

Popular Music & Society
R. Serge Denisoff, Editor
Department of Sociology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green,
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Academic articles on popular music (mainly rock); occasionally
deals with recordings.

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James F. E. Dennis, Editor
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Articles and discographies dealing with early classical vocal
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British Institute of Recorded Sound
29 Exhibition Road, London S.W.7, England
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Articles and discographies, primarily concerning classical artists.

Storyville
Laurie Wright, Editor
66, Fairview Drive, Chigwell, Essex, England IG7 6HS
(Bimonthly, \$6/year surface, \$9/year airmail) (#84)

The Talking Machine Review International
Ernie Bayly, Editor
19. Glendale Road, Bournemouth, England BH6 4JA
(Bimonthly, \$5.50/year surface, \$10/year airmail) (#57)
Early history of phonographs and recording, especially European.

Time Barrier Express
Ralph Newman, Editor
PO Box 206, Yonkers, NY 10710
(Bimonthly, \$9/year) (#25)
One of the better publications concerned with rock history, disco-
graphy.

RECORDINGS OF BRAHMS'

RHAPSODIE (Op. 53)

by
Martha Lawry

When Brahms' noble Rhapsodie (Op. 53) was first performed in Eng-
land, a reviewer called it "wild and gloomy music" and held that
"Brahms so uses the language of human emotion that emotion responds to
it."¹ In our own time, Hans Gal called it a "strange, profound, and
in many respects enigmatic composition."² Brahms himself, although
deeply affected by the Rhapsody, referred to it soon after its compo-
sition offhandedly as "somewhat intimate music"; however, he was also
reported to have loved it "so much that he had to lay it under his
pillow at night, in order always to have it near him."³ For the most
part this music -- variously described as "intimate," "profound," and
"emotional" -- has continued, from its first hearing to the present, to
receive critical acclaim and popular affection.

The Alto Rhapsody, however, has never become a standard offering
on recordings or in symphony programs. The relative infrequency of its
performance may well be because its "combination of alto voice, male
chorus, and orchestra is unconventional and contrary to ordinary
concert-hall usage,"⁴ rather than lack of interested performers and
listeners. The advent of long-playing records made it necessary to
record the Rhapsody in combination with other vocal works (e.g. Gustav
Mahler's Lied von der Erde and Richard Wagner's Wesendonck Lieder) or
Brahms' symphonic or vocal works.

And which recording of Brahms' Rhapsodie (Op. 53) is considered to
be the "best"? Judging from a survey of reviews, consensus, but not
complete agreement, can be reached. Most reviews of the Alto Rhapsody
have been markedly similar. They look to the "first" recording by
Sigrid Onegin as a benchmark for all the rest, and hold that the best
since hers have been those by Marian Anderson, Kathleen Ferrier, Aafje
Heynis, Christa Ludwig, and Janet Baker. Before Janet Baker's 1971
recording, reviewers generally tended to believe that the "ideal" re-
cording had not yet appeared. This assessment was particularly notice-
able in reviews of the three Anderson recordings. For example, in 1955
Philip Miller wrote:

So far, Marian Anderson has had three tries at the
Rhapsody, and where she has done herself justice in
one recording seems always to be the spot that comes
off less well in another. The first, prewar, version,
with Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra was

naturally the freshest vocally; the second, with Monteux and the San Francisco, the best interpreted, though the singer was caught short in some of the longer phrases; the third and at present only available performance is the best recorded, but does the artist least credit.⁵

Earlier in the same article, Miller suggested that had Kathleen Ferrier lived longer she might have made the first "completely satisfactory" recording. He added:

As it is, we must be grateful to London for transferring the older effort to LP, for it is, taken all around, the best yet made of this music. The noble voice is magnificent throughout, the patent sincerity apparent in every measure. One feels only that time would have mellowed the artist's conception of the work.⁶

Robert Simpson, in The Music Review, also found Ferrier's performance "right" -- with a few reservations:

In matters of detail this performance is open to considerable criticism, but the overall effect is so emphatically right and so much enhanced by the fine quality of the recording that one tends not to notice the imperfections.⁷

Few if any such reservations were evident in reviews of the Baker-Boult recording (Angel S37032, with Brahms' Symphony No. 2). Abram Chipman in High Fidelity Magazine called it "stark simplicity itself, direct and to the point, with a throbbing urgency from the Boult baton and a warm-blooded, caressing vibrato from the soloist."⁸ Trevor Harvey, reviewer for The Gramophone, was even more enthusiastic:

...how can anyone resist Janet Baker's superb singing and vocal colouring, from a wonderfully veiled tone to great, thrilling outbursts, full of warmth and feeling. Sir Adrian knows exactly how to accompany his soloist with understanding, helping her in the more difficult phrases. The choir makes just the right sound. Goethe's words aren't clear but I doubt if Brahms much wanted them to be, for the whole emphasis is on the soloist, whose response to the poem is always superb.⁹

Candidates for first honors other than Janet Baker have also appeared. Gunter Kossodo, a reviewer for The American Record Guide, found Christa Ludwig's recording to be "the best available ... in fact, the best in memory."¹⁰ Philip Miller considered the 1959 recording by

Aafje Heynis to be the one "first-rate" Alto Rhapsody. His review of Miss Heynis' recording also contained an assessment of some of the earlier recordings. The following excerpt reflects the consensus of many reviews:

The Alto Rhapsody is a veritable contralto paradise, yet only now for the first time are we offered a really first-rate recording of it. If we return to the first attempt, made in 1930 by Sigrid Onegin with Kurt Singer conducting ... we find the singing tonally gorgeous but superficial, the eminent soloist more concerned with placing of tones and with demonstrating her remarkable portamento than with the Goethe text. More recently Marian Anderson tried three times without producing a satisfactory recording. A composite of her three recordings ... might give us the singer's best, for neither the good spots nor the weak are consistent. The no-longer-available recording of Elisabeth Hongen and Ferdinand Leitner was marred by unsteady tone. Kathleen Ferrier and Clemens Krauss had they lived for another go at the work, might have turned the trick; the performance they left us only misses by seeming too slow and careful, perhaps tentative. Monica Sinclair and Sir Adrian Boult gave us a good account of the music without, however, the conviction that they were discoursing of really big things. Miss Heynis ... uses her rich and beautifully controlled voice for the glory of the music. In the recording she is not allowed to swamp the orchestra with tone, but is made a part of Van Veinum's rich but restrained ensemble.¹¹

Thomas Heinitz, reviewing the recent Greevy-Loughran recording (Classics for Pleasure CFP 40064) in Records and Recording, reported his pleasure in hearing the work performed by a "true contralto and not, as so often in recent years, a mezzo-soprano."¹²

The following discography lists commercial recordings of the Alto Rhapsody in chronological order by year of issue. Current availability is indicated by an Ⓢ (for recordings listed in the May or Spring/Summer 1978 Schwann catalog), a Ⓒ (for those in the March 1978 Gramophone catalog), and a Ⓓ (for the Fall 1977 Bielefelder catalog). The 1950 U.N. Concert recording by Marian Anderson and Fritz Busch can be purchased through its distributor, Discocorp. One recording, that of Vera Soukupova, Zdenek Macal and the Czech Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra, appeared in none of the record catalogs, periodical reviews, or recorded music reference works consulted. Correspondence with Supraphon's U.S. distributor elicited only the information "item deleted," while no reply was received from inquiries to Supraphon in Prague. Source for this listing is Bernard Jacobson's The Music of

Johannes Brahms (London: The Tantivy Press, 1977), p. 206.

- Sigrid Onegin 1930 (78 rpm) Berlin State Orchestra 7417/8, Victor
Berlin Doctors' Chorus 1442/3, HMV
Kurt Singer GR-2158, Angel (Japan)
- Marian Anderson 1939 (78 rpm) Philadelphia Orchestra V-15408, V-1919, Victor
Pennsylvania University Chorus tor
Eugene Ormandy DB3837, DA1700, HMV
- Marian Anderson 1946 (78 rpm) (recording 3 March 1945) San Francisco Symphony 11-9500/1, Victor
San Francisco Municipal Chorus Set M1111, Victor
Pierre Monteux Album SP-13, Victor
- Kathleen Ferrier 1948 (78 rpm, recording 1947) London Philharmonic Orchestra 1847/8, Decca
London Philharmonic Choir LL903, 5098, London
Clemens Krauss
1968 re-issue (G) ACL 306, Decca
(S) R23183, Richmond
(B) 6.48048DP, Telefunken Decca
- Marian Anderson 1951 (recording 20 October 1950) RCA Victor Orchestra LM1146, Victor
Robert Shaw Chorale Set 1532 (45 rpm), Victor
Fritz Reiner
- Elisabeth Hongen 1953 Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra DL4074, Decca
Berlin Choral Society
Ferdinand Leitner
- Monica Sinclair 1955 (recording ca. 25 Nov 54) Philharmonic Promenade Orches-WN 18035, Westminster
tra WN4401, Westminster
Chorus of the Croydon Philharmonic Society NCL 16002; NCL 16004
Sir Adrian Boult Nixa mono; MAL 732,
Marble Arch mono;
(G) GSGC 15021, Pye Col-
lector
"The 'Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra' was the recording name used by Nixa for the London Philharmonic Orchestra."¹³

Lucretia West

- 1958 (recording 1957) Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra LXV 5394, Decca
Vienna Academy Male Voice LLP 1752, London
Choir
Hans Knappertsbusch
1974 re-issue (G) ECS 701, Decca Eclipse
(B) 6.41981AJ, Telefunken Decca
- Aafje Heynix 1959 (recording 1958) Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra LC 3563, Epic
Royal Male Choir "Apollo"
Eduard van Beinum
- Maureen Forrester 1960 (recording 1957) Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra 17 199, Polydor
RIAS Male Chorus
Ferenc Fricsay
1970 re-issue 89 857, Heliodor
- Aafje Heynis 1962 Vienna Symphony Orchestra A2226-7L (M), Philips
Singverein der Gesellschaft 835114-5AY (S),
der Musikfreunde Philips
Wolfgang Sawallisch (B) 6530 027, Phonogram
(B) 6780 018, Phonogram
- Christa Ludwig 1962 (recording 21-23 Mar 1962) Philharmonia Orchestra (S) S35923, Angel
Philharmonia Chorus (G) SLS821, HMV; ASD2391,
Otto Klemperer HMV
(B) 1C063 00826, EMI
- Maura Moreira 1962 (1969 U.K. release) Innsbruck Symphony Orchestra STPL 512.320, Vox
Innsbruck Chorus (G) TV 34281-S, Decca-
Robert Wagner Turnabout
- Mildred Miller 1963 (recording 1961) Columbia Symphony Orchestra (S) MS 6488, Columbia
Occidental College Concert ML 5888, Columbia
Choir (G) (B) 61 428, CBS
Bruno Walter
- Grace Hoffman 1966 (released on Concert Hall tapes in 1958) Men's Chorus & Orchestra (S) HB73003 (S), Nonesuch
of Norddeutscher Rundfunk, H3003 (M), Nonesuch
Hamburg
Carl Bamberger

Helen Watts 1967 (recording 1966)
L'Orchestre de la Suisse
Romande
Les Choeurs de la Radio
Suisse Ansermet
1973 re-issue
1977 re-issue

Irina Arkhipova 1967
Russian State Symphony
Orchestra
Russian State Academy Choir
Igor Markevitch

Vera Soukupova 197-?
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra
Czech Philharmonic Chorus
Zdenek Macal

Janet Baker 1971 (recording 1970)
London Philharmonic
Orchestra
John Alldis Choir
Sir Adrian Boult
1976 re-issue

Bernadette Greevy 1974 (recording 1973)
Halle Orchestra
Halle Choir
James Loughran

Marian Anderson 1976 (recording 1950)
New York Philharmonic
Unidentified Chorus
Fritz Busch
(from the 1950 U.N. Human Rights Day concert
at Metropolitan Opera House, New York -- on
Bruno Walter Society record, Fritz Busch, Vol. 2)

SET 333-4; MET 333-4,
Decca
1265 (S), London
A4265, London
LP30073-4, HMV Concert
Classic
SDD 402, Decca
ECS 798, Decca Eclipse
(in Brahms, Choral
Works)
DPAS83-4, Decca re-
issue of SET 333-4

SR-90467
D 012301-2, S 0643/4
(USSR)

ST 50772, Supraphon

S 337032; S37199 (Q),
Angel
G ASD 2746, HMV
B 1C065 02758Q, EMI
G ASD3260, HMV -- with
R. Strauss Songs
and R. Wagner
Wesendonck Lieder

C CFP 40064, Classics
for Pleasure

RR-397, Discocorp
distributor

Yvonne Minton 1977
New Philharmonic Orchestra (S) M2 34583 (Q),
Ambrosian Singers Columbia
Lorin Maazel M34798; QBL 34798,
Columbia
G B 79211, CBS

Christa Ludwig 1978 (rec. 21 June 1976)
Vienna Philharmonic Orches- (S) 2530 992, Deutsche
tra Grammophon
Singverein der Gesellschaft
der Musikfreunde
Karl Bohm

Shirley Verrett 1978
Philadelphia Orchestra ARL 1-3001, RCA
Men of the Temple University (in Schwann, Jan. '79)
Choirs
Eugene Ormandy

In addition, Nathan E. Brown, archivist of Western Sound Archive,
El Cerrito, California, has reported to me the following archival
recordings on broadcast tapes:

Janet Busch 1941 (Broadcast over WABC, Sept. 21, 1941)
CBS Symphony
Schola Cantorum
Sir Thomas Beecham

Enid Szanthy 1941 (Broadcast over CBS Radio, Nov. 9, 1941)
New York Philharmonic
Westminster Choir
Bruno Walter

Martha Lipton 1956 (Broadcast over CBS Radio, April 1, 1956)
New York Philharmonic
Westminster Choir
Guido Cantelli

NOTES

¹Cambridge University Musical Society, "The Musical Times (June 1, 1877), 279-80. The Rhapsodie (Op. 53) will be referred to for the most part as the Alto Rhapsody or simply Rhapsody.

²Hans Gal, Johannes Brahms, His Work and Personality, trans. Joseph Stein (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 196.

³Albert Dietrich and J.V. Widmann, Recollections of Johannes Brahms, trans. Dora E. Hecht (London: Seeley, 1899), 74.

⁴Gal, op. cit., 196.

⁵Philip L. Miller, The Guide to Long-Playing Records: Vocal Music (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 50.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Robert Simpson, "Gramophone Records," The Music Review, IX (1948), 319.

⁸Abram Chipman, "Classical Review," High Fidelity Magazine, XXIV/12 (December 1974), 102.

⁹Trevor Harvey, "Analytical Notes and First Reviews," The Gramophone, XLIX/584 (December 1971), 1036.

¹⁰Gunter Kossodo, "Other Reviews," The American Record Guide, XXIX/7 (March 1963), 538.

¹¹Philip L. Miller, "Only Now a Really First-Rate 'Alto Rhapsody,'" The American Record Guide, XXVI/6 (February 1960), 427.

¹²Thomas Heintz, Record Review in Records & Recording, XVIII/1 (October 1974), 38. In a September 1976 letter to me, Mildred Miller commented on her surprise at Bruno Walter's wanting her to record the Rhapsody: "My voice is a lyric mezzo-soprano and all previous recordings that had been done were with a very heavy contralto voice. To make sure that Maestro Walter truly wanted me to record it, I insisted that I sing it for him before I sign my contract. When he still insisted, I then requested that on the jacket of the recording my name would be listed as a mezzo-soprano so that the listener would not have a pre-conceived idea of color and weight of the voice." Mrs. B. Bird, writing to me for Maureen Forrester, November 1976, stated: "Miss Forrester well remembers Bruno Walter saying that one should think as a man, even though it is written for a woman."

¹³Mike Ashman, "Boult Discography," Records & Recording, XVII/7 (April 1974), 17.

CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

compiled by
Tim Brooks

Following is a directory to significant articles on recording history which have been published recently. It is not intended to list everything in print, but rather the principal articles, those that may be of interest to Journal readers and to other researchers. Reviews, news of the current music and collecting world, and articles on subjects other than recording history are not included. Issues covered are those received between May and November, 1979.

Recordings:

Popular/General

"What's So Funny" by Tim Brooks describes the Okeh Laughing Record and other laughing records of 1900-1930, Antique Phonograph Monthly, V/10.

"Phonograph Arrests in Old New York" by Robert Feinstein describes recordings of the 1890's which were banned or deemed obscene, Antique Phonograph Monthly, V/10.

"Spending the Sixties With the Smothers Brothers" by Ronald L. Smith, with discography, Goldmine, Sept. 1979.

"Trends in Recorded Television Themes, 1950's-1970's" by Steve Gelfand, with discography, Goldmine, Sept. 1979.

"The Bob Newhart Story" by Ronald L. Smith, with discography, Goldmine, Nov. 1979.

"7" Victory Research" by Arthur Badrock and Jim Hayes, continues listing the English label, Gunn Report #73.

"Billy Williams Discography" by David Moore, cont., Gunn Report #73.

"Dominion Gramophone Records, Ltd." by Barry Raynaud, continues the history of the English label, Gunn Report #73.

"The Vertical Cut Disc Period" by Len Watts and Frank Andrews, a summary of European companies in this field, Hillandale News, June 1979.

"Gone Missing" by Frank Andrews describes obscure artists on pre-1910 English Milliphone and Rex issues, Hillandale News, June 1979.

"The Amberol Controversy (June 1910)," Hillandale News, June 1979.