after this one. The violinist mauls nearly every phrase in the piece with changes of tempo, exaggerated emphases, and other artificial expressive devices. Poor Paray does a heroic job of trying to keep the orchestra together with the soloist, but Elman's lack of concern for ensemble causes several ragged moments.

Both sides of the LP are listenable, although both have some surface noise. Two tiny bits of music are missing, a few notes in the second movement of the Bach Concerto (which must be due to careless transfer work) and a similarly brief part of an orchestral tutti in the first movement of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, perhaps a flaw in the transcription source.

Elman's technique is still fairly impressive in these recordings, nothing like the deteriorated mess I remember from his last appearances in the 1950s.

This record is recommended for special tastes only.

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 5, in E flat, Op. 73; Sonata No. 32, in c, Op. 111. Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, pianist; Bergamo Festival Orchestra conducted by Franco Caracciolo (in the Concerto). Educational Media Associates IGI-327.

In this case the "filler" matters far more to me than the main course. Michelangeli's Op. 111, recorded in the early sixties, is an excellent performance, quite straightforward in conception and superbly executed. The second movement does not reach the ecstatic heights heard in performances by Schnabel (especially RCA Victrola AVML-1410) and Lateiner (RCA Victor LSC-3016, deleted), but by any other standards this is very satisfying music making. I am especially surprised since I have long thought Michelangeli's commercial recording of the same work (London CS-6446), made about the same time, a travesty. The exaggerations and distortions of that performance are not present in this newer issue.

The "Emperor" has some virtues. Michelangeli has fleetness and power to spare, providing some exciting moments. I am also pleasantly surprised by the very decent playing of the Bergamo Festival Orchestra, whoever they may be, and by Caracciolo's excellent coordination with his soloist. Someone, either the conductor or (more likely) the recording engineer, has a greatly exaggerated idea of the piano's role in this work, and the orchestra is placed far in the background, enough so that silly accompaniment figures in the piano totally blot out important solo passages in the winds. Michelangeli plays the first movement with quite a bit of life, but he does the slow movement blandly, as though he had not an idea in his head. The finale is sparkly but fails completely to excite me.

Both recordings are decent medium-fi, about twenty years behind the standard for good commercial recordings. There is an awkward side break between the second and third movements of the concerto (inevitable with this program), and the 35½ minute second side is cut at a noticeably lower level than side one.

BEETHOVEN: Serenade in D, Op. 8; HINDEMITH: String Trio No. 2. Szymon Goldberg, violinist; Paul Hindemith, violist; Emanuel Feuermann, cellist. Educational Media Associates RR-459.

These two famous prewar Columbia sets are long overdue on LP. "Historical" interest will naturally center on the Hindemith Trio, involving the composer in the performance, and rightly so. This is one of those versions of a twentieth century piece in which I feel the musicians have complete command of the music (which was, after all, written for them), and the result is a marvellously expressive performance, not merely audible problem-solving. However, the same is true of the Beethoven piece, in which the players grasp the impromptu nature of the music and bring out its song, surprise and humor.

Fortunately, the transfer to LP has been done competently. Some surface noise is still present (I suspect most of it could have been eliminated with a proper size stylus and a Packburn Transient Noise Suppressor), but it is not offensive. The tonal qualities of the originals have been neither improved nor degraded, and the splices are sensitively accomplished.

CHOPIN: Ballade No. 1, in g, Op. 23; Andante Spianato e Grande Polonaise, Op. 22; Scherzo No. 2, in b flat, Op. 31; Mazurkas in a, Op. 68, No. 2; in b, Op. 33, No. 4; in D flat, Op. 30, No. 3; Berceuse in D flat, Op. 57; Fantasy in f, Op. 49; Waltzes in A flat, Op. 69, No. 1; in A flat, Op. 34, No. 1; in E flat, Op. posth. Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, pianist. Educational Media Associates IGI-350, 2 records.

This release apparently reproduces a complete recital of 1962. Since there is no audience noise or applause, I presume it comes from a studio broadcast. Sound quality is reasonably good from the beginning of the recital until the Berceuse, but from the Fantasy on it is noticeably duller and the sound then is unpleasantly muffled.

Michelangeli remains a most controversial pianist even today. Heard at his best he sounds like one of the world's greatest pianists, with awesome control and individual but straightforward interpretive ideas. The kind of playing heard in this recital is different, enough so that I would call it perverse. The music is permeated with the scent of sweet incense. Everywhere the rhythmic pulse is disrupted with "expressive" ritards; dynamic contrasts are exaggerated here,

ignored there; and so it goes. The Waltzes are less madly mauled than the rest of the music, but they are only less offensive than the other pieces, not admirable.

The two records contain just over an hour and a quarter of music.

MOZART: Sonata in F, K. 533/494; Piano Concerto No. 17, in G, K. 453--Andante (fragment); BEETHOVEN: Bagatelles, Op. 33. Artur Schnabel, pianist; New Friends of Music Orchestra conducted by Fritz Stiedry (in the Concerto). Educational Media Associates RR-502.

The most valuable item here is the Mozart Sonata, which is given an entirely characteristic Schnabel performance. The pianist's typical insight is brought to bear on this piece, which deserves to be known better than it is, and his technical execution is excellent. The recording is marred by an announcement, during a long pause between the second and third movements, which carries over above the first phrase of the Rondo. This could have been eliminated by careful editing, since the phrase is repeated. On the other hand, while the sound of the recording is pretty dull, it is better than on the tape I once heard, indicating good luck, good sound engineering, or both.

The Mozart Concerto movement is blessed with the best sound on the record, a beautiful representation of both piano and orchestra. It is dubbed also from typically ticky acetates and should have been run through a de-clicker, but I prefer the light ticks to drastic filtering. An announcer's voice interrupts just before the end of the music, but the movement is almost complete and it is superbly played.

The performance of the Bagatelles is for completists only, since the recording has no high frequencies at all. It sounds like a poor quality telephone line transmission. Schnabel's commercial recording of this set has greatly superior sound. Nevertheless, the LP is a must item for Schnabel collectors.

MOZART: Fantasia in d, K. 397; BERMAN: Mazurka. Lazar Berman, pianist. Columbia 7" 45 rpm BTS 37.

This little bonus record comes with Columbia M 34545, "Encores," a Berman collection. The performances were dubbed from a 10" Melodiya 78 recorded in 1937, when the pianist was seven years old. I believe Berman was the youngest prodigy to make a commercial recording of a classical composition. The original record is superlatively rare; I presume the present dub was made from Berman's own copy.

The performances are sensational. The playing of the Mozart Fantasia is hardly profound, but it does convey good musical sense. The speed and accuracy of the child's rapid scales are astonishing.

Berman's own little piece is a trifle silly, but I have heard worse from adult composers.

The dubbing is half a tone sharp and the sound quality and surfaces are poor. However, I never expected to be lucky enough to hear this recording, let alone own a copy, and I am extremely pleased to see this issue. The encore record is pretty good, although nowhere near as exciting as Berman can be with the same pieces in recital. But I'd gladly pay the price for the 45.

STRAUSS: Oboe Concerto; VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Oboe Concerto; BACH-Tovey: Concerto in A, BWV 1055. Leon Goossens, oboist; Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Alceo Galliera (in Strauss) and Walter Susskind. World Records (England) SH 243.

All three of these concertos have been issued previously on LP. The works by Bach and Vaughan Williams were coupled on HMV CLP 1656; the Bach was also included in American Columbia ML 4782, a regrettably short-lived collection of Goossens performances. The Strauss Concerto was issued by HMV as CLP 1698, which also contained concerto arrangements by Benjamin (of Cimarosa sonatas) and Bryan (of D. Scarlatti sonatas); it also appeared on Columbia ML 4775, coupled with Dennis Brain's first recording of the Strauss Horn Concerto No. 1.

So much for history. Far more important is the artistry on this record, which catches one of our century's great instrumentalists at the peak of his awesome powers. There are few moments on records I find so breath-taking (almost literally) as Goossens' phrasing in the first movement of the Bach concerto (played on the oboe d'amore), including one long phrase which leaves me gasping just listening to it. But Goossens cannot be reduced to a wind machine; the beauty of his tone and his musical sensitivity are always apparent throughout these superb performances. This record has my highest recommendation for anyone interested in great wind playing, although I cannot say that either the Strauss or Vaughan Williams works are favorites of mine. The artistry in their presentation (seconded by fine work of both conductors and the excellent orchestra) makes them come alive, and the Bach alone would be worth the price of the record.

I cannot say EMI has done very much of interest in presentation. Anthony Griffith's transfers are excellent, but so were the earlier HMV editions. (The Strauss concerto, recorded in 1947, naturally sounds a bit duller and has a little more surface noise than the other recordings, made several years later; however, all three recordings are listenable by any standards.) The program notes, copied from the earlier HMV editions, are concerned entirely with the music; a wholly superficial brief paragraph added on Goossens gives us no useful information other than that the record is published in celebration of his 80th birthday. Surely more biographical material was called for

in this type of release. But the oboe playing--ah, it's gorgeous!

DVORAK: Symphony No. 8, in G, Op. 88. Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra conducted by Thor Johnson. Varese Sarabande Stereo VC 81044.

This release is, at least, of considerable interest in the history of recording technology. It was one of a series of stereo tapes engineered by Robert Blake in 1953, previously released on records by Remington (in mono) and on stereo tape by the A.V. company. To the best of my knowledge, this and its companion release (VC 81041, a collection of music by Sibelius and other Finnish composers) are the earliest stereo tapes to be issued on records, although of course the famous Fantasia sound track was stereophonically recorded on film in 1939.

The recording quality, not outstanding today, is remarkable for its age. Stereo placement seems to me quite firm, with a good image of the orchestra and excellent presence for solo instruments without spotlighting. Good contemporary recordings, of course, have better frequency response and more feeling of presence for a massed orchestra. There is also noticeable tape hiss in this recording, although I've heard worse from later recordings. In general, anyone interested in investigating the beginnings of stereo recording technology will find this record quite interesting to hear, and its quality remains a testament to the work of a great recording engineer.

The musical interest of the record is more limited. The performance is a decent routine one from a second-class professional orchestra, with its share of impressive moments and some that are not so impressive. (I suspect that a less economy-conscious label than Remington might have insisted on more retakes to correct obvious errors and out-of-tune brass passages.) Johnson's direction shows good control of the music, with little of the fire and inspiration that bring this symphony more excitingly to life in the hands of such masters as Talich, Szell (with the Concertgebouw), and Monteux.

Leslie Gerber