

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