

HISTORISCHE AUFNAHMEN

CHOPIN: Piano Concerto No. 2, in F Minor, Op. 21; Fantaisie in F Minor, Op. 49; Tarantelle, Op. 43; Sonata No. 2, Op. 35; Sonata No. 3, Op. 58; Barcarolle, Op. 60; Waltzes, Opp. 18, 34, 42, 64, 69, 70, & posth. (B Minor); 4 Ballades; Berceuse; 3 Nouvelles Etudes; Etudes, Opp. 10 & 25; Preludes, Op. 28; Prelude in C Sharp Minor, Op. 45; Chants Polonais, Op. 74 -- Nos. 2 & 3 (arr. Liszt); Nocturnes, Op. 9, No. 2; Op. 15, Nos. 1 & 2; Op. 27, No. 1; Op. 55, Nos. 1 & 2; Impromptus, Opp. 29, 36 & 51; Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op. 66; Polonaise No. 6, in A Flat, Op. 53. Alfred Cortot, pianist; orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli (in the Concerto). EMI La Voix de Son Maitre 2C 153-03090/6, 7 records.

CHOPIN: Etudes, Opp. 10 & 25; Preludes, Op. 28; Impromptus, Opp. 29, 36, & 51; Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op. 66; Waltzes, Opp. 18, 34, 42, 64, 69, 70, & posth. (B Minor); 4 Ballades; Fantaisie in F Minor, Op. 49; Sonata No. 2, Op. 35; 3 Nouvelles Etudes; Nocturnes, Op. 9, No. 2; Op. 15, Nos. 1 & 2; Op. 27, No. 1; Barcarolle, Op. 60; Tarantelle, Op. 43. Alfred Cortot, pianist. EMI Angel (Japan) GR-2060-E, 5 records.

Cortot's Chopin records have been famous since their publication which occurred mostly in the period between the two World Wars. Virtually all of these performances have also been transferred to LP at one time or another. However, with the sole exception of the Waltzes, which have long been published on the American Angel and Seraphim labels, their availability in the U.S. has been extremely spotty, and most of them have not been available in recent years.

Both of these newly issued sets are being distributed in the U.S., and I trust their effect will be that of making Cortot's Chopin interpretations known to a new generation of listeners. Older collectors will also find the French set of interest for its quality of presentation.

Before going any further I should state that I regard the French set as superior in every respect. Most important is the sound quality. The Japanese set is apparently yet another mastering from the tapes prepared in France in the early 1960s for the Pathe "Les Gravures Illustres" series, Angel's "Great Recordings of the Century" in the U.S. While these dubbings are listenable, they are somewhat constricted in sound and the highs have been reduced, often drastically, to reduce surface noise, which is nevertheless usually present. Ironically, the French LPs are taken from an entirely new dubbing made in England by EMI's Anthony Griffith. As regular readers will already know, Griffith is one of my heroes among dubbing engineers, and he certainly has maintained his impressive standard here. The sound quality of these transfers is wonderfully full and true. Surface noise is occasionally present (especially in some selections which were obviously not taken from master discs), but it is never offensive and is usually lower than

in the filtered Pathe transfers.

Further, the additional material included in the French set is all worth hearing, and some of the originals are very scarce. Finally, as usual, the Japanese Angel label has done nothing to prepare their records for export. You have to look at the record labels to find out what is on them, as the contents are not listed on the outside of the box (which reads merely "Cortot/Chopin Album") and the enclosed booklet is entirely in Japanese. French EMI has supplied a large booklet in French and English, including extensive commentary on Cortot and on the specific performances along with Cortot's own comments on most of the compositions.

Cortot's idiosyncrasies, virtues, and flaws are by now well known to most collectors. He is certainly one of the century's major pianists, although he can be maddeningly uneven. His technical lapses are legendary, and they sometimes interfered with his interpretations, although technique problems rarely intrude in these Chopin performances. (One possible exception would be the numerous misses in the Scherzo of the Sonata No. 2, although even there the conception comes across, the pianist hits his wrong notes with great flair.) In fact, more frequently there are impressive displays of technique, such as the excellent Scherzo of the Sonata No. 3, the Etudes as a whole, and so on. As with most pianists of his era, Cortot's playing is more rhythmically flexible than is commonly heard today. That is his way, and one must either accept the style or reject the entire album out of hand. While I do feel Cortot sometimes goes too far towards rhythmic anarchy, most of his playing is well within the bounds of good taste. I can remember, when I was much younger, hearing Cortot's Chopin Waltzes for the first time and finding them distastefully free. Now that I am familiar with a wider variety of performing styles, they seem like typical and not exaggerated samples of the era. I do not always love Cortot's Chopin performances, but they are always interesting and illuminating even when they seem strange or farfetched. Cortot had devoted many years of his life to Chopin studies, and one constantly hears the results in these performances.

The Second Concerto is the only recording in the French set without a recording date. Although I find the playing here too rhythmically lenient for my taste, it is extremely well executed and the Larghetto is very beautiful. The Fantaisie in f is one of the few Cortot performances I actively dislike; it is both rhythmically and technically sloppy, and I cannot forgive Cortot's diluting of the powerful upward passages by taking an extra beat to get back down the keyboard, turning 4/4 time into 5/4. Both Sonatas are fine interpretations, powerful conceptions well executed (except for the messy Scherzo I've already mentioned), and the similar requirements of the Ballades are also well met, although with a few more idiosyncrasies. The performances of the Etudes are deservedly legendary. Despite a few minor technical flaws, Cortot's playing of these pieces is an outstanding blend of commanding

execution and poetic insight, seldom if ever matched since in performances of these pieces. (I would be very interested in hearing Cortot's wartime remake of the Etudes, which I've heard has been recently reissued, but it has yet to come my way.) The Preludes of Op. 28, while slightly uneven, are mostly inspired, as are the Impromptus. The well-known Waltzes are generally good, but the difficult Op. 42 is botched. Among the smaller pieces, I find the Tarentelle delightful, the Barcarolle beautiful if a bit moony, the two Liszt transcriptions very lovely, and the Polonaise very strongly and excitingly played despite some odd clusters of wrong notes in undemanding passages.

The performances I have discussed so far are all prewar recordings. Cortot's postwar recordings are far less well known, and I had not heard most of them before. The talk among collectors is that in general these recordings are feebly played, but I must strongly disagree in the cases of those selected for the French reissue. The Berceuse and Nouvelles Etudes, recorded in 1949, are magical performances. The Prelude, Op. 45, although on the dreamy side, is also very convincing. Of these, the Etudes and Prelude come from 78s, probably commercial pressings, while the Berceuse sounds as though it comes from an LP copy; perhaps the master is lost. Finally, we have the Nocturnes. Op. 9, No. 2 is the earliest recording in the box, from 1929, and although beautifully played it strikes me as excessively sentimental. The others are all postwar. The two of Op. 55 date from 1947; Op. 15, No. 2 is from 1948; Op. 15, No. 1 and Op. 27, No. 1 come from 1951 tapes. I found all of these performances beautiful, and especially appreciated the dramatic playing of Op. 27, No. 1, which must be one of Cortot's last recordings.

Of course, being a collector, I always wish for more than I have. In the case of the French EMI set, I would have loved to hear at least a few of Cortot's many alternate recordings for comparisons, especially the earliest acoustic 78s and the very late recordings made in Japan and issued only there. Also, the commentary by Henri-Louis de la Grange makes tantalizing mention of Cortot recordings of Chopin Mazurkas: "The late and still unpublished attempt of the fifties no longer corresponded to his artistic requirements." One wonders whose opinion this was, and I can't help feeling that certainly at least one example of the series would have been worth hearing. Overall, though, this French edition of Cortot's Chopin is a gratifyingly excellent presentation, well worth its expensive import price tag.

BEETHOVEN: Violin Sonatas No. 1, in D, Op. 12, No. 1; No. 8, in G, Op. 30, No. 3; No. 9, in A, Op. 47; SCHUMANN: Violin Sonatas No. 1, in a, Op. 105; No. 2, in d, Op. 121; BACH: Violin Sonata No. 3, in E, BWV 1016. Adolf Busch, violinist; Rudolf Serkin, pianist. BACH: Violin Concertos No. 1, in a, BWV 1041; No. 2, in E, BWV 1042; Double Concerto in d, BWV 1043 (with Frances Magnes, violinist). Adolf Busch, violinist and conductor; Busch Chamber Players. Columbia Odyssey Y3 34639, 3 records, \$11.98.

Only four of the performances in this new set have been officially published before. The Bach Concertos, BWV 1042 and 1043, were issued as 78s on Columbia M 530 and X 253 respectively, and were then coupled on Columbia ML 4002 (LP). Beethoven's Op. 47 was issued on Columbia M 496 (78) and ML 4007 (LP). Even the LPs were deleted by 1956. Of the remaining performances, the Beethoven Op. 12, No. 1 and the Bach BWV 1041 are of unspecified origin and appear to be previously unpublished studio recordings. The remaining sonata performances were transcribed from recitals at the Library of Congress in 1943 and 1946. The Bach Sonata was briefly issued in a private release; the others are new to records altogether.

Busch's Bach Concertos must be taken with a bit of toleration for their period. Although Busch was a pioneer in the performance of Bach's orchestral works by small ensembles, his orchestra with its piano continuo now sounds rather thick, and there are some intrusive romantic mannerisms--particularly an outrageous ritard in the first movement of BWV 1041. However, there is also much of beauty in the playing. For all the nervous tension in Busch's performances, he remains at all times a remarkably eloquent interpreter.

The Sonata performances require no tolerance at all; awe would be a more appropriate attitude. Here we find a meeting of two great musicians at the height of their respective powers, devoting themselves to great music with selfless dedication and extremely convincing interpretive ideas. Perhaps the most impressive feats of re-creation occur in the Schumann Sonatas, seldom played late works full of fine ideas but marred by structural looseness. Busch and Serkin play these Sonatas as though they were masterpieces, and for their duration they do sound like masterpieces. The justly famous "Kreutzer" Sonata, which was long overdo for reissue, is an extremely, almost unbearably tense performance, in which very fast tempos in the outer movements sometimes drive Busch to edgy tone. I wouldn't want to hear the piece played that way every week, but it's a thrilling experience. The other two Beethoven Sonatas and the Bach Sonata are equally fine. In short, Columbia has given us some truly superb material, most of it unpublished; the set is a magnificent bargain.

Sound quality is best on the previously published recordings, which are well dubbed (probably from 33 1/3 rpm masters) and on the Beethoven Op. 12, No. 1. The Bach BWV 1041 sounds noticeably inferior to the other two Bach Concertos, and probably comes from test pressings which were not in the best condition; numerous ticks and pops could and should have been removed. In the Sonata recordings from the Library of Congress, the piano is sometimes afflicted with blurring distortion, although it is never severe; the violin comes through more clearly. I understand that Columbia "jumped the gun" on this material without waiting for proper master tapes, which is a pity. However, I have endured far worse recordings than these for the sake of hearing less excellent performances.

RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto No. 3, in D Minor, Op. 30; MOZART: Piano Concerto No. 12, in A, K. 414--Andante and Allegretto. William Kapell, pianist; Toronto Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Ernest MacMillan (in Rachmaninoff); San Francisco Symphony Orchestra conducted by Pierre Monteux (in Mozart). International Piano Archives IPA 507.

These recordings, never before published, are an important addition to the small legacy of William Kapell. The Rachmaninoff Concerto seems to be an aircheck, from a performance given on April 13, 1948. The sound quality is variable, and the worst of it is pretty poor. Surface noise is constant, occasionally heavy; some of the loudest passages are badly distorted; and there is even some interference from another station. Further, what can be heard of the orchestral support does not seem very inspired. Through all of this comes the blazing intensity of Kapell, still a very young man with a great deal to learn but a fiery spirit with the power to put this music across. At its heights, which occur frequently throughout this performance, Kapell's playing is thrilling.

As an experience of Rachmaninoff's composition, this recording is necessarily incomplete, since the orchestra and recording are such weak factors. However, as a memo of Kapell, this performance has a great deal to offer, and it will certainly sustain his reputation as a major pianist cut off before his prime.

The Mozart performance, dating from two years later, is incomplete (according to the jacket) because the entire concerto was not performed. This seems odd, and I would like to know the circumstances. One seldom encounters a performance of 2/3 of a Mozart Concerto. However, what we do have is certainly worthwhile, and highly impressive. Even within his tragically brief recording career of eight years, Kapell displayed obvious maturation both in his choice of repertoire (from Khachaturian to Bach and Chopin) and in the playing itself. This is the only recording of Kapell playing Mozart yet published, but the playing would do credit to a specialist. It is poised and clear, beautifully singing and richly colored. Monteux and the orchestra provide loving support, and the sound--also from 78 rpm acetates--is greatly superior to that of the Rachmaninoff. In fact, in balance and clarity it surpasses many studio recordings of Mozart concertos.

This record is available only from International Piano Archives (Box 303, Ivor, VA 23866) for \$15.00. It's expensive, but if you're interested in Kapell, it's worth the price.

GRIEG: Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16 (2 performances); first movement cadenza; Norwegian Folk Songs, Op. 17--3 excerpts. Percy Grainger, pianist; Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski; Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard A. Morse. International Piano Archives IPA 508.

Grieg, of course, never recorded his own Piano Concerto. However, he did personally coach Grainger in the work and enthusiastically expressed his approval of the young pianist's performance. This much information is fairly well known. What remains a puzzle is why Grainger was never asked to make a commercial recording of the composition. Even when he was actively recording for Columbia, that company produced instead a recording of the work played by Ignaz Friedmann (set M 98), who virtually tortured the piece to death.

Fortunately, several performances of the piece by Grainger have surfaced since the pianist's death in 1961. A live performance dating from 1957, with the Aarhus Municipal Orchestra conducted by Per Drier, was prepared for publication as Vanguard VRS-1098, but the record was never released and the few copies which slipped out are superlative rarities. Grainger's piano roll of the piece, an inadequate representation in my opinion, has been published several times. Most recently it has been issued with dubbed-in orchestral accompaniment in stereo as RCA ARL1-3059, which I find no more of an artistic success than the piano solo version. Now, at last, we have two complete live performances available (although on a limited basis) to the public, along with a fascinating early fragment.

Both of the complete performances strike me as superior to the Aarhus version, and in the Stokowski recording we have the only adequate orchestral support. In fact, Stokowski is here on his best behavior, delivering a powerful and thoroughly uneccentric reading of the score. As an integrated performance, this one is much the best of the three, and although the recording dates from 1945 the sound is amazingly good. When I want to demonstrate Grainger's way with the Grieg Concerto, this will be the recording I use. However, I can understand IPA's publication of the second performance as well, although the orchestra here is pitifully inadequate and the conductor's work incompetent. The recording, from a 1956 tape, is excellent hi-fi mono, and Grainger's playing is actually stronger than in the 1945 or 1957 versions. Some passages, thrown away in a flurry of wrong notes in the 1945 recording, come through here with great clarity and vigor. Grainger, sometimes an amazing technician, was known for his erratic practice habits, and he obviously had his strong and weak periods. The Iowa recording caught him at his strongest, and it makes an interesting supplement to its discmate. Another interesting supplement is the recording of the cadenza for the first movement, a scarce English HMV 78 recorded in 1908. Not surprisingly, it is the strongest playing of all, and neither the sound quality or the surface noise is as bad as one would expect from the date.

I have not yet addressed the question of how Grainger did play the Grieg Concerto. I do not find any amazing revelations in the performance, important points of style or interpretation which have completely eluded other pianists. However, the performance is an excellent one--unsentimental, sometimes almost aggressive in its energy, yet always sensitive. If there is any "revelation" offered, it is that Grieg

apparently wanted the expression of his music to cover as wide a range as possible. Quiet, lyric sections are played very songfully, while the climaxes are tremendously intense.

The little bonus on side two, the three folk songs, is difficult to listen to. Grainger announces the pieces, and his voice is quite clear; but the piano is badly out of tune (a fault present to a lesser extent in the 1945 Concerto recording) and the recording has offensive pitch waver. Still, there is enough of interest on this record to make it a worthwhile acquisition for any collector or library wanting to have the only composer-endorsed performance of the Greig Concerto, and in a recording which lacks the usual painful interference of so many "historic" recordings. The disc is available directly from IPA for \$15.00.

TARTINI: Violin Concerto in D Minor; BARTOK: Rhapsody No. 1; BEETHOVEN: Romance No. 1, in G, Op. 40; PROKOFIEFF: Violin Concerto No. 1, in D, Op. 19. Joseph Szigeti, violinist; unnamed orchestras conducted by Leon Barzin (in Tartini), Howard Barlow (in Bartok), and George Szell (in Beethoven and Prokofieff). Discocorp BWS-741.

This record is labelled "The Art of Joseph Szigeti, Vol. 8." You might guess that by Vol. 8 the publishers might be scraping the bottom of their barrel, and you might be right. Although many diehard Szigeti-lovers like myself will cling to this record, all the works but the Beethoven represent repertory duplicated in the Szigeti discography, and the performances, while characteristic of the artist, are not among his best.

The Tartini Concerto is the same work Szigeti recorded on 78s (Columbia X 103, reissued as EMI HQM 1127) and again on LP with George Szell (Columbia ML 4891). The present recording, which is dated 1949, shares with the LP recording the defects of overly lush orchestral accompaniment and lack of harpsichord continuo, leaving the first recording as the preferred version. However, this recording is the only one currently available, and Szigeti's tone is better here than in the recording with Szell. The Concerto, incidentally, is a superb piece of music, deserving to be much better known. I have no information on the identity of the orchestra, but it might be the National Orchestral Association, a training orchestra which Barzin founded and was conducting at this time.

The Bartok Rhapsody, recorded in 1943, is the third recording of this piece played by Szigeti to be published, and the first one with orchestral accompaniment. (One of the Bruno Walter Society's first issues, WSA 701, long deleted, included the Lassu from this Rhapsody in a different performance conducted by Abravanel.) Szigeti's first recording of the piece, a 78 disc with Bartok at the piano (Columbia 11410-D), has not been issued on LP since 10" Columbia ML 2213. However, the live performance with Bartok from a 1940 Library of Congress

recital (Vanguard Everyman SRV-304/5) has a white heat that thoroughly eclipses the other performances. Barlow, here probably conducting the Columbia Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra over which he long presided, provides little more than an adequate accompaniment.

Side 2 of this LP presents an unbroken sequence from a 1945 broadcast concert, complete with announcement between the selections and Szigeti tuning up between movements of the Prokofieff Concerto. The announcer identifies the orchestra as the "Philharmonic Symphony," and it needs little deduction to place the locale as New York. Szigeti plays the Beethoven Romance about as well as it can be done, but something about this piece eludes me no matter how beautifully it is played, so I can't work up any enthusiasm for the performance. The Prokofieff Concerto performance is certainly preferable to Szigeti's pathetic stereo version (Mercury SR90419), and the orchestral sound is better detailed than on his 78 rpm recording conducted by Beecham (Columbia M 244, now available in an excellent transfer as part of Columbia M6X 31513, a magnificent set). However, Szigeti's playing here is surprisingly cool, musically sensible enough but utterly lacking the hair-raising intensity of the 78 recording.

The sound quality on all of these recordings, derived from broadcast transcriptions, is gratifyingly vivid, and there are only a few minor patches of intrusive surface noise.

I reproduce herewith the entire jacket copy of this record:

"BWS-741

MONO

The Art of Joseph Szigeti, Vol. 8

PROKOFIEV: Violin Concerto No. 1 in D, Op. 19 (with George Szell, rec. 1945) & Works by Tartini, Beethoven & Bartok"

This certainly reaches some hitherto-unplumbed depth of inadequacy. Since these records are sold shrink-wrapped, you have to buy the record and open the cellophane just to find out what music is on it!

BACH: Brandenburg Concertos Nos. 3, in G, BWV 1048, and 5, in D, BWV 1050. Willi Boskovsky, violinist; Gustav Neidermayer, flutist; Wilhelm Furtwängler, pianist (all in No. 5); Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. Discocorp RR-515.

As an enthusiastic admirer of Wilhelm Furtwängler and the owner of virtually all of his recordings, I have been looking for something favorable to say about these performances. It is not easy. Furtwängler's extremely romantic style of Bach interpretation is already known from his commercial recordings of the Third Orchestral Suite and the Third Brandenburg Concerto (a 1930 recording, currently available on LP as Discocorp RR-431). These 1950 live performances are even more sluggish and bloated than the earlier recordings. In 1930, Furtwängler slogged through the Third Brandenburg in ten and a half minutes, quite

a slow timing considering that he interpolates no slow movement. The 1950 performance takes fourteen minutes, and seems to me representative of big orchestra Bach at its worst.

The Fifth Brandenburg Concerto is a little more interesting, although not as a sample of good Bach interpretation. Instead, Furtwängler perverts the concerto into what virtually amounts to a romantic recomposition, Brucknerian in sound. His piano performance of the long harpsichord cadenza in the first movement sounds to me like the music as heard in a dream, and as such has an interest similar to Lukas Foss's fascinating Phorion, a Bach recomposition with strong dreamlike qualities.

Nobody is likely to find these performances convincing specimens of Bach interpretation. Interestingly, the Vienna Philharmonic strings almost come apart when playing Furtwängler's greatly exaggerated ritards at the ends of movements, as though the misconception went so strongly against their musical natures that they simply couldn't follow the conductor accurately.

The sound quality of the recordings is quite poor, of limited frequency range and rather congested. However, it is still better than the tapes I have previously heard of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, so don't blame the producers.

FRANCK: Piano Quintet in F Minor. Alfred Cortot, pianist; International String Quartet (Mangeot, Pecker, Howard, Withers). Discocorp RR-463

To the best of my knowledge, and somewhat to my surprise, this is the first appearance of Cortot's Franck Quintet on LP. The performance is quite an interesting one. Cortot is slashing and incisive when called for, meltingly lyrical elsewhere, and the string players collaborate with considerable verve. The whole performance is done with a surprising lack of sentimentality for its period. (No recording date is provided, but it certainly dates from before 1930.)

A comparison with my copy of Victor M-38 shows that the transfer has removed some of the surface noise along with a slight amount of treble response and somewhat more bass. However, the sound quality is acceptable, the mild deficiencies becoming apparent only on direct comparison. For some reason, though, this very short LP (less than 33 minutes) has been mastered at an extremely low level. I play the average LP with my volume control set at 12 o'clock; this one needed to go almost to 3 o'clock, making it the lowest mastering level I have ever encountered. Since this label has issued LP sides in excess of 39 minutes long at higher volume levels, the deficiency is indeed odd. As usual, not a word of information is provided beyond the names of the composition and the performers--and, at that, the quartet's title alone is given.

Cortot fanciers will certainly want this one, and I enjoyed hearing it, although there is still more juice in the performance of Sviatoslav Richter and the Bolshoi Theater String Quartet available on Monitor MC 2036.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Piano Concerto No. 2, in G, Op. 44 (Siloti edition). Shura Cherkassky, pianist; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Richard Kraus. Heliodor (England) 2548 298.

Cherkassky, long a figure of cult admiration, has made many recordings, but few of them have been issued in the U.S. This one appeared here as Decca DL 9916, but I don't believe there has been any accessible edition since then. I'm also quite certain, without having heard the Decca pressing, that this new version must sound much better. Although it was recorded in 1955 (in mono only), the sound quality is very impressive.

No doubt about it, Cherkassky is a dazzling virtuoso, and the way he tosses off this concerto demonstrates that he has one of the best developed piano techniques of our time. If you want a case in favor of this performance, read the liner notes by Edward Greenfield, a worshipping account of Cherkassky and his playing of this concerto. For my taste, this entire performance is a misconception, a flighty, lightweight, prissy Tchaikovsky, all flashes of delicate light and shade, helium-lifted. I like to hear the piece played with much more weight and power, and so I am more satisfied by such pianists as Gilels (especially in his live performance published as Baroque 2865 and Olympic 8118), Nikolayeva, or Graffman.

Cherkassky records have a way of becoming very scarce items quickly, so his fans will want to grab this beautifully processed disc.

BACH: Concerto No. 1, in D Minor, BWV 1052 (Busoni edition);
BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 4, in G, Op. 58. Egon Petri, pianist, unidentified orchestras and conductors. Encore PHS-1277.

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 5, in E flat, Op. 73; SCHUBERT-Liszt: Die Forelle; CHOPIN: Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27, No. 2. Egon Petri, pianist; unidentified orchestra and conductor (in Beethoven). Encore PHS-1278.

These two records, taken from live performances given during Petri's last years, need to be approached with some caution. However, caution taken, they provide considerable rewards.

The first record causes more problems. The Bach performance is taken from a 78 rpm transcription with heavy surface noise. Volume levels change, and the orchestra is quite distant, while the piano tone is polluted with some distortion. Further, I do not care for Busoni's tinkering with this concerto, which I feel has the same aesthetic value

as drawing a mustache on the Mona Lisa. The Beethoven recording comes from a tape recorded by an amateur. During the second minute of the concerto there is an atrociously loud hum, obviously caused by some kind of loose connection. Fortunately it disappears at about 2:15 and does not return, but it's ghastly while it lasts. The sound quality overall is better than on the Bach, but during the first movement of the piece the piano and orchestra are both distant and lack impact. Various noises intrude, including some whispering during the cadenza. You can hear the microphone being moved between the movements, and the re-aimed mike picks up much better during the remainder of the piece.

During his latter years, Petri preferred to remain relatively near his home in California, and he gave many performances like these with semi-professional orchestras in small cities. His playing was completely unimpaired by age. These hardly sound like the performances of a man in his seventies, and while I cannot get much enjoyment out of the Busoni-ized Bach, the Beethoven performance is one of the best versions of the piece I have heard, very strongly played yet tempered by considerable lyricism. It will be up to individual listeners whether or not they want to put up with the deficiencies of this record, which include rather feeble support from both unnamed orchestras. But to Petriphiles these performances will rank as major discoveries.

The orchestra in the "Emperor" Concerto is probably the weakest of all, yet this performance I would recommend to almost anyone interested in great piano playing. Here the sound quality is quite decent, and Petri's playing is riveting in its intensity and technical command. Some of the passagework he plays here would be startling from a young prize-winner; from a man of Petri's age it is almost unbelievable. I sat through this performance in a state of wide-eyed amazement, although in general I have had enough of this concerto and try to avoid it whenever I can. The two encores, from a private recital, are also beautifully played and well worth hearing, but the "Emperor" is the thing and it's astonishing.

Encore Records are available at \$7.50 each including shipping in the U.S. from Philip Stern, 777 Foster Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11230.

MILHAUD: The Globetrotter Suite; The Joys of Life (Homage to Watteau). "Los Angeles Chamber Ensemble" conducted by Darius Milhaud. Varese Sarabande VC 81051.

This record reminds me of the old joke about the bad restaurant: the food's no good, and they don't give you enough of it. Here we have, at full price, little more than half an hour of off-the-top-of-his-head Milhaud. Both of these suites were written over a span of just over two months (December 13, 1956 to February 19, 1957), and they really do sound that way. Milhaud was writing them, on commission, for use by student ensembles, and I can understand that such groups might find the music rewarding to play. I can also imagine that the

conductor of such a group might want to hear the way the composer wanted his music to be played, although the pieces are hardly problematical. Otherwise, the music seems to me so bland, so utterly lacking in worthwhile content, that I cannot imagine any educated listener playing through this record more than once, except perhaps as background music.

The performances are quite spiffy; the ensemble, originally identified by Decca only as "chamber orchestra," sounds like a group of Hollywood studio musicians playing in what must have seemed to them a thoroughly familiar idiom. As Varese Sarabande rightly notes, the original Decca issue of these recordings was available for only about a year and became a great rarity, so if you need the record for your collection of composer-conducted performances I'd suggest you grab it now. The sound quality and disc processing are impressively fine.

ENESCO: 2 Roumanian Rhapsodies, Op. 11. Colonne Concerts Orchestra conducted by Georges Enesco. Dixtuor in D, Op. 14. French National Radio Orchestra wind ensemble conducted by Georges Enesco. Varese Sarabande VC 81042.

Georges Enesco had an active career as a professional conductor, and he made quite a few recordings in that capacity. Oddly enough, few of them were of his own music. Aside from the compositions collected on the new reissue, I know of composer-directed recordings of Enesco's Octet, Op. 7 (Remington RLP-199-52) and a two-record Soviet 78 set of the First Roumanian Rhapsody and an orchestration of the Gigue from his Piano Suite No. 2, Op. 10 (D 013661/4, also Supraphon 40063/4). There are certainly other recordings yet to be discovered from broadcast transcriptions (I know of at least one, done with the New York Philharmonic, still in existence), but their publication remains a distant possibility.

Enesco seems to me a curiously uneven composer, one who grew greatly as his career progressed. Some of his early works, such as the Suites for Piano, sound unbearably empty and monotonous to me. The deservedly popular Third Violin Sonata is unadventurous in comparison with Bartok's contemporaneous Violin Sonatas, but it is well constructed and moves with enthusiasm along its way. I once heard Enesco's opera Oedipus (recorded on a regrettably short-lived Electrecord set), and was startled both by the power of the music and by the advanced compositional techniques employed; this was truly music of the twentieth century.

The pieces reissued here won't do much for Enesco's reputation either way. The First Roumanian Rhapsody is certainly more catchy and entertaining than the Second; neither piece has aspirations beyond the pops concert. The Dixtuor is a thoroughly euphonious, pleasant piece, beautifully written for winds, which says hardly anything of consequence. Enesco's performances seem to be quite good. There is

fortunately not much in the Rhapsodies to challenge the competence of the Colonne Orchestra, which was far from a great orchestra by the 1950s (it has since disbanded), and Enesco has the ensemble playing with fine spirit. The Dixtuor burbles pleasantly along its way, thoroughly free of the ungracious sounds which sometimes mar French wind playing.

As an example of Enesco conducting his own music, this new release is indispensable. It also collects performances previously available only on several different scarce Remington records (all with totally irrelevant couplings) and presents them in surprisingly good sound. The surface noise generated by the junk on which Remington pressed its records was evidently masking better high frequency response than I would have expected to hear even from the master tapes. So, our thanks to Varese Sarabande for fine presentation (including the unobtrusive touching-up of a couple of flaws in the master tape of the Dixtuor). Still, I suspect that most record collectors (except those who pursue Roumanian import records) have yet to hear the best of Enesco's music.

Leslie Gerber