

FERENC FRICSSAY 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 Calleri, 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 misequalized, 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