

Alan Poulton, The Recorded Works of Sir William Walton. Kidderminster: Bravura Publications, 1980. Pp. xxxxi + 132, £5.95 (boards).

I will be quite frank about this discography, which the Editor asked me to review from a copy which was not submitted by the publisher when requested but obtained otherwise. (See Editor's Note) It was originally prepared for Discography Series after the compiler had offered to submit manuscripts of acceptable composer discographies and we had mutually agreed on Walton as the first subject. I received the finished manuscript in late 1979 and returned it to the compiler with a lengthy list of recommendations. My objections were both substantive (these remain, and will be cited below) and accidental (the style largely failed to match the format specified for Discography Series even in the most trifling details--of no more importance one way or the other than the desirability of some kind of consistency in a series.)

The compiler has now published it on his own as the first of a series "Studies in Discography." It is cleanly offset-printed from a very neat, IBM Selectric typescript with no reduction from the original letter-size page. There are almost 200 entries as well as a considerable amount of additional information. For comparison, William Curtis's Janacek discography in Discography Series has almost twice as many entries in one-third of the space. After an introduction there is a rambling, nine-page essay, "50 Years of Recording History," which attempts to narrate the principal appearances of new Walton recordings in chronological order. An example of the prose style will be indicative: "1973 at last brought us a viable recorded alternative to the Piatigorsky Cello Concerto on RCA - from Paul Tortelier on HMV and Decca, making a now rare appearance, produced a real winner with Kyung - Wha Chung's playing of the Violin Concerto (Previn again directing)." If that's unclear, try a major stop after "HMV." Then come 30 pages of reviews and advertisements, reproduced from careless electrostatic copies of periodicals (mostly Gramophone), and nine photos made at recording sessions, mostly featuring the composer with artists.

Next comes the discography in 100 pages. While there is room for individual judgement, I would have thought that Walton's oeuvre would have been arranged in chronological order, considering the wide variety of forms and media which he employed. Instead, the 90 opus numbers are divided into nine genres, not all of which are as immediately obvious as quick reference would require. For instance, one genre includes ballet, stage works, and incidental music, while another is devoted solely to film music; organ and piano music form one genre. The book concludes with several indexes, the most useful and commendable being the artist index with six categories of performers in four neat and legible pages.

My overriding problem with the total presentation is the need for a balance between conciseness and completeness. Here conciseness seems not to be a desideratum, and completeness includes all sorts of odds and ends which may interest one reader or another but are likely to be considered clutter by most. Despite such overkill, the essential information

is not nearly complete. I already have a long list of recording dates and venues to add to those given here, as well as some corrections to make (under the first recording of the Cello Concerto, LM 2109 was released in April 1958, not October 1964, and LSC 2109 in September 1964, not January 1965). I also have a lot of matrix and take numbers which could have been added to those supplied here.

Facade (the entertainment, not including the suites and arrangements) sprawls over an indigestible 13 pages plus four pages crammed with copies of reviews and other prints. Included are elaborate charts, a rambling summary of the recordings in essay form, and all sorts of details laid out with too little sense of proportion. A keen editor would have reconsidered the use of single spacing and double spacing, the choice of type-faces (a variety of styles is used but not to best effect), and a layout which would emphasize the key material relegating minor comments to the place they deserve.

While the typescript is generally neat, quite a few pages were done with a broken element which would not strike evenly. The typist was also inconsistent in choosing the key to strike the number "one" using an italic element where such care is essential. I haven't described all the worthwhile facts which are indeed included along with all the dross, and the conclusion must be that one who is willing to wade through this compilation will learn a lot about Walton while missing some things he might have learned. But a discography can be more--a work of art which unfolds the composer and his music on records to a receptive eye and mind.

J. F. Weber

Editor's Note:

As this Journal was going to press, the review copy requested finally arrived. However, this copy proved to be unsuitable for consideration when it was discovered to have pages 79 through 106 of the discography mounted backwards in the binding.