

## RUSSIAN LP'S ON RECORD

John R. Bennett, Melodiya; A Soviet Russian L.P. Discography. Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1981. Pp. 832. (Discographies, No. 6) \$75.00.

This weighty but compact volume represents a new departure for Mr. Bennett, whose invaluable publications devoted to numerical listings of the 78 r.p.m. output of the Gramophone Company are well-known to collectors of the records of an earlier era.

The latest fruit of the compiler's industry is arranged alphabetically by composer and covers the period from the first LPs issued by the USSR state record company in 1951 up until 1979. It is confined to listings of 'serious music'.

A foreword by Boris Semeonoff and Anatoli Zhelezny summarizes the history of USSR recording and conveys the astonishing information that LP prices have never changed. A valuable table of record numbers is provided which enables the reader to determine publication dates. It is worth pointing out though that Russian recordings often appear much later than their recording dates, e.g., from live performances or as reissues, and Mr. Bennett does not attempt to give such dates as are known, nor indicate where LPs emanate from 78 r.p.m. discs.

The compiler himself writes an introduction in which he refers to the very wide scope of the material he brings together, representing more than a thousand composers and a similar number of artists. Not only are there the composers from the many Soviet Socialist Republics but in addition some unexpected works from the West. The piano sonata by Arthur Bliss for years existed in recorded form only in a version by a Russian artist; Alan Rawsthorne's 'Pastoral Symphony' also appears in the lists in its only recording. There are violin sonatas by Arthur Benjamin and Quincy Porter. In the latter, the pianist is not G. Vin-grien as Mr. Bennett has it, but Harriet Wingreen! The curious will find (well, perhaps not find the actual records, because many of those listed are obviously no longer available, but that fact has never been less than a spur to the true collector) the only records of Borodin's cello sonata and string quintet. On the other hand, it is surely remarkable that Balakirev's beautiful piano sonata which has received at least six recordings in the West is entirely absent from the Russian catalogues.

In the case of recordings of songs and short instrumental pieces, accompanists are usually not named by the compiler and indeed they frequently are not in Russian lists. This lack of information is something of a deprivation for the reader when, for example, the soprano Nina Dorliak is accompanied by none other than Sviatoslav Richter, her husband.

The names of artists who do appear are all collected in an index with page references which should prove a good starting point for future artist discographies. Unsurprisingly, not too many of their dates, provided where possible, are given for the lesser-known Russian artists, but the distinguished cellist, Knushevitsky, is shown as living still. He died as long ago as 1963 as did the conductor Alexander Gauk. If we turn our attention for the moment to the composer section, this enables us to point out that Lev Knipper died in 1974, while the undated Roy Douglas, who orchestrated one of the versions of 'Les Sylphides' and who surprisingly appears here, with an entry for a composition of his own, could have been found in the 5th edition of Grove. The New Grove has come too late for Mr. Bennett to have benefited from being able to incorporate more information from its many pages, but he could have consulted rewardingly the annual necrology in Notes and Storm Bull's Index to Biographies of Contemporary Composers.

Whenever the transliteration of Russian names from the Cyrillic alphabet is involved, problems abound. New Grove has aroused adverse critical comment by its use of 'Metner' a form which seems unjustifiable given the composer's own adoption of the German spelling, Medtner. 'Skriabin' in Grove's 5th edition has become 'Skryabin' in New Grove but neither spelling has won wide acceptance. The Library of Congress catalogue reasonably has 'Rachmaninoff', since again this was the spelling used by the composer, but also has, less justifiably 'Rikhter' and quite unacceptably, 'Moiseevich'. There is cause for gratitude then that Mr. Bennett adheres fairly closely to what may be described as 'common usage'. Thus, we find 'Arutyunyan' not as in New Grove 'H'Arutyunyan', though Mr. Bennett has failed to recognize Hovhaness in the name he renders as 'Ovanes', so there is perhaps a lesson of some kind to be learned here. In another instance the French flautist Michel Debost has become Debo though both names appear in succession in the index, while the Hungarian composer is Ferenc Szabo, not Ferents Sabo. The former Baltic states still use Roman script so it is positively an error to write Churlyonis rather than Ciurlionis, Sondetskis instead of Sondeckis or Ryaets not Raats.

However, these are relatively unfamiliar names. Not so Karol Shimanovsky (1882-1937), for this is Szymanowski, no less, and it is really somewhat astonishing that Mr. Bennett failed to recognize this.

Up to this point we have spoken most of peripheral matters. It is most of all the discography itself which is our concern and this is 728 pages long.

In compiling a work of this kind, presumably retrospectively, there are a number of important areas of source material. A substantial amount of information relating to early Soviet LPs is to be found in the Third Supplement to the World's Encyclopaedia of Recorded Music but a quarter of a century has passed since its publication. The Discopaedia of the Violin is more up-to-date (1971) but, obviously, selective. The most readily accessible source of information on Russian records is the

monthly supplement of new issues for export which has been appearing for many years and which includes a Russian language section together with an English translation. These monthly lists are supplemented by an annual cumulation similarly arranged but apparently not quite in step with the monthly issues. In addition, they exhibit a tendency to include items not already listed, so they need to be carefully watched.

This is not the whole story however, for many records are produced which are available only domestically and complete listings evidently appear only in the Russian language quarterly release sheets for which no translation is provided. For the non-reader of Russian, they can be a daunting prospect, for while the eye soon begins to recognize familiar names and musical forms, there is much that cannot be unravelled save by laborious transliteration and recourse to dictionaries.

Complete catalogues seem no longer to exist in either English or Russian. The last I have seen, formidably large, appeared in the mid-sixties.

Where these sources are not accessible, information may some times be gleaned from the lists of specialist dealers who on occasion produce copies of discs of a quite early date, while some critical journals catering for the specialist collector review recent releases.

Frustratingly, Mr. Bennett provides no information regarding the sources he has made use of and there is no indication of how far he regards his work as having covered his subject as a whole. A single page of 'Late entries' mostly of a somewhat early vintage is all that suggests that the lists could be added to.

An error repeated from WERM's Third Supplement, where the pianist in Balakirev's 1st concerto should read Zhilinsky not Shirinsky, suggests that at least that volume has been consulted.

As it happens, I have been able to compare a substantial part of Mr. Bennett's discographies with my own annotations, forming part of a larger study of the recorded repertoire. My own information has been gathered largely from the monthly Russian export lists which I possess or have seen virtually complete over the whole period covered by the present work. They have been supplemented by information gleaned from the other areas already described but in respect of domestic issues I regarded them as certainly incomplete though without being able to guess to what extent this might be so.

It was with keen anticipation therefore that I embarked on the task of comparing at least a substantial part of Mr. Bennett's book with what I knew already. After what seems to be an ample sample (perhaps a quarter of the whole, with an emphasis on Russian composers), I have come to the conclusion that big though it is, this Melodiya discography lacks a fairly large number of items which could have been included, perhaps 10 to 15 per cent of the whole. To make lists of examples would be futile

and thankless but one important Set I observed to be missing was the complete songs of Rachmaninoff on 5 discs which appeared in about 1978/9 but certainly within the limits of the numerical lists mentioned. In fact, those items not shown appear to be well distributed between old and newer recordings. Evidently then Mr. Bennett did not have access to the full range of monthly lists and this may well account for his errors in transliteration since the Russians in their English translations (though not free from such faults as inconsistencies in providing English titles for Russian songs) are usually reliable and informative. Not a large number of items previously unknown to me have come to light so perhaps after all there is not too much left to discover.

Over the years a considerable number of Russian recordings have appeared in the West on various labels. In earlier days, such companies as Colosseum, Period, Monitor, Artia and Westminster were their main outlet in the U.S., while in Great Britain there were Monarch, Saga and others. In more recent times, Angel and Columbia have been the American sources as have E.M.I. in Britain. It would have been of interest if such issues were indicated in Mr. Bennett's work, but he would have no doubt considered this to be outside its scope. There is, however, the curious fact that quite a considerable number of well-known recordings of the last decade or so, many of them still available in Western catalogues, do not appear in these pages with their Russian numbers. Clearly Mr. Bennett did not trace their Russian publication, but their complete absence almost suggests an unawareness of their existence despite their local availability.

One has to conclude therefore that this not inexpensive publication has its blemishes and its limitations, but the very size of Mr. Bennett's achievement and the labor involved in it should not be minimized. This is a veritable mine of information that will not be readily found elsewhere and the likelihood of its being superseded in the near future is slim indeed. I expect to be delving in it for some time to come and would recommend it to all good music or record libraries. If the reader can afford it for himself, he will find the ample margins perfect for annotations!

Eric Hughes