

Bibliography of Discographies. Volume 1: Classical Music, 1925-1975.
by Michael H. Gray and Gerald D. Gibson. New York, London: R. R.
Bowker Co., 1977. \$19.95

In an article in an earlier issue of this magazine "Standards for the Review of Discographic Works," (VIII, No. 3; 1976), I included a paragraph on "Bibliographies of Discographies", from which I quote a portion, with elaborations. "The usefulness of a discography is a direct result of the information it contains. Standards are still evolving, so each entry must not only be noted but described in sufficient detail that a user will be led to the publication which promises the information he requires and away from the one which, lacking it, wastes his time... The compiler is required to inspect and evaluate each item before listing. Annotations may be a luxury in a bibliography, where the rules are well established, but are mandatory for discographies, where they have been chaotic."

The annual cumulation of discographies which has appeared in past issues of this magazine has supplied the basic format with some expansion for the listings in this book; the authors either have been (Gibson) or are at present (Gray) editors of this journal.

Having been included in the discussions which preceded both the listings in these pages and the compilation of the book itself, some of my comments are in the nature of "They took my suggestion; hooray," or "They didn't; boo."

The book itself is arranged in one alphabet, by subject or by performer, each entry numbered. This is followed by an index of discographers and discography-generating organizations. Each entry is in clear bibliographic form, followed by a number code which discloses the information included in the discography: noncommercial recordings, matrix numbers, take numbers (shouldn't this be complete or incomplete matrix numbers?), release dates, place and/or date of recording, and the presence of an index. Altogether a major piece of work, well done. There are nits to pick, but none serious.

In lieu of the number code, which must be referred to constantly or memorized, perhaps two-letter combinations with mnemonic associations would have been more effective: mx for "matrix", tk for "take", etc.

Performer's names have been checked with the Library of Congress' authority file and, when found therein, adopted. Otherwise, basic bibliographic procedure has been followed. I do wish the voice range or instrument has been included after each performer's name--not only to assist the reader but also as an aid to filter out impurities: Renato Carosone (not Carosone), a popular crooner; Joseph Jefferson, a major American actor at the turn of the century.

Many sources are cited in individual listings, but an index of periodicals, country of publication, whether still publishing, current subscription address, etc., would have been of great help.

Many vocal discographies do not include information about accompanists, even though the records they list do. Maybe an abbreviation here could be useful. Aida Favia-Artsay's "Caruso on Records", though it omits takes from matrix numbers, gives thematic incipits in music type for each selection, particularly useful for those ephemeral music titles he recorded. She identifies composer and lyric writer for many songs not found in Barlow and Morgenstern's "Dictionary of Vocal Themes" or James Fuld's "Book of World-Famous Music". Similarly, many of William R. Moran's discographies contain careful musical identifications which go well beyond label copy. How can these important extras be indicated? A note, perhaps?

On the other hand, many items listed are of absolutely no redeeming discographic value--inaccurate, sloppy, incomplete, self-serving, and worse. Some (see the article referred to above) are not discographies and should not, I feel, have been honored by inclusion. Many are borderline, to be consulted with care. If simple lists of what happened to be in print at the time, lacking recording dates, matrix numbers, and often the recordings of more than one manufacturer, are to be included, then the carefully compiled lists put out by some record companies of their artist's activities in the studio (Columbia has an extensive series), publications of performing organizations and concert managements have been overlooked (I recently acquired an Igor Kipnis discography--from the artist. He keeps updating it).

Some of the subject headings are suspect, and subject cross-references are totally lacking. Thus there is a heading for Song, and another for "Lieder-German".

Don't let my small quibbles put you off. This is a badly needed book, carefully researched by professional librarians with card catalog and conscience, well presented, and easy to use. It far outpaces all previous attempts at the organized listing of extant discographies, remarkable though some of the pioneer work may have been.

Future volumes are to cover jazz, popular music, ethnic and folk materials, and general works of discography.

No library should be without this book. Get this one now to encourage the authors and publisher to keep 'em coming, and to keep the well-meaning partially informed "authors" at bay.

Steve Smolian