

BACH AND RESPIGHI DISCOGRAPHIES

Martin Elste, Bachs Kunst der Fuge auf Schallplatten. Frankfurt: Buchhändler-Vereinigung GmbH, 1981. Pp. 160. DM. 36,-.

Adriano, An International Respighi Discography. Zürich: Adriano Records, 1981. Pp. 53. n.p.

In quick succession we have examples of the best and worst of composer discography.

Martin Elste sets out to do two things, and he does them thoroughly. As a musicologist, he analyzes the manifold performance possibilities of "The Art of Fugue," complete with tables and graphs, and concludes that there is not one "Art of Fugue" but many "Arts of Fugue." As a discographer (he assisted Klaus Blum with the Schütz discography of 1972, ARSC Journal, V/1 (1973)), he describes in detail the 61 reasonably complete recordings made between 1935 and 1979. Not many pieces of music need this kind of detailed study because not many lend themselves so readily to the variety of performances that have appeared on records. The discography is usable by anyone who can cope with the Bielefelder Katalog, but the essay requires some command of German. This book is well worth the price, and I'd like to see an English version published.

Adriano is an Italian singer living in Switzerland who is acquainted with the widow of Respighi. He set out to do a complete discography of the composer, he knows the reference material, and he knows who to ask for help. But he doesn't know what to do with the stuff after he has assembled it. A lot of composer discographies have been published in recent years, and the recent Fauré (ARSC Journal, XII/3) is as good an example to emulate as any. Instead, the compiler puts all his data on index cards, arranges the cards in order of label name and (get this!) date of recording, then reproduces the cards, five to a page. Among his faulty procedures is limiting himself in most cases to one issue number. There are a lot of errors (to mention one, he confuses the ATS releases of the three tone poems broadcast under Toscanini with the studio recordings issued by RCA, but since he doesn't list the ATS numbers one can only guess why the RCA entries are incorrectly described as "live"). But details are unimportant when the whole layout is misbegotten. There is a lot of room in the world of discography for anyone who has a favorite subject, but he would do well to profit from the trial and error that his predecessors have experienced. Adriano did not. The whole booklet is in English.

J. F. Weber