

BROADWAY BABIES

I LOVE NEW YORK - Vocal and instrumental 45rpm. (Struttin' Records STR 103) \$.75

MARTIN CHARNIN'S MINI-ALBUM (Take Home Tunes THT 771) 7" album/\$4.95; DR. JAZZ AND OTHER MUSICALS (Take Home Tunes THT 777) 12" album/\$7.95; THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM (Take Home Tunes THT 761) 7" album/\$4.95; CANADA (Broadway Baby Records BBD 776) 12" album/\$7.95; SNOW WHITE AND BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (Take Home Tunes THT 775) 12" album/\$7.95; THE SECOND SHEPHERD'S PLAY (Broadway Baby Records BBD 774) 12" album/\$7.95; DOWNRIVER (Take Home Tunes THT 7811) 12" album/\$7.95; THE BAKER'S WIFE (Take Home Tunes THT 772) 12" album/\$8.95; NEFERTITI (Take Home Tunes THT 7810) 12" album/\$8.95; TWO (Take Home Tunes THT 788) 12" album/\$7.95.

Available in some record stores or by mail from Take Home Tunes, Box 496, Georgetown, Connecticut.

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN THEATRE SERIES: George and Ira Gershwin's OH, KAY! (DPL 1-0310); SOUVENIRS OF HOT CHOCOLATES (P 14587). Available from Smithsonian Customer Service, P.O. Box 10230, Des Moines, Iowa 50336. \$6.99 each plus 90 cents postage and handling charge.

I had never heard of Steve Karmen until early this year, but I was very familiar with his disco-paeen to the Empire State and its namesake city, I LOVE NEW YORK. Mr Karmen is by now a millionaire, I presume, and supporting the state he so loves, but in spite of the constant repetition of theme, a simple four-note structure, and the incessant blaring of numerous vocal versions on television and radio, I have yet to tire of hearing the piece. Perhaps it is that I too love New York. This 45rpm release of the song takes the next logical step; it adds a musical bridge I've never heard before and ties the theme together with a counter-melody (which I have heard before, it seems, in a soft-drink commercial) and the total effect is as infectious as the main theme heard by itself. Both sides are performed by the Steve Karmen Big Band and the record was produced by Steve Karmen. It's a disc I am delighted to have because I don't just love New York, I love "I Love New York".

I cannot compare the total output of Steve Karmen to that of Bruce and Doris Yeko, the team who mastermind Take Home Tunes Records and Broadway Baby Records. The success and good taste of one 45rpm disc and the similar qualities of the quantitative issues of a larger production output are hardly parallels. The Yekos' produce original cast recordings (when possible) of shows which either closed out-of-town because they weren't good enough to come in to Broadway or played somewhere off the beaten track, the Off-Broadway circuit, showcase houses and regional theatres. They have amassed some unusual material which bears close scrutiny.

Take MARTIN CHARNIN'S MINI-ALBUM, subtitled "5 Great Songs from Not-So-Great Shows", for example. The songs are sung by Larry Kert (of West Side Story and Company), Robert Guillaume (of Kwamina and Jacques Brel...), Laurie Beachman (of Annie) and lyricist Martin Charnin himself. The songs have been culled from La Strada (music by Elliot Lawrence), Mata Hari (music by Edward Thomas) and Softly (music by Harold Arlen), all of them flop shows. So far the subtitle is telling us the truth. The songs themselves are duds with the exception of "Maman" from Mata Hari. The performances are not the best and only Mr. Charnin himself brings any real love and excitement to his war-ballad, "Maman". The album is partially dedicated to Charnin's daughter, Sasha, who "kept wanting to know why there were not any second nights" of these shows. Now we all know.

DR. JAZZ AND OTHER-MUSICALS also carries the title "18 Interesting Songs from Unfortunate Shows" and is produced in the Ben Bagley manner of assembling a group of talented professional performers to render unto us these eighteen gems. Betty Garrett and Susan Watson are underused, Bobby Van qualifies as an original cast member and Buster Davis, who wrote Dr. Jazz (and the album notes) carries the majority of the material. This album was not my favorite of the Yeko output, but it does have some true high spots.

Buster Davis' renditions of "He's Always Ticklin' the Ivories", "Our Medicine Man's a Music Maker Now", Susan Watson's delightfully comic "Here Comes the Ballad" from the show Diversions by Carl Davis/Steven Vinaver, Betty Garrett's silly Judy Holiday-like "I Think the World of You" from Mary Rodgers/Martin Charnin's show Hot Spot, and her "I'm in Love with a Soldier Boy" from Cole Porter's Something for the Boys and the album's finale, "Summer Is" from The Body Beautiful by Bock & Harnick are the best items on this long disc. There are also songs from Pousse Cafe, Look to the Lilies, That's the Ticket, Vintage '60, and Small Town Girl. This is a connoisseur's collection and not for the theatrically uninitiated; it might turn them off altogether.

THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM by Robert Waldman and Alfred Uhry is more of a demonstration recording than anything else. This 7" disc has four bands consisting of three solo vocals and an instrumental number. The songs are sung by Jerry Orbach and Virginia Vestoff and, except for "Sleepy Man," did not excite my interest in the show.

Then there is CANADA. This is an original cast recording (except that the lead here is sung by the composer instead of the actor who played the role) of the Barn Theatre, Montville New Jersey production. It is one of the dullest shows I have ever heard. The songs are banal and the performances anything but professional. There are hand-written lyric sheets which are difficult to read. This one is a total waste.

The Gingerbread Players and Jack are a well-established New York City Children's Theater troupe and the Yekos have brought us two of their best shows, both with music by Michael Valenti and lyrics by

Elsa Rael. We have the added attraction of performances by Margaret Whiting, Reed Shelton, Gilbert Price, Christine Andreas and some excellent supporting players. "I've Dreamed", "Laughter", the vocalise "Waltz of the Roses" and "Let Me Love You" all from BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, "I'm Alive", the Queen's song "Look at Me" wonderfully performed by Miss Whiting, and "The Yodel song" from SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS make this a very enjoyable album, the first one in this list completely satisfying and worth owning. For collectors of Snow White trivia the dwarves are herein called: Scrubber, Blubber, Scotty, Flubber, Mosquito, Pepito and Fred.

THE SECOND SHEPHERD'S PLAY is not as good a show as either of the above two mini-musicals. There is one interesting song, "Palestine", which rather than builds, just sits there repeating its lovely theme over and over (not as well as I Love New York) and finally coming to a stop. This is the first of Off-Off Broadway committed to disc and it should find its way to the shelves of serious musical collectors. Just don't expect revelations. The inexpert cast is unable to do justice to Steve Kitsakos' often clever lyrics (although he couldn't find a rhyme for Palestine) and the comedy number "Lamb Stew" is a thorough muddle.

DOWNRIVER is much more interesting. This musical adaptation of Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn has a great deal to offer. It has a young, energetic cast with good voices, a light, contemporary score by John Braden who has also written the lyrics and a definite direction and drive which carries the show from point A to point B. The score is oriented toward the Gospel and Country-Western motives, but not so much so as to alienate the show enthusiast. It all works and works well. The show was originally a showcase at the Theatre at St. Clemens in New York and should become a staple of community theatres everywhere. This is one to listen to over and over again.

This brings us to the "big-guns" of the Yekos' output to date: Stephen Schwartz's THE BAKER'S WIFE, starring Paul Sorvino, Patti LuPone, Kurt Peterson and Teri Ralston and NEFERTITI by David Spangler and Christopher Gore with Andrea Marcovicci, Robert LuPone, Michael Nouri, Michael Smartt and Jane White. Both were on pre-Broadway tryouts; both were million-dollar musicals with the best of the professional theatre on call. Both closed out-of-town only to resurface sometime later on these well-produced discs. Both raise the question, WHY? WHY? WHY?

THE BAKER'S WIFE is the most traditional show Stephan Schwartz has written. After Godspell, Pippin and The Magic Show he has seemingly abandoned his own demi-rock style to turn out a rather pedestrian rehash of Richard Rodgers/Stephen Sondheim/Leonard Bernstein/Irving Berlin all rolled into one. Listening to the well-performed album selections it is hard not to hear the influences of the afore-mentioned in both lyrics and music. There is a lack of consistent style and nothing of Mr. Schwartz himself. "Chanson" which opens the album is a pretty song and Teri Ralston does it justice, but it neither intrigues me nor pushes me on to wonder what for. It is just a pretty song. The song "Any-Day-

Now Day" is magnificently performed by Paul Sorvino, but I've heard too much of it before in other shows. I was delighted to find that Mr. Sorvino has such a fine singing voice, however, and I hope he'll return in a really good musical someday. This is just not it. The show ran for almost six months out of town and then folded out-of-town; it had a better run than it deserved.

NEFERTITI on the other hand only played 44 performances in Chicago before it disappeared completely. An enormous show with a large company and an interesting concept, it was severely letdown by its musical score. The album opens with a martial song called "Egypt is Egypt Again" and it is an exciting number. This is followed by a hauntingly beautiful ballad sung by the young princess Tadukhipa, later Nefertiti, called "Everything is Possible". After these two you can fold up your tents, hitch your camels to a star and ride off into the sunset. The whole thing just falls away into repetition and banality. Not even the remarkable Jane White can save the show in Act Two with her only song, "Dinner at Thebes", a pallid reproduction of Stephen Sondheim's "Chrysanthemum Tea" from Pacific Overtures. This is all complicated by the fact that too often it is impossible to tell whether Mr. LuPone, Mr. Nouri or Ms. Marcovicci is singing. And even Jane White is a baritone.

Both albums are rarities and should be acquired, not only by collectors but by schools of the performing arts. They are magnificent object lessons to young musical writers of what not to do.

The best show recorded by the Yekos is a little revue presented by the Equity Library Theatre at Lincoln Center's Library of the Performing Arts. It is called simply "2". It has a cast of two: Ann Hodapp and Hal Watters. It was written and conceived by Julie Mandel and all of its songs and song sketches have the word Two as a base concept, even the song called "One". Most of the material is humorous, but there is a nice balance of styles and types of songs ranging from a fugue, "Love is a two-part Invention" to ragtime "The Two-Note Rag". The two performers are excellent and it makes darn good listening. It also makes you wonder why some producer hasn't taken it and put on where it can be seen and appreciated nightly. Producers of Nefertiti and The Baker's Wife take note!

All in all the Take Home Tunes collection is a vast and varied one with both good and poor material in evidence. There is no reason not to buy all of them, and I hope the future works selected by the Yakos for immortality in vinyl will be as worthy.

The Smithsonian has done it again. Their two latest show issues are as mixed a bag as their first three, and my comments in the ARSC Journal (Vol. X, No. 1) still hold.

There was no reason for another release of the On, Kay! material. It has been given us over and over again. All of the Gertrude Lawrence recordings have been issued on both English and American labels (most are still available), the Gershwin solos have been fed us by George

Garabedian and others and the two Arden and Ohman selections, while fun, don't qualify as enough to warrant this issue.

Of a possible sixteen musical numbers, as listed in the original program, only six are represented. Four of them are performed three times. The first of the Arden and Ohman piano selections is an excerpt from a larger recording in its sharply cut in/cut out band; it also opens the album which doesn't help the overall effect. There is one cut by the Victor Light Opera Company. It is the title song, and although not an actual original cast recording it is good to have it included here. It breaks up the monotony of the constant repeats and gives us a totally different sound from the rest of the solo and duet album.

The notes, usually so fine in these Smithsonian albums, leave a lot to be desired. Most of the photographs have been mis-captioned, identifying Julie Sanderson (a major star who took out the touring company) as Gertrude Lawrence and similarly misnaming others in the stills. My copy brought with it an errata sheet offering "sincere apologies" for the mistakes and correcting them. I should like to add the following information: To the first correction the Jimmy Winter is Frank Crumit; to the second correction add Beatrice Swanson's name as Constance; to the third correction add the name of John E. Young as Shorty McGee. The errata would also alter the rear cover to read "An archival reconstruction of the original 1926 production" rather than the printed 1924. I would suggest a further alteration to 1927 since most of the cuts are from the English production of that year. This is not the finest album in this group.

On the other side of the balance scale, however, is the SOUVENIRS OF HOT CHOCOLATES album. So far this is the finest piece of work issued by the Smithsonian in this series. Here, the repeated numbers don't seem to matter so much. With a score by Fats Waller, performances by Waller himself, Louis Armstrong, Edith Wilson and others not connected with the show, marvelous liner notes by Dan Morgenstern and two comedy sketches written by Eddie Green and performed by him and other members of the original company (including Fats Waller) we almost do have the "archival reconstruction" so sought-after by the producers of this series, and not as yet achieved. This album, wisely, makes no such claim; it is rather a collection of souvenirs, of moments of sheer entertainment having to do with the 1929 hit Hot Chocolates. The performers are flawless. Even Seeger Ellis, whose gratuitous rendition of "Ain't Misbehavin'" closes the album, is worth listening to and not just for Louis Armstrong's guest appearance. My copy is getting worn already and I expect yours will soon be also. Please, Smithsonian, give us more gems like this!

If anyone has an idea for a Smithsonian album, please send it posthaste to the Director of Performing Arts, but please think carefully about it first. There must be many shows waiting for just such an opportunity.