

Herbert von Karajan: A Discography by Anthony Williams Pub: General Gramophone Publications Ltd., 177-179 Kenton Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 0HA, Great Britain; price £1.50

In today's increasingly performer-conscious society there would seem to be a ready market for a publication such as this. Indeed, it is no surprise to learn that this is the first of a series with volumes on Sir Adrian Boult and André Previn due out later this year; and on the whole one must give this initial issue a sound recommendation, despite certain reservations discussed below. In the introduction Mr. Williams states that it is not his intention to provide "a completely accurate, cross-referenced and fully investigated list of Karajan's recordings, but instead an interesting look at Herbert von Karajan's career to date." Accordingly he lists the data which is not included: matrix numbers, exact recording dates (only months and years are given), comprehensive cross-referencing of Karajan's recordings appearing in such collections as "The Maria Callas Album", "Your Best 100 Tunes", etc., the present availability of any of the material, and tape collections. Of these, the absence of exact recording dates is most regrettable, especially in view of the fact that there is more than sufficient room for them in the margins, and anyway, it seems rather silly to go to the trouble of giving the year and the month and not to give the exact dates involved. The effect on the reader is one of frustration. The omission of matrix numbers is also unfortunate, but understandable given the scope of the publication. The reader is not told, but none of the numerous Karajan "pirates" in existence including the recent Cetra issues are included.

The above quibbling is perhaps unfair, in view of the fact that it would extend the work beyond the author's stated objectives. However, I must register several other reservations, the first of which is the format: a listing of Karajan's recordings in chronological order, which in my opinion is a mistake. After all, a discography is by nature a reference work; one simply does not sit down and read it straight through. Most readers, I believe, will purchase this volume to find out when particular performances were recorded or how many times Karajan has recorded a particular work, two feats rather difficult to accomplish with the present format. In fairness it must be admitted that there is a certain insight into Karajan's career that is gained from such an approach, and in a truly definitive study of Karajan, which one hopes will appear someday, a chronological discography as an appendix would be most welcome. However, I strongly believe that the value of the present volume would be greatly increased by an alphabetical listing by composer and title. Another annoying feature is that the contents of Karajan's numerous collections of short pieces are not listed in the main body of the discography; instead one is directed to an appendix where they are given by record company and catalog number. This procedure is, however, not followed strictly; for example, all of the contents of the DG collection "Invitation to the Dance" (2530 244) are

listed in the main body, while one must turn to the back to learn what is contained in the EMI collection "Overtures and Preludes" (SXL P 30210), in which there are fewer titles than the previously mentioned DG issue. Incidentally, two collections, "Operatic Intermezzi" (DG 139 031) and "Ballet Music from the Operas" (DG 2530 200) are cited in the main body without their contents, but have been omitted from the appendix, with the result that what is on the records is never listed anywhere.

Also one must cite certain omissions, such as Karajan's Philharmonia recording of Beethoven's Coriolan Overture (English Columbia 33CX 1277 or Angel 35196) and the recent Berlin Philharmonic recording of the Beethoven Second Symphony (DG 2740 172 or 2531 101). One would like to think that Mr. Williams is aware of such details as the fact that the Decca-London recording of the Grieg Peer Gynt Suite No. 2 (Decca-Jubilee JB 14 or London CS 6420) contains only two excerpts from that work and that of Karajan's two recordings of the Intermezzo from Franz Schmidt's Notre Dame with the Philharmonia (EMI SLS 5019 or Angel 35793) and the Berlin Philharmonic (DG 139031), the former contains twice as much music; but perhaps he considered them too trivial to mention. Another interesting point concerns Karajan's Philharmonia performance of the Beethoven Eighth Symphony which EMI declares on SLS 5053 to have been recorded in stereo. In the present work this performance is said to have been recorded in November of 1953 and completed in May of 1955. If EMI's assertion is correct, then none of the 1953 material could have been used for the performance on SLS 5053, as stereo recording was not yet in existence. Furthermore, several American re-issues are omitted, such as the 1951 Bayreuth Die Meistersinger on Seraphim 6030 E and the Mozart A Major Piano Concerto, K. 488 on Odyssey 32 16 0371, and there is an inordinately large number of typos. This volume should have been proof-read more carefully; in fact almost all of the above mentioned errors could have been corrected with another extra week of re-checking. As a further example of what appears to have been a mad scramble in the final drafting, one should examine page 11 where an almost entire column of unreleased or unacknowledged Karajan recordings with the Vienna Philharmonic has been inserted into what would otherwise have been recordings from 1960. While one realizes that this material only became available at the last minute, it surely would have made more sense to have included it as an appendix instead. In fairness, an erratum is included explaining that this material is from 1946-7; however, according to World Records release SH 286 the Final Scene from Salome and "Es gibt ein Reich" from Ariadne auf Naxos were recorded in 1948.

Despite these complaints, some of which are admittedly minor, the present publication represents a distinct improvement over its most readily available competition, namely the discography prepared by Bruce Surtees that appears at the conclusion of Paul Robinson's Karajan (Lester and Orpen Ltd., 1975). Apart from the difference in cost and the fact that I find Robinson's book rather shallow, the Williams work is considerably more accurate and provides a great deal more information.

However, both seem confused about the contents of Angel 35739. Williams states that it is the same as the English Columbia issue SAX 2356 which consisted of the Mozart Symphonies Nos. 29 and 39, while Surtees says that it contained the Mozart Symphonies Nos. 29, 38, and 39! In fact, it contained Nos. 38 and 39, of which the latter was the first stereo appearance of a performance which had previously been released on Angel 35323. Karajan's 1960 performance of the Symphony No. 29 was never released in America, although it is currently available as a German import coupled with the Symphony No. 38 (Electrola 1C 037-00 653).

While one must regret its limitations, one must still give credit for what has obviously entailed a great deal of work. One hopes that this will spur someone on to provide a truly thorough study of this ever-astounding musician. Incidentally, such a study would have to include a prolonged search through EMI's archives, considering the recent initial release of two Karajan performances with Boris Christoff (excerpts from Boris Godunov and Don Carlo on EMI RLS 735). Nevertheless, the present volume represents the start of a potentially valuable series; however, I do hope the editors will abandon the chronological format in favor of an alphabetical one, and that they will attempt to provide more polish to the final product.

Walter Pate