

THE ART OF K. N. IGUMNOV

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata No. 7, D major, Op. 10/3 - 2nd movement, Largo e mesto; CHOPIN: Piano Sonata No. 3, B minor, Op. 58 - 2nd movement, Scherzo, molto vivace, and 3rd movement, Largo; SCHUBERT: Moment musical, C sharp minor, Op. 94/4, D. 780, no. 4; LIADOV: Prelude, B minor, Op. 11/1; RUBINSTEIN: Impromptu, F major, Op. 16/1; TCHAIKOVSKY-PABST: Berceuse, A flat minor, Op. 16/1; TCHAIKOVSKY: Aveu passione, E minor, c. 1891; Reverie dussoir, G minor, Op. 19/1; Grande Sonate, G major, Op. 37 - 2nd movement, Andante non troppo quasi moderato. Recorded on tape at a recital in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, December 3, 1947. MELODIYA S10-05519-20.

SCHUMANN: Kreisleriana, Op. 16 (recorded on audiofilm, 1941); CHOPIN: Mazurka, B major, Op. 56/1; SCRIABIN: Poem, F sharp major, Op. 32/2 (restored from metal parts for unissued commercial recordings made in 1935); SCRIABIN: Mazurka, F sharp minor, Op. 25/7; RACHMANINOV: Barcarole, G minor, Op. 10/3; RUBINSTEIN: Prelude, F minor, Op. 75/9; RUBINSTEIN: Melancholy, G minor, Op. 51/1 (recorded on "celluloid" discs at a recital in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Fall 1946). MELODIYA S10-05521-2.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Les Saisons (The Months), 12 morceaux caracteristiques, Op. 37-bix. Recorded on tape for commercial issue, 1947. MELODIYA S10-05523-4.

SCHUMANN: Dichterliebe, Op. 48. Ivan Kozlovsky, tenor; K. N. Igumnov, piano; (recorded on tape for commercial issue, 1946); TCHAIKOVSKY: Trio, A minor, for violin, cello, and piano, Op. 50 - Part 1, Pezzo elegaico. David Oistrakh, violin; Sviatoslav Knushevitzky, cello; K. N. Igumnov, piano. (recorded on audiofilm at a concert in the Moscow Conservatory, 1939). MELODIYA S10-05525-6. Available in the USA only as a boxed set of four discs, c. \$24.00.

Konstantin Nikolayevich Igumnov (May 1, 1873 - March 24, 1948) spent his lifetime pretty much confined within the borders of the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia. Born in Lebediany, he received early music instruction at home, and entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1888. His musical education from that point onward is a near-duplicate of his much-better-known fellow student, Sergei Rachmaninov. Both had preparatory piano studies with Nikolai Zverev, prior to their matriculation at the Conservatory. Both then studied with Aleksandr Siloti and Pavel Pabst, took theory and composition courses from Sergei Taneyev, Anton Arensky, and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, and a chamber music ensemble course with N. Safonov. Igumnov graduated in 1894, and received an honorary diploma for piano performance at the 1895 Rubinstein Competition. In 1899 he became Professor of Piano at the Moscow Conservatory, and occupied that position for the rest of his life. From 1924 to 1929 he was Rector of the Conservatory.

He concertized extensively through late middle age, and later

confined his recitals to the premises of the Conservatory - where at least two were in part recorded. It is to this circumstance that we owe rather more than half of the existing documentation of his playing, for he disliked making records, and his studio recording activities were extremely limited.

To judge from contemporary commentary on Igumnov, he shared something of the personality characteristics of Sergei Taneyev - warmth, honesty, and kindness tempering intensely high musical and intellectual standards. There are few of his students that are well-known outside the Soviet Union, for Igumnov did not preside over a virtuoso-mill. An abbreviated list of the best-known products of his pedagogy is illuminating: Nikolai Orlov, Issay Dobrowen, Lev Oborin, Yakov Flier, Maria Grinberg, Aleksandr Iokheles, Naum Shtarkman, and Bella Davidovich.

It is regrettable that Melodiya found so much of the existing recorded material to be "short of the lowest technical requirements," and so we have isolated movements of Beethoven's Op. 10/3 and Chopin's Op. 58 - in performances that will make the listener wish they were to be had complete. These are primitive tape-recordings, restricted in range and dynamics, distorted and unstable in speed, but what comes through is totally engrossing - a "floating" approach, modest in dynamics, clearly articulated and voiced, and wholly attentive to the shaping of each entire movement. Affectionate attention to detail, and a similar modesty of expression characterizes Igumnov's playing of the smaller works in the set. There is no music here that is not illuminated by this meticulous, tasteful - even "aristocratic" (not a word one finds in Soviet criticism) treatment.

The short pieces recorded in the 1946 recital are the poorest in sound, with lots of acetate noise and blasting; the audiofilm material is surprisingly good, but is afflicted with sharp level drops and some pitch instability.

Best of all, of course, is the commercially-recorded music, including a pair of 1935-78's, miraculously resurrected from metal parts. Ivan Kozlovsky's performance of Schumann's Dichterliebe is surprising in its high musical quality, with only a few lapses in articulation. It does not come off well in Russian, perhaps because the singer's diction is distractingly good. Igumnov's contribution is strong, accurate, and well-balanced.

This set was issued more or less in commemoration of Igumnov's centenary, and would in the ordinary course of events by now be effectively out of print. However, a New York City retail store (which shall be nameless, since they are about as obliging as the proverbial steamroller) failed to display the records upon arrival, and so this reviewer found, at the beginning of this summer, that their stock consisted of some eighty copies. For this benighted nation, that will probably serve the needs of all interested parties.

A Look At
The Record of Singing Volumes 1 and 2;
The Books and Recordings

From the moment one has seen EMI's massive twelve record set The Record of Singing Volume 1, and the thirteen record The Record of Singing Volume 2, there is only wonder and admiration at the size and ambition of what (when it is finished) will be a virtually complete aural reference of singers who recorded. As such these sets cannot be too highly praised and the guiding spirits behind the project, George Stuart and Vivian Liff, who lent their recordings and pictures, deserve the highest accolades. Unfortunately, there is a Jekyll and Hyde aspect to the entire project. Because of this it will be necessary to consider the two books by Michael Scott, which accompany the sets and which are also called The Record of Singing, Volumes 1 and 2, separately from the recordings. As the recordings are by far the most important historical re-issues devoted to opera singers to yet appear, I will first look at the "records of singing."

Volume 1 has recordings of singers who recorded or were active until 1914. It begins with the curious recording of the last of the castrati, Moreschi, but turns completely around with the immensely important record by Adelina Patti of "Ah! non credea" from Bellini's La Sonnambula. Although the singer is undoubtedly past her prime, this is a wonderful reading by possibly the greatest prima donna of the nineteenth century and the most accurate preservation of a relatively pure early nineteenth century romantic style on records. This is only the beginning of the set. Classic interpretations of French, Wagnerian, and Italian opera are presented, often by the original singers of the roles. Thus extinct styles are preserved along with unmatched singing. There are no singers before the public today who can equal the feats displayed by Pol Plançon, Lillian Nordica, Sir Charles Santley, Emilio de Gogorza, Leon Escalais, Mattia Battistini or Antonio Pini Corsi, who gives an invaluable demonstration of coloratura buffa singing in "Udite!" from L'Elisir d'Amore. Fernando de Lucia looks back to the art of Mario with his recording of an aria from La Sonnambula while Francesco Tamagno reveals that he has never been approached as Otello, a role he created.

The list is endless. Suffice it to say that more can be learned about opera in these discs than in all of the complete recordings of opera made since the LP era has begun. Happily, except for a few unfortunate pitch problems, Bryan Crimp has done an admirable job with the transfers which make easy listening indeed. Only rabid purists will object to the discreet filtering. Even so, one will never get closer to the true sound of Lilli Lehmann's titanic art than in her two selections in Volume 1.

Volume 2 reveals even more marvels. Fabulous singing by David Devries, Marcel Journet and Rosa Ponselle are only a few of the treasures in the set. There is the most spectacular recording of a Mozart aria

ever put on a disc: the incredible florid aria from Idomeneo recorded by the great Hermann Jadlowker. The wide-ranging selections in this volume, covering the years 1914-1925, are free from the major problem of Volume 1, in which so many of the legendary stars of the distant past recorded long past their primes. Thus a young Riccardo Stracciari and Fernando Carpi give bel canto lessons in their duet from Il Barbiere, a far cry from the heavy-handed treatment it is given in modern performances. The relatively obscure Genevieve Vix, Suzanne Brohly and Fanny Helder quite seduce the listener. There will be no surprise at the marvelous singing of Galli-Curci, but considerable surprise at the spirited singing of Elvira de Hildago, a singer who failed miserably at the Met. Once again the list of singers is extensive and since there are fewer pitch problems by far, I am even more enthusiastic if possible about this volume of records.

So much for Dr. Jekyll. Now for Mr. Hyde.

With the sets, one finds books by Michael Scott also called The Record of Singing, Volumes 1 and 2, with the covers identical to the record boxes seemingly linking the records with the books, a drastic mistake. For while the records give an impartial, unarguable account of the singers, at least as they recorded, the books only present a highly slanted record of Michael Scott's prejudices against singers which is damaging to the project and unfair. Further, it is written in a smug superior manner offensive to many readers, some of whom have refused to have anything to do with Volume 2 as a result. To see why I am so appalled by this book a detailed examination is in order.

In the preface, Scott writes "I have let the records-so to speaking for themselves and been content to act as guide to features of technique, style and interpretation..." Good advice, but unfortunately it is ignored. Scott acts not as a guide, but as a judge, an arbiter. It is not enough for him to criticize an individual singer, but he even goes on to condemn the whole national German style of singing. He notes that "Germany has never been a Land of Song." Considering that just about the only eighteenth century operas in the repertory are, with the exception of Pergolesi's La Serva Padrona, all written by Germans, this is strange indeed. Of course many were written in the Italian style, but many were written in the French and the German style as well and Mozart, not a bad vocal authority himself, was quite taken with many German singers and praised them greatly in his correspondence. But Scott ignores Mozart and writes that "In the eighteenth century...the Germans were not thought to be able to sing at all."

Scott is not necessarily incorrect in basing his judgements on singing upon the historic precepts laid down by the great Italian teachers Tosi and Porpora, but things have changed a lot in the last 300 years and it is not always a good idea to rigidly base all judgements on how we think singers sang before the age of recordings. All that we can really know is the music they sang, and from colorful contemporary criticism we can get an idea of what singing was like; considering how much singing changes

and fluctuates within even these two volumes of the Record of Singing, it is a mistake to use such unyielding yardsticks. Scott, however, falls headlong into the trap and even speculates that Tosi would have thought Chaliapin "the paragon of Bel Canto" and superior to Plancon. I personally think Tosi would have despised both of them, since their styles must have been so completely foreign to his own. Scott's attempt to place Chaliapin, one of the few singers he seems to favor, in the great line of bel-canto artists is a laughable assertion in the face of the Russian's absurd, sporadic attempts in bel canto repertory and completely misses the true genius of this unique singer. In both volumes he is highly selective in his quoting of contemporary criticism. Thus, he uses Chorley's glowing review of Viardot's singing to suggest that Schumann-Heink's virtuosity was something inferior, but neglects to quote Chorley on the subject of Patti, a singer the critic actively disliked; yet Patti is in the set, while Viardot, alas, made no recordings. One also gets the impression that Scott skimmed on research and is doing a lot of faking. Singers as important as Wilhelm Hesch and Paul Knupfer get short shrift while comparatively insignificant singers like Henschel are dwelt upon at length.

Volume 2 finds Scott at his meanest. Where in Volume 1 he sometimes demurs, he does not hesitate in Volume 2 to make sure, as one reader put it, "that everything bad that can be said about a singer isn't left unsaid." He also seems anxious not leave any judgement to the listener. So we are told that Rosa Ponselle and Elsa Bland, celebrated stars of the Metropolitan Opera and Vienna Court Opera respectively, were "provincial," a surprising term for headliners of two of the most cosmopolitan opera houses in the world. American singers particularly are given nasty treatment. In addition, Ponselle is unfavorably compared to her contemporary, Florence Easton, a British singer who is all but forgotten in the United States, and does not seem to be celebrated in England today, if historical reissues are any indication. In the head-to-head "competition" in the record set, Ponselle gives a stunning account of the "Ernani involomi" while Easton sings an agreeable, but by no means outstanding rendition of "O mio babbino caro." Scott uses selective reviews to support his dubious contentions in a manner reminiscent of modern advertisers quoting even negative reviews to appear like raves. Other Americans coming in for harsh treatment include the lovely Anna Case, who Scott notes had "self-conscious diction," and Riccardo Martin, "a good second rate singer," somehow neglecting to quote the important critic Henry Finck who had this to say about Martin in his book My Adventures in The Golden Age of Music published in 1926: "His (Caruso's) successor might have been an American. One evening...Nordica came in...she asked: 'Is that Caruso singing?' 'No,' I answered, 'it is Riccardo Martin,' ...a greater tenor than Gigli or Martinelli." Interestingly, Caruso admired and liked Martin and they went to performances together.

Scott likes to qualify his qualifications with petty and irrelevant slogans, such as calling Bronsgeest an "excellent routine artist" or the designation of Mardones as "the best kind of house singer."

Perhaps the most startling of Scott's revelations is that John McCormack's "Il Mio Tesoro," recording is "deficient from character." He explains that McCormack's virtuosity was exaggerated in an age when singing was so poor, but that such achievements as male coloratura singing are common today. He fails to mention who are the modern male virtuosos who can accomplish these feats or where they are performing today and we can only regret that such singers appear to have stayed away from the Metropolitan or recordings.

But if he criticizes McCormack, Scott is generous with British singers. Overgenerous perhaps in a way which does no service to them. Just as it does not help Easton's reputation to compare her to Ponselle, it is also a mistake to compare Peter Dawson, a likeable enough singer, to such giants as Battistini and Santley, two baritones who are quite unapproached by any others on records.

Now if we have seen that Scott is condescending to Americans, he maintains his prejudices against German singing and really skewers many German singers. Two that he treats particularly harshly are Herman Jadlowker and Elisabeth Schumann. No doubt some of this comes from his active and reiterated dislike of Richard Strauss since both of these singers were particular favorites of the composer.

Dismissing Jadlowker's technique, one of the most accomplished on records, as the result of "simple" practice, Scott also implies that Jadlowker had no impact at the Metropolitan where he was given four premieres in as many years! Scott states that Jadlowker returned to Berlin as "the big fish," implying "in a small pond." Since many experts who are not burdened with Scott's anti-German attitude rightly consider the performances in Germany to have been more musically important than the "Rolls Royce" performances of the Met and Covent Garden, the pond was big enough. While the Met was presenting Julian, Jadlowker was creating Bacchus in Ariadne auf Naxos, a role Strauss wrote for him. It is well known and was noted by Henry Lahee that Jadlowker left the Met at a peak of popularity because he was offered the highest salary ever given to a tenor in Germany. However, Scott truly outdoes himself when he writes that Jadlowker's "voice, like that of most cantors, has a guttural quality," a statement suspiciously close to anti-Semitism and in any case a strange comment from one who is so impressed with the undeniably guttural voice of Chaliapin.

Elisabeth Schumann was one of the most beloved singers ever to grace the stage but gets cruel treatment from Scott. Not content to discuss the records, Scott actually criticizes her singing in, of all things, her photographs. He writes that the pictures prove she sings incorrectly by the way she holds her shoulders in still photographs. How can we take any of his observations seriously after this?

Sadly, we can also look forward to much castigation of Toscanini, if the first two volumes are any indication. He is seen as a villain by Scott, responsible for many of the singers' sins. [Readers are advised

to consult the superb biography of Toscanini by Harvey Sachs to find out about Toscanini's vocal influence.]

Frankly, I don't know if it is possible for anyone to write a complete history of singing and make the clear-cut judgements and pigeonholing that Scott attempts without self-destructing. Better perhaps to consult the Kutsch/Reimens A Concise Biographical Dictionary of Singers as a far more useful book to the scholar and enthusiast.

I can only hope that the books will not damage singers' reputations too greatly and that those who read them will be able to see through the layers of pseudo history and expertise and enjoy and appreciate the invaluable recordings which belong in the collections of all music libraries and vocal historians.

James Camner

WAGNER: Siegfried Idyll; TCHAIKOVSKY: Romeo and Juliet (World Records SH 287); TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphonies 5 and 6 (World Records SHB 52, 2 discs); MENDELSSOHN: Symphony No. 4 "Italian"; SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 8 (World Records SH 290); FRANCK: Symphony in D Minor (RCA Red Seal ARL 1-3005); BRAHMS: Symphony No. 3 (Seraphim S60325).

Guido Cantelli conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra (in the Wagner, Brahms, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Tchaikovsky "Romeo" and Symphony 6), the NBC Symphony (in the Franck), and the Orchestra of La Scala (in the Tchaikovsky Symphony 5).

There seems to be a Guido Cantelli revival taking place, and it's about time. This writer became a Cantelli fan several years ago while copying all of the NBC Symphony broadcasts from acetate tape originals to mylar safety copies, a preservation project for the Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section. In all honesty, the Cantelli performances excited me more often than the Toscanini ones. In trying to analyze why I felt that way, I could only conclude that, to me, Cantelli displayed a delicate balance of insight, sheer musicality and humanity that were never obscured by utter showmanship. Like many other performers of the fateful Fifties, Cantelli's career could only remain a promise of greater things.

Fortunately for us he left a number of studio recordings, which, though tame in comparison to the live broadcasts, allow the listener special insights into Cantelli the man and musician. EMI, through World Records, has just re-issued four discs, with more, I understand, on the way. Simultaneously, RCA has re-issued Cantelli's performance of the Franck D Minor Symphony, recorded with the NBC Symphony, this time in stereo. It was made in Carnegie Hall, April 6, 1954, just two days after Toscanini's last performance with the orchestra he built.

A comparison of the old RCA mono disc (LM 1852) and the new stereo issue is startling. The mono disc is dull sounding, muffled, if you will. The stereo one has greater impact musically and sonically, with climaxes more brilliant, especially in the brass, and a depth achieved by placement of the violins on the left and right of the conductor. Musically, this is about the best performance of the Franck at any price. Cantelli's approach is that of an organist: he studied the instrument early in his music career, using the orchestra like a great French organ. It seems to me that this is what Franck unintentionally wrote into the music, and Cantelli understood that fact, interpreting the work as he would an organ composition.

Cantelli understood the Composer as fellow human being, with thoughts, feelings, and intentions, always injecting just enough of his own personality into the performance that the composer's personality remained in the limelight. This was the way I think he approached Tchaikovsky. What has bothered me about so much of Tchaikovsky's music is its overwhelming negativeness, its self-effacing, self-pitying bouts with anxiety and depression. To Cantelli's credit he softens these harsh emotions, and

allows the composer a strength that is ultimately positive. Of the two symphonies re-issued, the Fifth fares better than the Sixth, perhaps because the Orchestra of La Scala had worked for some time with Cantelli before coming to London to perform and record with him.

The Finale of the Fifth is not as electrifying as the NBC Symphony performance of March 1, 1952, but, as alluded to before, Cantelli's live performances tended to be powerhouses of concentration from start to finish, with all stops pulled out at the end. The sound of the two discs is substantially improved over the domestic issues (RCA LHMV 1003 and RCA LHMV 1047), with a slight loss of program material in the Fifth Symphony, perhaps due to a sticky splice in the original tape. Balances in the recording of the Fifth tend to highlight the woodwinds and brass, while the Sixth is very well balanced. Surfaces of the review copy were flawless.

The Wagner/Tchaikovsky coupling (recorded in October, 1951) is magnificent in every way. The playing that Cantelli received from the Philharmonia is inspired and very warm. The conductor is at his lyric best in the Wagner, and fiery in the Tchaikovsky, the remastering from HMV ALP 1086 is bright and more forward, the surfaces of the disc immaculate. In short a marvelous record.

My favorite of the lot is the Mendelssohn/Schubert re-issue, the Schubert appearing for the first time in stereo. In comparison with the domestic Seraphim issue, the World Records disc is stunning. All of the excitement of the opening of the Mendelssohn leaps at you, and the warmth of the Schubert Eighth is enhanced by the stereo sound. It's a pity that the Mendelssohn could not be pressed in stereo.

From the same recording period, August, 1955, comes a new Seraphim issue, the Brahms Third Symphony, again with the Philharmonia, and in stereo. Unless I am mistaken, this is the first domestic issue of this performance. As of this writing World Records has issued the Brahms Third coupled with a Schumann Fourth, so I feel a little cheated on this domestic disc. Neither can I arouse any enthusiastic feelings for this performance or the sound. In many ways the sound and the performance lack luster and life. Perhaps if I hear the World Records disc, I might change my opinion.

World Records has announced a Brahms First, to be issued shortly. Perhaps Debussy and Ravel as recorded by Cantelli will be forthcoming? Let's hope so.

Mike Donaldson

DEBUSSY: *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Irène Joachim (s, *Mélisande*), Leila Ben Sedira (s, *Yniold*), Germaine Cernay (ms, *Geneviève*), Jacques Jansen (b, *Pelléas*), Henri-Bertrand Etcheverry (b, *Golaud*), Paul Cabanel (bs, *Arkel*), Armand Narcon (bs, *Médecin*), Choeurs Yvonne Gouverné, orchestra, Roger Désormière, cond. [Louis Beydts, prod.] EMI/France 2C-153-12513/5, three discs, mono.

More and more, I am certain, we will become aware of the gradual dilution of significant national performing traditions in the second half of the twentieth century and of the significance of earlier recordings in showing us what those traditions were like before the instabilities and corruptions induced by technological and social change had made serious inroads. One such tradition was that of French operatic singing, now substantially extinct, and a special branch of it was the special case of Debussy's *Pelléas*. Recorded in 1942 in Nazi-occupied Paris, the Désormière recording was the first complete one, and it remains one of the enduring glories of French art and of the phonograph. (It had been preceded by two electrically-recorded sets of excerpts, which also retain considerable historical and stylistic value; the Columbia set, conducted by Georges Truc and featuring Hector Dufranne, the original Golaud, was recently reissued in England as Pearl GEMM-145.)

Later recordings of *Pelléas* are certainly not without merit: the first Ansermet set, the Fournet, Cluytens, and Inghelbrecht recordings, even the second Ansermet with its more international cast, show that the central tradition retained its strength for at least another twenty years (although the more recent Boulez and Karajan sets surely represent, whatever their respective merits, entirely independent constructs of the opera's meaning, new approaches to its communication). However, the Désormière set represents a particularly happy conjunction of stylistic expertise, for within the general French tradition these singers were *Pelléas* specialists (some of them recorded little else), an ensemble known in the 1940s as "la grande distribution." They knew how to read Maeterlinck's lines on Debussy's notes, how to make the words color and vitalize the music's frequent rhythmic neutrality. Their voices were distinctive--Joachim's slightly tremulous whiteness, Jansen's bright nasality, Cernay's vibrance, Etcheverry's easy solidity--yet they share basically the same approach to diction and rhythmic placement, sure and steady intonation. One feels the security of a closed but still vital system of musical and theatrical education, intuitively in contact with the opera's original impulses.

Relative to the voices, the unnamed but expert orchestra is recorded somewhat backwardly, after the fashion of the times. (Malcolm Walker's discography in *Opera on Records* credits the Paris Conservatory Orchestra, though I would have supposed it to be primarily members of the Opéra-Comique band, which had surely played the score more often than any other ensemble in the world but apparently never recorded it.) This new LP edition, packaged in a box rather than in the separate sleeves of earlier versions, is an admirable transfer, the work of Keith Hardwick at EMI London. When Conrad L. Osborne reviewed an earlier issue in the same

numbers (High Fidelity, April 1975) it was in electronic stereo, and a still-earlier Pathé-Marconi edition (FALP-35001/3) had much more surface hiss without corresponding improvement of the sound; though there is occasional surface noise on the new edition, it is rarely distracting. The accompanying booklet, in French, tells us nothing about the recording, its circumstances, or the performers; there is an historical essay on the opera by Emile Vuillermoz, and a fairly elaborate plot summary, but no libretto. The illustrations are interesting; many of them have found their way into the recent Karajan set as well.

David Hamilton

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: Guitar Concerto No. 1 in D, Op. 99. New London Orchestra; Alec Sherman, conductor; Tarantella; PONCE: Sonatina meridional; CRESPO: Nortena; TURINA: Fandanguillo; MORENO-TORROBA: Arada and Fandanguillo from Suite Castellana; VILLA-LOBOS: two Etudes (Nos. 8 and 1).

Andres Segovia, guitar (recorded June/July 1949)
HMV Treasury HLM 7134 mono

This reissue of music originally recorded thirty years ago by Segovia unfortunately offers few surprises in the guitarist's performance, either interpretively or technically. Although these recordings predate all his Decca LPs, made when he was in his sixties and seventies (not to mention his most recent albums for RCA as an octogenarian), this new release only turns back the clock to age 56 -- hardly, as it were, a portrait of the artist as a young man. Having heard several of his earliest HMV 78s (circa 1927) I can only hope that HMV will continue the good work begun with this album and give the music world a truly satisfying glimpse of this guitarist as few know him.

The 78s used on this record can be found on two out-of-print sources. Columbia ML 4732 omitted the Tarantella and Crespo; La Voce del Padrone 33 QCX 127 omitted the Tarantella and Villa-Lobos. Most of the music Segovia later recorded again: the Villa-Lobos on Decca DL 9832 and DL 710160 (only No. 1); Nortena on the latter and DL 9795; Torroba's Arada on DL 8022 and with the Fandanguillo on RCA ARL1-0485; and the first movement of the Ponce on DL 710063. The Concerto (a different performance) also appeared on a fairly widely distributed quasi-bootleg, Hall of Fame 522 (with the Ponce Concierto del Sur). Thus for collectors who might already have the source albums the only item previously unavailable is Castelnuovo-Tedesco's rousing Tarantella.

An excellent engineering job has replaced the strained, murky sound of the original recordings with an almost antiseptic clarity. This is a mixed blessing, for though it is certainly an improvement in fidelity, it is not always complimentary to the artist. The new sound unmasks choppy chordal passages (in Nortena and the Concerto particularly) and fluffed scales (Tarantella) and exaggerates the different sonorities of the strings in an offensive way (very clear in the melodic lines of the Turina work). For the most part though, the listener benefits from hearing Segovia with greater accuracy and very little audio-mechanical distraction (only in the Villa-Lobos is there a persistent hiss). In the Concerto there is a very distinct, if somewhat unnatural, separation between the soloist and the orchestra, and this is quite fortunate because the less heard of the latter the better. I'm not sure this piece deserves better, but Williams, Behrend, and Diaz versions benefited, respectively, from the orchestras of Philadelphia, Berlin, and the I Solisti di Zagreb; sadly, in Segovia's case he must supply all the virtuosity.

Segovia's musicianship throughout is uneven, though his expressivity

is nearly always persuasive. The Concerto is fine (all things considered) and the Tarantella has an urgency and flair that even Oscar Ghiglia's smoother, more refined version (Angel S 36849) can't match. The Sonatina, a bright and somewhat unusual composition, is played very colorfully, with a wonderfully warm, dark middle movement, though unmusical accents mar the first movement and a number of rhythmic distortions (particularly an exaggerated rallentando at the very end) detract from the otherwise wild third movement. All in all I prefer to listen to John William's performance (formerly CBS 73205, now Columbia M 35123), but it is nice to find, in Segovia's, the source of much of Williams'. (Interestingly, Segovia and Williams use a version of the last movement which contains a recapitulation of the opening material and, in the coda, further development of the fugal motif; the standard Schott score does not give this, but presumably Segovia was closest to the source.) Segovia's later recording of the first movement is virtually identical, but with the more familiar Decca sound.

Both the Crespo and Turina pieces, while played very poetically, suffer frequently from non-legato phrasing. (Instead, I strongly recommend the strikingly brilliant performance of the Fandanguillo by Angel Romero on Angel S 36094.) The Torroba pieces are played just perfectly, with the right proportions of lyricism, timbral color, rubato, and dynamic shading. The Villa-Lobos etudes are also very successful, with No. 8 featuring the widely accepted distortion of the accompaniment's rhythm and some dazzling scales, and No. 1 notable for the unique set of accents Segovia extracts from this seemingly imperturbable arpeggio study (curiously, Segovia adds an extra harmonic near the end).

John Duarte's program notes are a bit propagandistic--citing the record as evidence that the composers therein wrote music of "lasting value," an interesting argument, logically-speaking--but are otherwise informative about the making of the originals, Segovia's quest for new music and the composers and pieces themselves. (However, a discrepancy over the titles of the Torroba pieces, dating back to the original Columbia release, is perpetuated in the notes; the information accompanying the selections sets the record straight though.) The album is further graced by a marvelous, if deceptive (in view of the record's contents), photograph of the guitarist--in his thirties.

Gregory Dinger

VARESE: a. Ionisation; b. Octandre; c. Integrales. Juilliard Percussion Orchestra and New York Wind Ensemble conducted by Frederic Waldman; d. Density 21.5. Rene Le Roy, flutist. Deserts--Interpolations.* (a. recorded 21 May 1950, Greenwich House Music School; b. and c. recorded 21 June 1950, Mannes College of Music; d. recorded 11 May 1950, Rachmaninoff Society, New York City)* Electronic music. Finnadar mono & *stereo SR 9018.

The first four pieces on this record are reissued from EMS 401, which had the dual distinction of being the first published recording of Edgard Varèse's music, and the only recording of his music that he supervised. Not surprisingly, the four pieces are given ideal performances that have not been surpassed. The drawback is the somewhat limited range of sound that was possible in 1950 (even though the original release received the best recording of the year award at the 1951 Audio Fair). The percussion piece, Ionisation, and the flute solo, Density 21.5, suffer most from the lofi, whereas the octet, Octandre, and the piece for winds and percussion, Integrales, are just about acceptable. If nothing else, these performances can be used as a benchmark to rate all the subsequent hifi recordings of these four outstanding pieces.

The original Interpolations from Deserts are an additional reason to acquire this record since they have not been on any other record. Deserts was written in 1954 as an orchestral piece which included three sections of electronic music (organized sound compositions on two magnetic tape tracks to be pedantic). Varèse recomposed the electronic sections in 1961, and the revised version has been used in all the recordings of Deserts. These revised interpolations must surely be the best electronic music ever composed - and now earlier versions are available, not quite so good but still very fine.

Martin Davidson

FERENC FRICSAY CONDUCTS

- BARTÓK. Violin Concerto No. 2 * (Tibor Varga, violin) (rec. 1951);
RAVEL. Introduction and Allegro (Nicanor Zabaleta, harp) (rec. 1957). DGG 2535 704.
- BARTÓK. Concerto for Orchestra. (rec. 1957). DGG 2535 701.
- BORODIN. On the Steppes of Central Asia (rec. 1952); Prince Igor. Polovtsian Dances (rec. 1950); MUSSORGSKY. A Night on Bare Mountain (rec. 1952); TCHAIKOVSKY. Overture, 1812 (RIAS Kammerchor) (rec. 1953). DGG 2535 727.
- KODÁLY. Háry János. Suite for Orch. (rec. 1954); Marosszék Dances (rec. 1954); Galanta Dances. DGG 2535 706.
- HAYDN. The Seasons (in German) (Maria Stader, sop.; Ernst Haefliger, tenor; Josef Greindl, bass; St. Hedwig's Cathedral Choir) (rec. concert, 11/11/61) DGG 2721 170 (3 LP's)
- MOZART. Requiem (Elisabeth Grümmer, sop.; Gertrude Pitzinger, alto; Helmut Krebs, tenor; Hans Hotter, bass; RIAS Kammerchor; St. Hedwig's Cathedral Choir) (rec. concert, 3/5/51). DGG 2535 713.
- MOZART. Die Zauberflöte (Maria Stader, Rita Streich, Lisa Otto, sopranos; Ernst Haefliger, tenor; Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, bar.; Josef Greindl, Kim Borg, basses; RIAS Kammerchor, Berliner Motettenchor) (rec. 1955) DGG Heliodor 2701 015 (3 LP's)
- STRAVINSKY. The Rite of Spring (rec. 1954) DGG 2535 721
- VERDI. Requiem (Maria Stader, sop.; Marianna Radev, alto; Helmut Krebs, tenor; Kim Borg, bass; RIAS Kammerchor; St. Hedwig's Cathedral Choir) (rec. 1953) DGG Heliodor 2700 113 (2 LP's)
- VERDI. Requiem (Maria Stader, sop.; Oralia Dominguez, alto; Gabor Carrelli, tenor; Ivan Sardi, bass; St. Hedwig's Cathedral Choir) (rec. concert, 10/23/60) DGG 2721 171 (2 LP's)

DGG has recently issued a large batch of old performances by the Hungarian conductor, Ferenc Fricsay (1914-1963), some in concert performances published for the first time.

As with most performers, he had strengths and weaknesses, composers whose music was congenial to him and some whose was less so.

At one time, U.S. Decca listed a large number of these performances, pressed on less than the best material, often misedualized, sometimes off pitch. The sound of DGG originals for this period was the best mono could offer, and subsequent technological advances make these reissues sound as good as and often surprisingly better than the old yellow jacket German pressings.

Fricsay's affinity with music of his compatriots is well documented. Best is the Bartók Violin Concerto No. 2 with Tibor Varga, my favorite performance of the piece. Fricsay emphasizes the thematic material's folk nature and while not subduing the pungent harmonies he doesn't emphasize their "modernity" either. Varga's lyrical and lovely performance is in the same vein.

The other Bartók and Kodály items are well performed also, although here a bit more rhythmic incisiveness would have helped.

Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte", made in 1955, is still the best of all LP versions, and shares shelf space in my house with the 1937 Beecham set (now available on Turnabout THS-65078/80). Everyone in the cast sings well, the ensembles are delicious, and the recording clear but with impact (seemingly now a lost art).

The Verdi Requiem is also well conducted and the soloists are very good, Borg in particular. The other three solo singers perform in a disconcerting "glatin," i.e., German Latin-"qvo," "qve," etc. This music suffers from dated sonics, though it sounded well enough in its day, 1953.

The Russian orchestral collection is well enough done, and features a surprise chorus singing the old Russian national anthem near the end of the "1812" - shades of pop "break-in" records. The "Rites," good though it is, lacks ferocity -- again the problem of missing the ultimate in sharp rhythmic attack.

Also received were three concert records, part of this series. Haydn's "Jahreszeiten" has some lovely moments but, as presented here, many dull patches. The Verdi Requiem suffers from overage or dull soloists. The Mozart Requiem is the best of the bunch, though without the magic of the old Bruno Walter (now on Odyssey Y-34619).

Notes, mostly in German, are drawn when appropriate from Fricsay's own writings, published and unpublished.

Steven Smolian

VIRTUOSE CHORMUSIK. The Stockholm Radio Choir, and the Stockholm Chamber Choir, Eric Ericson, director.

André Jolivet: Epithaleme (1953) (for vocal orchestra in twelve parts); Francis Poulenc: Sept Chansons; Frank Martin: Ariel Choruses from Shakespeare's "Tempest"; Mass; Richard Strauss: Der Abend; Die Götter im Putzzimmer; Olivier Messiaen: Cinq Rechants; Luigi Dallapiccola: Due Cori di Michelangelo Buonarroti; Ildebrando Pizzetti: Tre Composizioni corali; Lars Edlund: Elegie; Claudio Monteverdi: Lagrima d'amante al sepolcro dell'amata; Thomas Tallis: Spem in alium.
EMI Electrola LC 165-30 796/99 (4 discs)

This is the second four-disc release to come from this prestigious German company and this equally prestigious Swedish choral director. The first set, Europäische Chormusik, gave us first recordings of virtuosic choral works of Strauss, Henk Badings, Poulenc, Ligeti, and Pizzetti, as well as items that are fairly often recorded. The recent issue, Virtuose Chormusik, includes items which, presumably because of their difficulty, have not made it to disc before now. With this conductor and these professional singers, the harder and more demanding the composition, the better.

Just glancing at the contents of this set, one would assume that this effort is going to be a tour-de-force, and considering the past efforts of these choirs under Ericson, the availability of hitherto unrecorded works might be justification for investing money in this expensive set. Unfortunately, the works that are new to disc, the Martin Ariel Choruses, the Strauss Götter im Putzzimmer, Pizzetti Tre Composizioni, and Edlund Elegie just aren't very interesting compositions, well performed as they are here. The Jolivet Epithaleme has been recorded once before by Pathé under the composer's direction, a recording I have seen and not heard. It is the weakest piece in the set, and just not worth the effort of performing or hearing.

Virtuose Chormusik falls short on one other count. The German EMI engineers have done an unusually haphazard job of splicing in several places in an otherwise beautifully recorded set.

Both Ericson's choirs sing superbly, and really are virtuoso instruments with impeccable diction in French, German, Italian, Latin, and even English. Their tone quality is typically continental - pure head tone from the sopranos, an almost white tone favored by the German and English choirs, with just enough color from the other voices to keep the ears from suffering too much. When it comes to calling forth different colors as demanded by the music, they can readily do so, as in the Monteverdi and Poulenc works.

In some of the works recorded here, I prefer other accounts. In the Tallis work, I find the Willcocks recording (Argo) still the finest available, with the Clerkes of Oxenford (Classics for Pleasure/Seraphim)

a close second. The Dallapiccola work as performed by the Monteverdi Choir of Hamburg (Telefunken) is preferable to Ericson's, and the Deller Consort's account of the Monteverdi "Sestina" (Vanguard) unbeatable.

The Strauss Der Abend alone is worth the price of the set. Not only is it more flexible and involved than the Heinrich Schütz Choir's recording under Roger Norrington (Argo), but I have been convinced by Ericson that this work is a great piece of music, not performed because of the orchestral demands that Strauss makes on the singers. Witness the opening of the work, with the sopranos strung out on high A for two pages! Strauss asks for, and gets from this choir, a seamless stream of sound. The Martin Mass, an early (1922), suppressed work, is better performed here than in the recording by the Wartburg (Iowa) College Choir, directed by James Fritschel (Musical Heritage Society), a recording that led me to believe that the composer was justified in withholding its publication for fifty years.

Virtuose Chormusik as a set is not quite as successful as the earlier effort by the Swedish choirs, but I would not wish to see an end to this admirable project, if it indeed is one. There are dozens of worthy works that need exposure and documentation like this, and if this organization continues with what promises to be a survey of choral literature, we listeners, choral directors and audio buffs are in for a real treat.

Michael Donaldson