

SCHUBERT IN HISTORISCHEN SCHALLPLATTENAUFNAHMEN

Fantasia for piano and violin in C major, D. 934, Adolf Busch, violin, Rudolf Serkin, piano, recorded May 6, 1931, issued on HMV DB-1521-3 (U.S.: Victor M-132); Trio for piano, violin, and violoncello No. 2 in E-flat major, D. 929, Adolf Busch, violin, Hermann Busch, violoncello, Rudolf Serkin, piano, recorded October 23, 1935, issued on HMV DB-2676-80 (U.S.: Victor M-374); "Trout Quintet", D. 667, Artur Schnabel, piano, Pro Arte Quartet, recorded November 16, 1935, issued on HMV DB-2714-8 (U.S.: Victor M-312); String Quartet no. 12 in c minor, D. 703 ("Quartettsatz"), Budapest String Quartet, recorded April 6, 1934, issued on HMV DB-2221 (U.S.: Victor 11699); Die Winterreise, D. 911, Gerhard Hüsch, baritone, Hanns Udo Müller, piano, recorded on various dates in 1933, issued on HMV DA-1344-6 & DB-2039-44; a collection of 12 songs, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano, Edwin Fischer, piano, recorded from October 4-7, 1952, issued in U.S. on Angel 35022; Symphony no. 8 in b minor, D. 759, Vienna Philharmonic, Karl Böhm, conductor, recorded in 1940, issued on Electrola DB-5588-90; Symphony no. 3 in D major, D. 200, Munich Philharmonic, Oswald Kabasta, conductor, recorded in 1940, issued on Electrola DB-5575-7. EMI Electrola 1C137-53032-6 (5)

"The record set in hand is an attempt at throwing some light on the history of the reception and interpretation of Schubert by presenting a selection of historical recordings which may help to enrich and deepen our knowledge of him." Since all the recordings in the set except for the Schwarzkopf-Fischer recital (1952) were made within the nine years 1931-1940, the significant word in the above quotation from the set's program notes is certainly "some". While the contents do represent several, but by no means most, styles of performance that have been recorded, they omit whole areas of Schubert's compositions; for example, piano works and sacred music. Furthermore, after consideration of the number and variety of performances of Schubert's music available to the producers of the set from the full span of monaural recordings made by EMI companies (assuming, as these people seem to have done, that "historical" means "pre-stereo"), one may wish to add several other qualifiers to the term "some". Other than the somewhat half-hearted effort implied by the quoted statement there seems no real reason for the collection or the purchase of these recordings as a group; their issue as separate records would at least have allowed buyers to choose their favorites or the best items relatively inexpensively.

The presentation of the set is a mixture of the clear and the incomprehensible. The records come in a sturdy box on the back of which is listed in German some of the available information about the contents, including recording dates and matrix numbers, but (how exasperating) omitting take numbers and places of recording. This lack is particularly significant because one of the reasons for variations in sound quality within Hüsch's recordings in the set is the use of different studios. For program notes there are two essays which appear first in

German and then in "translation". The first is a brief and curious biography of Schubert which most of us in the U.S. will have to attempt to read in a language that is difficult to penetrate but is pretty surely English. The second is something of a linguistic event, entitled "Franz Schubert in Historical Interpretations". I've tried for a considerable time to determine its purpose and its meaning, with little success in either direction. What appears is a mixture of rather mystical comments, vague references, quotations of jargon, bits of poetic language, internal contradictions, and occasional sensible statements. Even the sentence quoted at the beginning of this review has a problem: how does a record set by itself throw light on the history of the "reception" of a composer? Then there's the revelatory statement that opens the paragraph about the Schwarzkopf-Fischer disc: "There exist only a few historical song recordings made by female singers" (--horrors, have we all been playing so many of our records of Lieder at speeds that are too fast all this time?). The total effect of this essay is rather like that of a surrealist arrangement of words and serves strongly to reinforce the impression I've gained that in the study of Schubert one should pay attention only to the music and to strictly factual reference sources.

To suit the deed to the words and to proceed to the music, I found the first disc disappointing. Adolf Busch makes his fiddle sing beautifully in the Andantino of the Fantasia and Hermann Busch shines as the real star in the Trio, but Serkin's colorlessly literal playing makes very little of Schubert's music and drags the performances toward dryness. While the Busch Quartet made fascinating recordings of Beethoven quartets and managed to inspire their keyboard collaborator to heights nearly equal to theirs in Brahms, they seem to have had less success in adapting their style to Schubert. The second disc contains a deservedly famous performance of the "Trout" Quintet; Artur Schnabel and the Pro Arte Quartet play with great amounts of appropriate color and energy. The Budapest Quartet completes the second side with a well-played but slightly harried account of the "Quartettsatz", the second of their recordings of this work. On the third disc (on only two sides, as opposed to previous reissues which occupied three twelve-inch or four ten-inch) appears Gerhard Hüsch's eloquent Winterreise, with the fine, sensitive accompaniment of Hanns Udo Müller. Although listeners accustomed to certain current tendencies to overacting of the texts in Lieder performances may find Hüsch less dramatic than some other singers, the fact is that he gives full attention to the words in the musical qualities of his singing. The original sound of the D-series masters was fuller and clearer than that of those in the B-series; and, as the singer has related, a few of the songs had to be rushed for recording in order to fit 78-rpm side-allotments; but these problems do not detract seriously from the quality of the overall achievement. The song recital on the fourth disc is another classic: all three of the great musicians involved appear at their best, and the recording engineers have provided the sound quality they deserve. Unless there exist people who want to be bored by the "Unfinished", the ninth side would best be forgotten except for the usual fine playing of the Vienna Philharmonic,

which of course anyone can hear in any number of successful interpretations on other records. Karl Böhm makes the first movement soggy and lifeless and plods almost "senza moto" through the second. On Side Ten, the Symphony no. 3, Oswald Kabasta makes the first movement seem a bit too serious but improves steadily after that. The Munich Philharmonic plays well, and the total effect is good fun, one of the appropriate ways to conclude a Schubert collection.

Having mentioned quality of sound in reference to the Schwarzkopffischer disc, the only part of this collection the sound of which has not been damaged for the reissue, I'll now proceed to the results of comparisons of sound of the other records to original 78's and a couple of previous lp transfers. As I usually have to say, a Packburn filter would have been a great help to the work, especially for the Busch items and the two orchestral recordings, which contain ticks and clicks or various amounts of crackly hiss. But in this set, as in many reissues I've heard, there seems also to have been a fundamental error in playback method that dooms the sound to inferiority to the originals entirely apart from the area of noise-filtering. Though I have no instruments to measure equalization, I have come to the conclusion (through careful comparative listening) that the originals, whether older shellac pressings, metal parts, or vinyl pressings, have been played back or somewhere equalized to a curve that for the high frequencies resembles that of the RIAA for lp's. What this means is that the highs have been dimmed and distorted in comparison to what was originally recorded and that it is close to impossible (a friend who is an audio engineer confirmed, after I'd been unsuccessful on my own), even with very sophisticated equipment, to undo that error and recover the original qualities of sound. Now this kind of equalization is normal nowadays for lp's, most home equipment built in recent years offers no choice of equalization (so many people play 78's incorrectly and may have become accustomed to the incorrect sound), and reduction of the highs must be a temptation to reissue engineers because of its easy quieting of surface noise; but, sorry people, it's just plain wrong! Engineers playing back 78's for preparation of reissues should know enough to equalize them properly (the necessary equipment can easily be obtained or built) before they do any sort of processing (preferably by Packburn, as I've said) to suppress noise or attempt to correct for distortion.

To be specific about the effects of the misuse of technology on the records at hand, on the first disc what highs are left sound pinched and Adolf Busch's tone sounds distorted and much duller than on the 78's. Furthermore, in the Trio the bass reproduction is thinner than that of the originals. A previous lp issue of the latter work, from a French transfer of 1958 (COLH-43) sounds quite similar, though slightly more cramped in the treble. The Quintet on the second disc has survived somewhat better, perhaps because of the fine quality of the original; the highs have lost clarity, but the bass is fine and the balance of sound has not suffered too much. The 1958 French transfer (COLH-35) sounded very cramped, lacked bass, and added considerable distortion. In the "Quartettsatz" the Budapest Quartet's sound has been dulled, and

efforts to correct the problem make the treble very wiry. The earlier German transfer of the Hüsck (E-80679-80, 3 sides) was fair - rather wooden-sounding. That in this set is better: nothing has been lost in cutting the whole cycle on one disc; but the errors in equalization have caused shifts in the tone of the singer's voice. The original recording of the Symphony no. 8 (which I could not locate for comparison) I would guess to have been brighter in sound than this lp but still cavernous and muddy in detail. The Symphony no. 3, whose originals were of wide frequency and dynamic range and good clarity for their age, has suffered from pinching of treble but not of bass. When so many of us have heard how well at least A. C. Griffith has been able to process EMI's 78's for their reissues, it is quite depressing to have to hear an expensive failure like this set, in which only one item of eight, and that the most recently recorded of all, sounds as good as its original issue. EMI Electrola surely can do better than this!

In summary, Schubert as a great composer will certainly survive this issue, but there is very little else that can be said about it in general. The performances vary widely in style and quality, the original recordings range from fair to excellent, most of the processing for reissue has dimmed and distorted the sound of the performers, and the basis for selection of contents remains a mystery, at least beyond the vague idea of "throwing some light". I cannot recommend this package; but I hope that EMI will consider the separate reissue of at least the great performances in it: the Schwarzkopf-Fischer recital, and after correct re-processing of the sound, the Schnabel-Pro Arte "Trout Quintet" and the Hüsck Winterreise.

HARRIET COHEN

J.S. Bach: Piano Concerto in d minor, with Philharmonia Orchestra, Walter Susskind, conductor, recorded August 10, 1946, issued on Columbia DX-1312-4; Bax: Morning Song, with orchestra, Sir Malcolm Sargent, conductor, recorded February 7, 1947, issued on Columbia DX-1361; Mozart: Piano Sonata in C major, K.330, recorded May 13, 1932, issued on Columbia DX-375-6 (U.S.: Columbia X-20); Vaughan Williams: Hymn Tune Prelude on Song 13 (Orlando Gibbons), work dedicated to Harriet Cohen, recorded December 4, 1947, issued on Columbia DX-1552; Chopin: Etudes nos. 25 & 26, recorded April 19, 1943, issued on Columbia DX-1231; Falla: Andaluza, recorded February 9, 1943, issued on Columbia DX-1131; Turina: Danza de la Seducción, issued by courtesy of the Director of the British Forces Broadcasting Service. EMI His Master's Voice HLM-7148

In her excellent program notes to this release Myra Verney expresses her hope that "this small selection of Harriet Cohen's playing will give some inkling of her artistry, her consummate command of the keyboard and her glowing personality..." and states that this record, royalties from which are for the Harriet Cohen Memorial Music Awards Trust, will give examples of the wide range of styles of which the

pianist was capable. Harriet Cohen (1895-1967), after study with her mother, at Britain's Royal Academy of Music, and with Busoni, had a world-wide career, limited only by problems of health and an accident which caused early retirement. She was known for her performances of all sorts of music from Tudor English and Bach to that of a great many Twentieth-Century composers, particularly British as well as Russian and Spanish. She gave many first performances; and such composers as Bartók, Bax, Bloch, Ireland, and Vaughan Williams wrote works for her or dedicated pieces to her. Except for "heroic" works beyond reach of her small stretch she seems to have played large numbers of nearly every sort of piano piece, and her collaborators included many of the greatest: Tertis, Szigeti, Casals, and the Bohemian Quartet, for instance.

Harriet Cohen did not record extensively, but this reissue covers a sufficient variety of works to illustrate the range of her talent. Listeners will find on this disc neither empty virtuosity nor individualistic interpretations forced upon the music but rather the full use of beautiful tone and superb attention to appropriate phrasing and dynamics. The pianist's work with the orchestras in the Bach and Bax pieces is excellent. Some people may find the Spanish works a bit tame or lacking in atmosphere or the Bach and Mozart items less marked by internal contrasts than in Edwin Fischer's recordings, but this listener constantly noted how lively she made appropriate parts of the music sound and how effectively she could make the piano sing. For me the gem of this generous collection is the beautiful performance of the Vaughan Williams prelude.

Myra Verney speaks of "the limitations of these old 78's..." through which she feels Miss Cohen's playing "comes so vividly." Unfortunately, comparison of the lp to the sound of properly played 78's discloses that a good deal more of Miss Cohen's tone appears on the originals, which are both fuller in the bass as well as freer and warmer in the high frequencies. The first side of the lp has no serious problems of noise; but the second suffers quite noticeably from continuous noise, especially in the Chopin and Falla, and from an intrusive crackle in the Mozart. I sorely missed the type of filtering offered by the Packburn devices, and it seems likely that the sharp filtering of high frequencies has made the continuous noise that was not filtered seem more annoying than it did on the 78's. There is no need for this sort of pinching and drying of the sound of 78's; and I regret its having happened to this record both because it seems a regression in EMI's quality of remastering and because it obscures the large amount of musical value which this record contains.

Richard Warren Jr.

THIBAUD VIOLIN RECITAL: Vitali, arr. Charlier: Chaconne (T.J., r. March, 1936); Vivaldi, arr. Pochon: Adagio Largo from Concerto for 2 violins, op. 3, no. 11, (T.J., r. April, 1930); Eccles, arr. J. Salmon: Sonate (T.J., r. April, 1930); Paradis, arr. Dushkin: Sicilienne (T.J., r. April, 1930); Saint-Saëns: Le Déluge, op. 45: Prélude (G. de L., r. May, 1929); Saint-Saëns: Havanaise, op. 83 (T.J., r. July, 1933); Granados: Trois Danses Espagnoles: (a) Andalousie, arr. Kreisler (H.C., r. November, 1927), (b) Rondella Aragonesa, arr. Thibaud (H.C., r. November, 1927), (c) Danse Originale (T.J., r. April, 1930); Falla: La Vie Brève: Danse Espagnole no. 1 (G. de L., r. May, 1929). Jacques Thibaud, violin; Tasso Janopoulo, Georges de Lausnay, Harold Craxton, piano (accompanist's initials and dates of recording indicated after each title; the record's labels are in English and French, the notes in Japanese). Angel Records (Toshiba-EMI Ltd., Japan) GR-2079.

The elegant playing of Jacques Thibaud certainly deserves better reproduction than there is on this installment of the Japanese series "Great Recordings of the Century". Thibaud (1880-1953), a pupil of his father and then, at the Paris Conservatory, of Martin Marsick, was introduced as a concert performer by the conductor Edouard Colonne and had a long and very successful career both as soloist and as chamber music player, the latter particularly in the famous trio with Alfred Cortot and Pablo Casals.

Thibaud is famous for the beauty and warmth of his tone and for his exquisite musicianship. Despite the limits of early electrical recording, his 78-rpm discs show that he represents real bel canto on the fiddle. Whether a work demands simple singing, lightness and repose, energetic Spanish dance rhythms, soaring fireworks, or some combination of these qualities, Thibaud provides what is requisite while retaining constant elegance of tone and style. All of these qualities are to be heard in the recorded works in this collection, nearly all of which are arrangements.

Granados's Danse Originale, dedicated to the performer, was apparently not issued on 78-rpm; this and Saint-Saëns's Havanaise, played in the composer's arrangement for violin and piano, seem the most important works in the group. These and the other Spanish pieces strike this listener as the most accomplished of the performances. Thibaud makes even more of the Prelude to Le Deluge than does Gabriel Willaume in his record with Saint-Saëns at the piano (HMV DB-705), but the accompaniment sounds rather leaden by comparison with the composer's playing. The modified seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works on the disc's first side, especially the Vitali, sound lovely and illustrate many features of editorial and performance practice in Thibaud's era; listeners unaware of these should be prepared for various sorts of surprises besides portamento.

According to James Creighton's invaluable reference work Discopaedia of the Violin this record has the same content as an earlier

issue: French Trianon 2C045-00887 (which could not be located for comparison). The tape-to-disc transfer numbers of the Japanese disc suggest that the dubbing from 78-rpm discs was made in the early 1960's during work on the earlier European-American "Great Recordings" series, of which many of the Japanese group seem to be reissues. Many collectors will remember the variable quality of dubs from that period, before the discovery of the optimum types of styli and the invention of equipment such as the Packburn devices which remove noise without detriment to the sound of 78's. On this record poor Thibaud suffers badly from a general de-emphasis of recorded high-frequencies, apparently done to reduce noise and perhaps to even somewhat the balance of the instruments. From the original 78's selected for comparison, thanks to the HMV engineers' skill and artistry in coping with the recording techniques of the times (1927-1936), the violinist's tone floats freely, with relatively little distortion, and sounds much more prominent than that of the piano (especially in the earlier recordings). In the reissue the violin, although still very prominent, has been dulled and sometimes distorted; its muffled tones change the quality of its relationship to the tubby or faint sounds of the accompaniment in an obviously artificial fashion. The result, strange as it may seem, is often an apparent constriction of dynamics -- particularly noticeable in the Havanaise, perhaps the best-sounding of the originals. Technically then, this release can be praised only for the high quality of the pressing.

This record seems an unnecessary disservice to the artist whom it seeks to commemorate. To consider a visual parallel, suppose that a group of beautifully crafted works of art, such as Faberge's creations in jewelry, were preserved only as fine films. How well would it serve the jeweler's memory to present fuzzy and off-color copies rather than optimum projections of the original films? In the case of Jacques Thibaud's exquisite art of performance, then, since it is preserved only in the form of recordings, how well does it serve his memory to issue dulled and distorted dubbings rather than (as is perfectly possible with available equipment and techniques) clear and faithful reproductions of the originals?

Richard Warren Jr.