

THE ART OF CARLO MARIA GIULINI

Schubert: Symphony No. 8 in B Minor, D. 759 "Unfinished" (Recorded January 27, 1961); Haydn: Symphony No. 94 "Surprise" (Recorded October 4-5, 1956) Japanese EMI EAC 30290

Schumann: Symphony No. 3 in E-flat, Op. 97 "Rheinische" (re-orchestrated by Mahler); Schumann: Overture to Byron's Manfred (Recorded June 2-4, 1958) Japanese EMI EAC 30291

Brahms: Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68 (Recorded January 16-17, 1961) Japanese EMI EAC 30292

Brahms: Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73; (Recorded October 10-12, 1962) Japanese EMI EAC 30293

Brahms: Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90; Tragic Overture, Op. 81 (Recorded October 12, November 9 & 12, 1962) Japanese EMI EAC 30294

Franck: Symphony in D Minor (Recorded July 29-30, 1957); Psyche et Eros (Recorded May 31, 1958) Japanese EMI EAC 30295

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 17 "Little Russian" (Recorded September 29, 1956); Mussorgsky: A Night on the Bare Mountain (Recorded October 8, 1956) Japanese EMI EAC 30296

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, Op. 74 "Pathetique" (Recorded June 2-4, 1959) Japanese EMI EAC 30297

Dvorak: Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op. 88 (Recorded January 17-18, April 25, 1962); Scherzo Capriccioso, Op. 66 (Recorded April 18-19, 1962) Japanese EMI EAC 30298

All of the above with the Philharmonia Orchestra

Over the past few years, with the aid of Deutsche Grammophon's publicity department and his assumption of the directorship of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Carlo Maria Giulini has definitely attained superstar status. His recent recordings have struck me as either revelatory (Beethoven's "Eroica" DG 2531 123), bizarre, yet stimulating (Schubert's Ninth Symphony DG 2535 882) or simply wayward (Mozart's Requiem Angel SZ-37600). However, they have one thing in common, a genuine sense of personality and commitment. One may certainly disagree with him, but there is also no denying here is a true musical individualist, something to be cherished in these days, when so many performers sound alike.

The present discs date from the beginning of his recording career, when he was under the guidance of Walter Legge, provide a timely opportunity to examine this artist at an early stage of his development. I must say that I approached these discs with a keen sense of anticipation

in view of the fact that I was unfamiliar with any of them. I had greatly admired for a long time his recording of Don Giovanni (Angel S-3605 or HMV SLS 5083) with its stylish conducting and true sense of occasion, and this was borne out by an exhilarating reading of Haydn's Surprise Symphony. However most of the other performances in this series were a little disappointing; while certainly reliable, they lacked the intrinsically special quality that I had always admired in Giulini's work. Also the technical work in these discs does not seem up to the usually high standards of Japanese EMI. Besides some occasional surface noise, the sound is rather coarse, the strings are generally lacking in lustre, and there is a general absence of depth. Perhaps Toshiba hasn't been able to use the best quality copy tapes from EMI, for if one compares them with World Records recent Cantelli re-issues or with Japanese EMI's own Karajan mono anthology, it leads one to suspect that the transfers were not handled with proper attention at some point in the duplicating process.

The most well-known of all of these performances is probably that of the Tchaikovsky "Pathetique", and it is excellent. Giulini may lack Cantelli's rhythmic control in the third movement in his recording with the same orchestra (World Records SHB 52), but Giulini does score over his younger Italian rival on one key point: the first and final movements often have ritenuto markings at key transition moments which Cantelli seems to rush ever so slightly (though it is still a tremendous performance), while Giulini spaces them out beautifully. However, there is one drawback to the performance under review; and that is, though Giulini can shape and phrase a melody as poignantly as anyone, this often seems to occur at the expense of anything else that is happening in the music. Consequently, accompanying figures are not heard properly, and, in the case of Tchaikovsky, this robs the work of some of its instrumental color and creates a rather stuffed, flabby sound that I feel is inappropriate.

On the other hand the performance of the "Little Russian" is really not very distinguished at all. Besides there being a big cut in the finale, which was a common practice of the time, the coda of that movement is terribly rushed and out of control, as is the introduction to the first movement. In general, I wonder how familiar Giulini was with this score at the time of the recording, though I must add that the balletic qualities of the second movement are nicely caught. The Mussorgsky filler was a pleasant surprise; this is in many ways the best item in the entire series. Notice the wonderful articulation of the opening string entries and the hushed control at the end.

The Franck Symphony receives what I would say is a typical performance in this series. It is certainly enjoyable; Giulini avoids the pitfall of allowing the work to seem ponderous and there is some excellent solo work from the winds, but if one listens to some other recordings one realizes that there is really something missing in this performance. A comparison with Sir Adrian Boult's recording (British RCA GL 25004) with what is, according to rumor, actually the Philharmonia under

a pseudonym shows a far more gripping and exciting reading. Also one must mention the vastly superior, though contemporaneous, RCA recording, at least on these transfers. Roughly the same may be said about the Schubert "Unfinished", though in this case the comparison is with Giulini's own re-recording with the Chicago Symphony (DG 2531 047). The new performance, besides including the crucial first movement repeat, which the earlier one omits, has an ominous sense of breadth and drama, while again the Philharmonia performance seems bland.

Regarding the three Brahms Symphonies, Giulini turns in warm lyrical readings that many will, no doubt, enjoy. What I find missing is the thrust and sweep that Karajan and Cantelli provide or Klemperer's sense of weight and grandeur. Also, while Giulini insists on a warm singing sound in the strings, he apparently does not insist on clear articulation. Compare him with Cantelli and the same orchestra (World Records SH 315); with Giulini there is a feeling of scramble in some of the trickier passages, but here Cantelli's control is absolutely sovereign. There is also a tendency from Giulini to exaggerate dolce indications to the point that the forward pulse of the music is stopped. This is especially irritating in the first movement of the second symphony, where Karajan in his 1955 recording with the same orchestra (Japanese EMI EAC 37021) manages to keep a much better sense of momentum, while still observing the dolce indications. However, Giulini's beautiful account of the slow movement must be mentioned in particular for the excellent solo horn playing. Recently I heard a live performance of the Brahms First with Giulini and the Los Angeles Philharmonic which I found most impressive. The tempi were similar to those in the Philharmonia performance, yet there was an added feeling of weight and bite, reminding one of Klemperer; inner voices particularly in the winds were much clearer, and the big theme in the finale did not seem so narcissistic, but an integral part of the movement.

In regards to the Dvorak Eighth, I greatly prefer this one to his re-make with the Chicago Symphony (DG 2531 046). The American orchestra sounds rhythmically bloated and the string portamenti in the third movement are grossly overdone. The Philharmonia performance avoids these failings, but it still sounds rather bland. Bruno Walter with an admittedly inferior orchestra (Odyssey Y-33231) takes a similarly warm view of the work, but he is much more successful because of his added rhythmic resiliency. The Schumann Third receives the worst performance in the entire series. The first movement suffers from his previously cited tendency to concentrate on the melodic line at the expense of accompaniment figures; the result is that Schumann's rich scoring becomes a big mess. The second movement has some terribly sloppy string playing, and the fourth movement is rhythmically murky in a movement where absolute rhythmic control is essential. The finale comes off a little better, but basically it is performances like this one that gave the Schumann Symphonies a bad name for so many years. The Manfred Overture receives a much better reading, though it seems out of control at times. Finally, one must comment on the particularly congested and coarse quality of this disc.

Basically, these performances are recommendable only to fervent Giuliani admirers. I do not feel that these recordings, with the exception of the Haydn "Surprise" Symphony, have caught him at his best. If one is interested in these readings, I certainly do not recommend going to the trouble and expense of ordering these discs from Japan. One should probably get much better sound by obtaining them as they are recycled on HMV's Concert Classics label.

Walter Pate

Japanese Angel EAC 30290/8 are available from Tower Records, 2525 Jones Street, San Francisco, CA 94133