

GREAT BRITISH NOSTALGIA

Sydney Kyte and his Piccadilly Hotel Orchestra (World Records Ltd. SH 387); Hits of the 60s and 70s/played by The Great British Dance Bands 1927-1945 (World Records Ltd. SH 390); The Young Dorsey Brothers 1928-1930 (World Records Ltd. SHB 67); Memories of "Band Wagon" - Happidrome" and other great Wireless Comedy Shows (World Records Ltd. SH 388); Roy Hudd presents Leslie Sarony (World Records Ltd. RTRS 101)

This collection of albums is more fun than a barrel of monkeys rolling a "loverly bunch of coconuts" at a most appreciative audience. They trade, as can be seen from the dates on the material cited above, on nostalgia and bring a contemporary slant and perspective to the material. The material touches on the best music and light comedy from both sides of the Atlantic. The performances are, except for the Dorseys, the most delightful the British could provide.

Sydney Kyte's orchestra (smaller in reality than on records) plays a cross-section of dance arrangements as you might have heard them any night between 1931 and 1932 had you dropped into the Piccadilly Hotel after a dinner party, evening at the theatre or meeting at your club. The songs, drawn equally from England and America, include such social documentation as "I Do Like to See a Game of Football" (English), "Yes, Yes (My Baby Said Yes)" (American), "Guilty" (American) and selections from Bow Bells (English). The initial impression of a rather staid group of serious musicians playing sub-rosa for laughs and money is dispelled once and for all with the fifth band on Side one, "Live, Laugh and Love" a Johann Strauss parody complete with bird calls, heavy-handed piano playing and a classically uninvolved vocal. The number which follows it is a delightful gem by Leslie Sarony called "Tom Thumb's Drum". The xylophone rills are the sort to start your shoulders shaking, like it or not. Styx Gibling, the drummer on this cut, ranks with the finest on either side of the Atlantic at this period.

Hits of the 60s and 70s is a collection of 20 numbers performed by the top British dance bands of three decades including Jack Hylton & his Orchestra, The New Mayfair Dance Orchestra, Carroll Gibbons & His Savoy Hotel Orpheans, Ambrose & His May Fair Hotel Orchestra and Ken "Snakehips" Johnson and His West Indian dance orchestra from the Cafe de Paris, London. All the songs on this re-issue were revived with great success during the 1960s and 1970s and almost all the songs will be familiar to devotees of either period, perhaps more fun for those who've never heard the period originals but assumed that "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" was written for Bryan Ferry to sing or, worse, that Art Garfunkel wrote "I Only Have Eyes for You" in 1975. Almost all the songs on this album are American, almost all of them show or film tunes. They range from "Diane", theme from 1927's Seventh Heaven to "The More I see You", a Harry Warren tune for Betty Grable's film Diamond Horseshoe.

One of the most beautiful vocals on this album is Julie Dawn's sensitive and lovely version of "Whispering Grass" played by Eric Winstone & His Swing Quartet in 1941. And, I must add, if you think you've heard the definitive performance of Hoagy Carmichael's "LazyBones", lyrics by Johnny Mercer, listen to Lawrence Wright's tenorizing of the song with Debroy Somers & his Band holding themselves to a whisper during the vocal so that Mr. Wright can assume a rural American accent and play it as far under as a lyric can be underplayed. The following instrumental sections make you wish the whole thing were longer. What a delightful album!

The Young Dorsey Brothers 1928-1930 is an excellent collection of recordings, 34 in all, of the period. The sides include stirring performances by both Dorseys, Jack Teagarden, Frank Teschmacher, Phil Napoleon, Eddie Lang, Bud Freeman and vocalists Irving Kaufman, Scrapy Lambert and Seger Ellis, although it is hard to single out one performer over another. The Dorseys knew good musicians and used them well. For me the most interesting item of items in this collection are the two takes of "Was It a Dream?" conducted by Dr. Eugene Ormandy. The "concert-arrangement" of Sam Coslow's song is best in the first version, with its opening section in 3/4 time taken slowly in severe contrast to the later "hot-jazz" break. The vocal by Smith Ballew and the back-up trio of Jack Mayhew, Saxie Dowell and Skinnay Ennis is charming and lilting and quite in keeping with the rest of the arrangement ranging from an exquisite four bars for solo violin to a solo Gershwin-esque piano bridge right on to a full orchestral finale. The second version doesn't have quite the same range of motions, it's opening section having been taken at a faster tempo. While all of this may be old hat to some of you, it's new to me and a sheer delight.

The last two albums in this group are for Anglophiles; at least that's their intended audience. Part spoken word, part musical comedy and all radio oriented, these collected moments from Great Wireless Comedy Shows present us with a picture of that period between the depression and Second World War when even the gentlest Englishman needed to settle back and laugh at himself and his fellow Britishers. For the unpracticed American, a few playings will accustom your ear to the accents, the slang, the enormously delightful repartee of the Bagwash clan or the humor of "Tomsky, the Great Counter Spy". Fans of the Goon Show, a later BBC produce masterminded by Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, will undoubtedly find their roots deeply imbedded in some of these routines, "Our Up-to-Date Farm" and "It's That Man Again" even having been lifted to some extent by both the Goons in the 1950s and the more recent TV nuts, Monty Python.

Leslie Sarony was a prominent songwriter and singer of the teens, 20's and 30's and this album, a bit different from the ones cited earlier, shows why. Recorded in 1980, in his eighties, Sarony's voice is strong, his way with a lyric very ingratiating and, according to Roy Hudd's notes, recording his songs in one take each he proves himself as important a performer now as he must have seemed in 1929 when he first

performed "Jollity Farm", a great favorite of my grandfather's. I cannot single out any other songs, because they're all delightful, but I should add that Mr. Sarony comments in the liner notes on all his songs and the comments are as good as the songs themselves. I hope a proposed Sarony II happens. I'd like to own it as well.

This mixed batch of nostalgia from across the seas is most worthwhile. Buy them all; buy two copies; you'll need them.

THE GIFT OF GREAT AURAL LITERATURE

Giovanni Boccaccio: Five Tales from the Decameron (Caedmon TC 1650); Isaac Asimov: The Mule (Caedmon TC 1661); Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary/A portrait of Emma Bovary (Caedmon TC 1664); John Bunyan: The Pilgrim's Progress, excerpts (Caedmon TC 1666); C.L. Moore: Shambleau (Caedmon TC 1667); John Cheever: The Swimmer and The Death of Justina (Caedmon TC 1668); William Makepeace Thackeray: Vanity Fair/A portrait of Becky Sharp (Caedmon TC 1669); E.T.A. Hoffmann: Councillor Krespel (Caedmon TC 1671). \$8.98 each.

Poet William Alfred in his preface to Helen Roach's excellent book, Spoken Records, says: "A great text makes its demand of truth on audience as well as performers: we must prepare to listen as they must prepare to read, by bringing ourselves to a reverent sense of that text's full nature." Similarly, when charged with reading aloud for posterity, the story-teller should listen to his own voice, place his best verbal foot forward and become the story for us, the eventual listeners, the eaves-droppers on their own inner magic. This new crop of spoken records from Caedmon, while all great literature, are not all great aural literature, for not all the readers bring to our ears the best intentions of the authors they represent.

Professor Roach points out that: "Listeners have the right to hope that when an author reads his own works he will convey what he meant in the way he meant it and that listening to such 'informed' readings will bring them closer to the writer's work." I confess that I approached the three discs in this group with the author's reading their tales with just that sense of expectation. I knew the stories, had chilled to the revelations at the end of "The Swimmer," had been haunted by the mob chanting "Shambleau, Shambleau" and avidly read and re-read the Foundation and Empire trilogy from which "The Mule" excerpts are taken. I have been let down in part, amused in part, and once again drawn in and enthralled.

John Cheever is not a good reader. His tendency to rush his sentences, his somewhat sing-song delivery and his Massachusetts accent which becomes increasingly more difficult to listen to as guttural and glottal sounds gather in his throat destroy the build in his stories. I found myself rather eager for the story to end, not to reach the ending, but for it to be over. According to the liner notes by Max

Zimmer this is Mr. Cheever's first recording and we are assured that John Cheever believes that stories are meant to be heard. I love his stories, and they should be told as well as read, but only if they are as well told. Mr. Cheever needs more practice.

If you have never heard Isaac Asimov speak, you are in for a surprise. His clear, New York Jewish voice is a natural for both the lecture hall and the phonograph record. His accented, pleasant tones are perfect and the choice of these excerpts from his books leave you with a sense of the man, the work and that indefinable quality referred to as "talent." The opening device of the disc, sonic sounds (it's hard to call them music), helps the author introduce the character of the Mule clearly and sets us on the path of a good, hearty tale. We are not disappointed. This disc is geared for the Science Fiction lover; the tale, certainly a classic, is now made more so by a classic recording.

"Shambleau", also a Sci-Fi story, is more than just a good tale for a limited audience. Its unique blend of legend, sci-fi trappings, romance and sensuality remove it into a different class of story from "The Mule". Its author, C.L. Moore, is a woman who reads the story with a sense of value. She gives the proper sort of emphasis to the surging of the crowds and the sensations of her hero, Northwest Smith, as he experiences the overwhelming beauty/horror of his relationship with the mysterious brown-skinned female creature known as Shambleau. I mentioned earlier that I'd been haunted for years by the sound of mob-chanting as Shambleau tries to escape her pursuers; that mob now has a single voice to haunt my dreams, the voice of C.L. Moore.

Actors must be suited to their material when performing in any form, be it film or stage or recording. Of the performers on the rest of these new records there is no reason to doubt their abilities as performers; they have all shown us their insight into character; they have all been roundly applauded for their often soul-stirring performances. Unfortunately, for my ears, they are not all delivering their best work.

The Pilgrim's Progress isn't an easy or accessible piece of literature anymore. It's not taught in grammar schools as it once was and so its lengthy rambling narrative and its expressive and picturesque grand language, so much a part of the 17th century, strike modern ears as somewhat formal and stilted unless read with the utmost credibility. James Mason, who has never disappointed me before, here doesn't seem equal to the task at hand. He insists upon announcing who is speaking, even when the narrative tells us in context who the speaker is, and cannot seem to vary his tones or accent to allow a group of characters to emerge. Even my grandmother could do that, her thick European accent often making it impossibly silly. This is not Mr. Mason at his best and so it is not Mr. Bunyan at his best.

At the opposite pole is Claire Bloom's reading of excerpts from *Vanity Fair*. She is remarkably good at assuming different identities in conversation with one another. Accents appear and disappear, spoken

tessitura alter from moment to moment and as herself she narrates with clarity and sincerity. I found myself so thoroughly caught up in the work, one which I've never cared for really, that I wished Ms. Bloom had recorded the entire work instead of these eight sections. Her "Sir Pitt Crawley" in his proposal scene is a classic in good story-telling technique and should be played to acting students, teachers of young people and baby-sitters on a weekly basis.

Ian Richardson is another fine actor who reads well. The tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann are special gems of fantasy and require a special touch which Richardson has. This tale, one of music and earthly passions, should have a musical accompaniment, which this record doesn't provide. Even without it, however, Richardson conveys the power the words have to express the sound of the perfect violin and the most perfect voice in the world. As Councillor Krespel tells the hero his awful tale, Richardson's voice assumes a slightly hollow quality, at least to my ear, and it is almost as if Hoffmann himself had lent his voice through time to aid in the reading of his ageless story of love and death.

I am not sold on Irene Worth's abilities to tell a story for records. She has wonderful moments on this collection of excerpts from Madame Bovary. While she is undoubtedly a fine actress, her sense of narrative material is too often that of a bridge between the scenes. Yet when she describes Emma's feelings or takes on a sensual scene, the actress becomes an inseparable part of the book itself. At those times, it seems as though Flaubert must have heard her on the stage and written these words to be spoken by Miss Worth and no one else. That she cannot sustain that impression is probably due more to Flaubert than to Worth. She does her best, I'm sure, and she is easy to listen to, but not thrilling enough to totally enliven the tale she tells.

How do you choose five stories out of one hundred as being the stories to tell on a recording of selections from Boccaccio's Decameron. Frankly, you don't! Not when you can pick six tales. Instead the selections by Asad ur Rahman include the Forward to the book, read well by David McCallum, but read for no real purpose. What information we might need to know is afforded us in Rahman's notes and could easily have been expanded into a second paragraph if more information was deemed necessary.

In the fifth grade I was almost booted out of school for delivering an oral-book-report on a book of my own choosing, The Decameron. The tale which entranced me the most is the first one Mr. McCallum reads; he reads it very well, but slightly lacking in that tongue-in-cheek quality I noticed at age ten. His partner in story-telling, Carole Shelley, makes up for this very slight lack in the two tales she has been given. What an actress she is as she vocally oozes her way through the delicious stories. She and McCallum are so good, in fact, that one wishes they were acting the stories together and not telling them separately. Perhaps some future recording will. . .well, a spoken record to dream about.

In her introduction to Spoken Records, Helen Roach points out the importance of the director to the recorded performance. "Many have been hurt by enthusiastic but ill-equipped directors, competent directors unaccustomed to the milieu, and even able directors who, in the rush to publication, have not taken time to establish rapport with the performers, much less to rehearse or re-do recordings." Ward Botsford is the director of all the above with the exception of the John Cheever album: it had Linda Morgenstern at the helm. In many cases relative to this group of new releases I must conclude that these two good directors did not, for whatever reasons, establish that rapport with their performers. Talent will out, it is said, and highly talented performers have saved the play in the past and I think that where these discs succeed is in their choice of readers. None of them, with the exception of Shambleau and Vanity Fair are as satisfying as the Lotte Lenya recordings of Kafka tales (Caedmon TC 1114) or P.G. Wodehouse's amusing Jeeves (Caedmon TC 1137) both directed by Howard Sackler.

There is a good solid market for well-recorded, well-planned and directed, finely acted spoken records. Caedmon, long the greatest exponent of the form, must uphold its fine standards, past and present, bringing us not just good works welded to good performers, but great aural literature, produced in the best possible manner.

J. Peter Bergman