

Paul Kusch, Discographers' Handbook. Volume One: Conductors.
G.E., Suite 310, 620 No. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
60611. 1978. 265pp \$14.95

In his excellent article, Standards for the Review of Discographic Works (ARSC Journal, VII (3) pp. 47-55) Steve Smolian suggested that performer discographies contain some twenty-five pieces of information. In addition to the more normal data, titles, performers etc., there should also be included the date of recording, place of recording, matrix numbers, timing, original issue number, re-issue numbers and dates, to mention only a few pertinent and necessary data. Similarly, Lewis Foreman, in his unpretentious but most useful book, Systematic Discography (Linnent Books and Clive Bineley Ltd., 1974), set out in some detail various characteristics necessary for a working discography. Whilst these two authors discuss the requirements for good discographical work, Kusch's book raises the question, at what point does a record list become a discography? That is, what shall be the minimum requirements that shall define a discography? I would suggest the following minimum list of necessary information.

- Composer
- Title of work
- Orchestra
- Other performers
- Recording location
- Recording date
- Manufacturer's name
- Original label
- Original issue number
- Original issue date
- Re-issue labels and numbers
- Re-issue dates

These twelve seem to me to comprise the minimum necessary for a list of records to qualify as a discography and lest I be accused of setting up my own rules by which to judge others, it should be reiterated that this is only half of that suggested by Smolian. There are two exceptions which would make legitimate the publishing of an incomplete discography. The first arises because the compilation of a discography can often be an extremely long and frustrating experience. There comes a point after many years' work when it is justifiable to publish it as a "work in progress" that is, to organize the material that has been collected so as to stimulate a final assault on the material, or to provide a basis for others to complete the work, or, finally, to signal an abandonment of the project. The second justification occurs when a work actively in progress is published as a plea for further information for help with lacunae. But in both cases, the intention of the author should be clearly expressed.

Volume one of Pavel Kusch's Discographer's Handbook is paperbound, has 264 pages of material covering twelve conductor discographies, each

preceded by a brief biography. Of the twelve discographies only one contains a consistent notation of the recording location (by city only) and only a further five contain some or a few locations. Recording dates are given for only eight discographies whilst none of them contain re-issue data, except in some cases where re-issues of 78's on LP's are noted. No issue dates are provided and the manufacturer and label notations are varied and confusing. No cast lists for operas are provided, only an abbreviated list of singers without their roles. A variety of type faces and layouts are used.

The contents of each discography need to be accepted with caution. A few examples at random must suffice. Under the Strauss listing in the Furtwangler discography the following entry is found:

Vier letzte Lieder	
-POL-5/22/50-London	private
Flagstad, soprano	
-POL-5/22/50-London	private*
Flagstad, soprano	

*There have been comments made that lead this writer to believe that a complete 'Four Last Songs' was recorded either at the dress rehearsal, or the performance itself for the Maharajah of Mysore, India.

The "complete" performance (minus alas, the last few bars) has in fact been available on an EJS disc and from at least three private tape sources for many years before its commercial release on the Turnabout label last year. Nor has Toscanini been spared. There is no mention of the existence of the 1935 Fidelio Act 1, long since available on the UORC private label. Even if Mr. Kusch is shy of letting us know that Furtwangler's 1943 Bayreuth Meistersinger has for years been available on private discs, he could at least have given us a hint that Odeon released it commercially in 1976. And so on.

A random comparison of the Walter entries with Clough and Cumings' Walter discography (Gramophone Record Review, August 1959) indicates a seemingly haphazard selection of record numbers by Kusch. Each entry has one number, some of which appear to be original issues, some to be re-issues. In other sections of the book US, UK, French and German issues are given. In this Walter section, with few exceptions, only US issues are noted. All of which is confusing.

"Much talk means much exhaustion;
Better far it is to keep thoughts"
(Lao Tsu)

Such a discography suffers considerably by not listing private issues, nor BWS nor Rococo, nor Everest releases, since the omissions distort the true picture of what may or may not be available. As Mr. Kusch states in his introduction, "Many will be upset that (these)

recordings . . . are not included here." Indeed.

It is difficult to perceive the intention of this volume and the audience at which it is aimed. There is plenty of smoke: "this is a special edition, pre-publication (?sic) facsimile . . ."; we are asked to await "the revised second edition of the hard bound copy . . ."

The book has no index -- a serious hindrance to its use, and the bibliography contains no mention of ARSC publications, nor the work of Gray and Gibson, and Weber's discographical series might have been consulted . . .

Discographical work is time consuming and tedious. A labor of love. Weber and others have shown that the work can be done well. As a listing of recordings and some issue numbers, this present book is an interesting checklist. A discography it is, alas, not.

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