

SILVERLAKE AND MORE DEEP WATERS

KURT WEILL'S SILVERLAKE (Nonesuch Digital DB 79003) \$10.98

THE UTTER GLORY OF MORRISSEY HALL (Original Cast 7918); CARMELINA (Original Cast 8019); FLY WITH ME (Original Cast 8023); FIVE AFTER EIGHT (Original Cast 8027) \$8.95 each

BERNADETTE PETERS (MCA 3230) \$8.98

EVELYN LEAR SINGS SONDHEIM AND BERNSTEIN (Mercury SRI 75136) \$6.98

MAKE MINE MANHATTAN & GREAT REVUES REVISITED (Painted Smiles 1369); E.Y. HARBURG REVISITED (Painted Smiles 1372); HAROLD ARLEN & VERNON DUKE REVISITED, VOL. II (Painted Smiles 1373) \$7.95 each

WHOOPEE (Smithsonian American Musical Theatre series DPM1 0349) \$7.98

Several weeks ago I was dining with some friends, other critics among them, and the question of how to approach reviewing materials with which the critic had some "connection" came up. Was it ethical to review things when you knew the author, the performer, the producer or received the items gratis? It set me thinking; consequently this set of reviews is a bit different from the usual: all but three of these records were bought by me and I have some connection with people involved with all but two of the above. On to the work at hand. Objectively I hope.

Kurt Weill's Silverlake, a Winter's Tale has been recorded with the New York City Opera cast intact from the March 1980 production. Hand-somely packaged in a jacket which exhibits the mylar-panel front curtain and a dozen captioned color photographs, the album includes an inserted packet of program notes and lyrics (note...not a libretto) for many of the songs or musical numbers. The liner notes by Kim H. Kowalke are far more honest about the production than the opera company itself has ever been, for this is not an opera. It is more a collection of musical numbers ala The Threepenny Opera or Happy End than is a true opera like The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny or Die Burgschaft. Music has been interpolated from earlier, obscure works by Weill, primarily as underscore for action or dialogue scenes although the major duet between the protagonists is lifted from the incidental music for a play Konjunktur which was recorded on "Kurt Weill in Berlin" (Angel 35727) under the title "Die Muschel von Margate" and, in most cases, is clearly not the Weill of Silverlake, orchestration and tonalities being what they are in his work. In fact, three of Silverlake's or "Silbersee's" musical numbers have been removed for this production which also features a rewritten book, a rethought set of philosophies (not Georg Kaiser, but Harold Prince and Hugh Wheeler) and lyrics which do not exactly cry out to be sung. Some are better than others, the bitter far sweeter than the sweet ones. The performances are mixed: Elaine Bonazzi and Elizabeth

Hynes, excellent; William Neill, Penny Orloff, Jane Shaulis, Harlan Foss and Robert MacFarland very good; Joel Grey and Jack Harrold unbearable.

The Digital recording is wonderfully alive and bright. Nothing is lost to the ear and if it were a bit cheaper would be mandated as the only way to go. An album worth having if you like Weill or if you want to keep up with the advancements in recording technology.

Bruce Yeko is the executive mind behind the "Original Cast" label. He and his wife, Doris Chu Yeko, in the words of the album notes, "have sought and seen more productions than most theatregoers; and have recorded musicals neglected by major companies." These four items are typical, to a certain extent, of their output. The first one, ...Morrissey Hall, was a Broadway flop in May 1979. Starring Celeste Holm and featuring a score by Clark Gesner of You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown, this show goes from silly glories in the overture to the darkest, dullest finale I've ever heard. In between these two extremes are a few delights, "Elizabeth's Song" sung by Marilyn Caskey (an unrhymed, autobiography in song) and "Way Back When" sung by Ms. Holm and Karen Gibson prominent among them. The problem, I thought after hearing side one was, indeed, the book which, even in synopsis, is dull. Then I listened to the second side and second act songs. They were as dull as the book. A pity! A show with great promise ground to a dead stop.

Carmelina doesn't fare as well. Music by Burton Lane and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner (the team that gave us On a Clear Day You Can See Forever) make no difference to this show. Georgia Brown gives it all the energy the show can stand, recreating her Broadway performance with Paul Sorvino stepping in for the absent Cesare Siepi, converting a baritone role into a lyric tenor one. There are new orchestrations by Philip J. Lang and they add little to the pedestrian score they amplify. Mr. Sorvino, whose work on the Yeko's The Baker's Wife I enjoyed, strains to make the music lyrical and the sound is too often unpleasant. Ms. Brown, on the other hand, makes even the overwritten, overstated "I'm a Woman" somewhat worthwhile. This is not my favorite album.

Five After Eight, billed as an "entertainment", advertised as a revue, but clearly from the synopsis a loose-limbed book-show is by a talented young composer named Michael Bitterman who should not have written his own lyrics. All too often they miss rhyming or stress wrong syllables, two bits of amateurism which drive me up walls. I had an additional problem with this album, after four copies had been tried out on my machine, my neighbors' machines and Colony Record Store's machines, I still had not found one which tracked cleanly through both sides. What I could hear, however, impressed me musically. Several themes have been haunting me, not for poor lyrics but for pure lyricism. The music ranges from the banality of a Bar-Mitzvah-band to the beauty of the best of the new-form, long-line lyrical thru-composed scene. An interesting item, but try to find a clean copy.

Fly With Me is a true find. This 1920 Columbia University Varsity Show by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart (and Oscar Hammerstein) was

revived by the school in 1980. I saw it and was charmed by it. I listen to it and marvel at it. This is a live, in-performance recording mastered by Jerry Bruck, among others, and originally announced by New World Records; the quality is variable, but lyric sheets have been provided for many of the numbers so you can keep up; the cast is an amateur one, but they give it plenty of heart. Rodgers was still in his teens when he composed this score, his first complete score, and his enthusiasm for Jerome Kern is evident in several of the numbers. Hart, while clever and facile, was still not the witty-sad writer of the late twenties and thirties whose agile lyrics trip off the tongues of people who like to recite such things at parties. Nevertheless the two men shine brightly with such songs as "Another Melody in F", "Don't Love me Like Othello", "The Third Degree of Love", and the rousing "A College on Broadway". Beyond that the album is a worthwhile addition to any serious show collector for the inclusion here of a complete first act finale, a rarity on records. Here we have plot and music interwoven in the fashion of the day, with new lyrics, specifically book-oriented, to already sung melodies and the ultimate dramatic build to the final full-throated, full-company threnody. Act Two includes one song by Rodgers and Hammerstein, another Kern-like gem called "Always Room for One More". Buy this one; cherish it.

Bernadette Peters, one of my favorite show-biz ladies, has released a new kind of "cross-over" album, invading the world of rock but tempering it with two beautifully sung old ballads, "If You Were The Only Boy" and "You'll Never Know". She moves wonderfully between them with such pearls as "Gee Whiz", "Other Lady" and "I Never Thought I'd Break". I play this one often, sometimes with the lights on.

Another cross-over of sorts is the Evelyn Lear album. I've seen the lady on stage at the Met, heard her in recital and enjoyed her as Minnie Belle in Kurt Weill's Johnny Johnson. Now here she is back in the realm of the latter, Broadway at its most refined. She sings five songs by Bernstein, (two from Peter Pan; three from On the Town) and five by Sondheim (one from Sweeney Todd, one from Evening Primrose, one from A Little Night Music, two from Follies). She treats them like Schubert lieder and Grieg songs, then lets the blues seep into her interpretations. "I Can Cook Too" is different from the Nancy Walker versions, but just as memorable. "I Remember" and "Losing My Mind" are soul-stirring. She even makes "Green Finch and Linnet Bird" musical. A lovely album taken altogether.

Ben Bagley usually issues interesting records and these three are no exception. The casts he assembles are usually top-notch and here we have three of his stalwarts making re-appearances after unusually lengthy absences: Nancy Andrews, Tammy Grimes and Arthur Siegel. Siegel, who used to sing only the occasional comedy duet Jimmy Durante or Bert Lahr number, has become Bagley's main male vocalist on these three discs and he turns out to possess a fine, expressive singing voice. Also warbling these show tunes are Helen Gallagher, Dolores Gray, Elaine Stritch, Blossom Dearie, Patrice Munsel, Sandy Duncan, Estelle Parsons, Lynn Redgrave and the only male other than Siegel, Carleton Carpenter.

Make Mine Manhattan is one of Mr. Bagley's favorite revues; not mine, however. Two songs (they're by Richard Lewine and Arnold Horwitt) do stick out: "The Subway Song" sung by Mr. Siegel and "Schraffts" sung by Ms. Gallagher. Other highlights on this disc are Elaine Stitch's contemporary revival of her early hit "Civilization" (or Bongo, Bongo, Bongo) from Angel in the Wings, "Take Off the Coat" from Bless You All (sung by Ms. Gray) and "Miss Platt Selects Mate" from Touch and Go (sung by Ms. Andrews).

E.Y. Harburg Revisited brings us the "entire score" of Hold On To Your Hats, the 1940, Harburg/Burton Lane show which starred Al Jolson in his final Broadway appearance. The score is rather flat, remembered primarily for "There's a Great Day Coming, Mañana", but it does contain two other gems, "Life Was Pie for the Pioneer" and "She Came, She Saw, She Can-Canned". The performers perform to the best of their ability in this slight score, but the album redeems itself with the items on side two. Tammy Grimes' rendition of "Moon About Town", with tune by Dana Suesse, the chorus song "Sing the Merry", cut from Flahooley and Harburg himself performing "Saroyan" from Mr. Bagley's Shoestring '57, more than justify the price of the album.

Of the three Bagley Albums the Arlen/Duke Revisited Vol. II is my favorite. Five numbers stand out as special and the rest are so good it's almost a shame to single out favorites, but here goes: "Will You Love Me Monday Morning" sung by Sandy Duncan; "Things" sung by Helen Gallagher; "I'll Take the City" sung by Arthur Siegel; "Let Him Not be Beautiful" sung by Blossom Dearie; "You Took Me By Surprise" also by Ms. Dearie. This album is truly cast in the traditional Ben Bagley vein with its smattering of songs from many shows covering a range of years and featuring the works of one (in this case two) minds. Not surprisingly, it works.

Another new issue which works is the Smithsonian version of the 1928 Eddie Cantor/Florenz Ziegfeld show Whoopie. This latest archival "reconstruction" features Eddie Cantor and Ruth Etting, George Olson and his Orchestra, Paul Whiteman's Orchestra and the Ritz Quartet performing numbers they actually executed in the original run of the show. This record was issued at the time of the Goodspeed Opera House Broadway run of the show and it points up the curious fashion fostered by that company of interpolating additional material into their so-called "revivals." Stanley Green and Martin Williams in their liner notes talk about the interpolation in the original show of "special material" for Cantor and Etting, but the recent version threw out songs from the show's own score and added other songs to bolster a score with only two major hits, "Makin' Whoopie", given several treatments here, but featuring Cantor's sensational, historic vocal and "Love Me or Leave Me" throatily and beautifully sung by Ruth Etting. With two hits like those, who really needs interpolated ditties? And what new show today can boast of such high-points? Get this album for your collections; it is an original!

J. Peter Bergman