

## THE POOR MAN MEANT WELL: WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT A CARELESS DISCOGRAPHY?

Michael Powell (compiler), Alfred Deller a recorded legacy 1949-1979. York, England: privately published, [1981]. Pp. ii + 50. \$1.45.

A member recently suggested that my reviews of discographies have been harsh. An author whose labor of love was recently reviewed sent me a rather vitriolic response. Perhaps in indicating the positive or negative values of a discography clearly and concisely, I've left too little room for specifying grounds for judgment. The latest monograph provides an opportunity to enumerate in detail the factors that make a discography misleading or confusing to the reader, and the comments which follow may be checked against the first paragraph of my review of the Boult discography (in the last issue of this Journal), which is virtually a list of the elements missing from this work. I had anticipated this discography rather eagerly, for I had followed Alfred Deller's career on records since the mid-fifties and had heard him twice, with Desmond Dupré in 1957 and with the Consort in 1964. Despite the varying opinions about his artistry, there is no question that he profoundly influenced the music performance of our times.

Deller's biography, published in 1969, included a discography which I had occasion to criticize in an article in Recorded Sound in 1975: "The information is accurate enough although not nearly detailed enough, almost complete (Archive APM 14056 and Decca LXT 2798 are omitted), but organized as a list of records by label. Hence the same recordings in different guises appear as separate entries. The Purcell/Lully coupling on Oiseau-Lyre, the Machaut/Pérotin/anonymous group on Harmonia Mundi, and the Morley/Wilbye couplings on Vanguard Everyman are actually reissues of other entries in the list, while there are two miscellaneous collections [BG 606 and SRV 141] actually assembled from various other entries."

Messrs. Kelly, Perkins, and Ward in a subsequent article called my comments "insufficiently explicit," adding: "Firstly, is it reasonable to expect the compiler to have avoided the faults (what were the facilities available, could the publishers have found someone better able to do the work, was the work done conscientiously or carelessly)? Secondly, given a manuscript ready for the printer, was it better to proceed to publication or should publication have been delayed for further investigation to take place?" My cheerful reply never appeared in the review, but I found the questions more concerned with intentions than results; I did make my criticism explicit by pointing out that over thirty LPs, cited by some such title as "The Wraggle Taggle Gypsies," gave no indication of what music was being performed, and I suggested that rules for discography should provide a working method of research, not a subsequent test of the finished product.

The biography and discography were updated in a new edition after the death of the singer, but a quick glance last fall indicated that no substantial changes had been made. This later version came to the attention of Michael Powell: "I first decided to compile this small booklet after reading Alan Howlett's excellent discographical list of the recordings of Alfred Deller, which appeared as an appendix to the new edition of Mollie and Michael Hardwick's 'A Singularity of Voice' published last year." (It's not clear why a new job was needed if the earlier one was excellent.) Powell has in fact addressed two of my complaints: he has included the two omissions mentioned, two recordings on Concert Hall (Guilde Internationale du Disque) which I had overlooked, and all the 78s, and he has supplied contents for every disc. Unfortunately, three more pervasive problems have been carried over to the new work, and these suggest an opportunity to analyze some methods of discography, not in the form of rules (as I did before), but as an examination of how a body of facts can be presented to the reader in either a clear or a confusing manner.

First, the new work is still a list of records, not of recordings, and the reissues mentioned are still not clarified: the Purcell/Lully recoupling is still not cross-referenced to the two earlier discs, the Harmonia Mundi collection of Gothic polyphony is still a disaster, the Morley/Wilbye recoupling is not cross-referenced (although it's mentioned in the first place as a reissue of Morley alone), and the two assembled programs are nowhere connected with the various earlier discs. Indeed, several more such assemblages are now included (OLS 109, VSD 729-30, HM 260, HM 2-473), only one of which has so much of a hint as the single word "collection" attached. It would have been highly desirable to have entered each new record once with full details, citing all subsequent reissue numbers, while discs recoupled from a variety of sources might have been detailed as such in an appendix, citing the original issue numbers of all the contents. The widely accepted form of artist discography goes further to show what was made in each recording session, listed chronologically. Such an arrangement would have eliminated works in which Deller didn't take part.

Second, the compiler states in the preface just quoted: "Each recording is referred to by the original prefix [i.e., issue number] except in one or two cases where re-issues are indicated as belonging to a particular series." Actually, there are long lists of Vanguard Everyman and Vanguard Historical Anthology of Music which are entered in full detail and not always described as reissues. Yet the RCA Victrola series of eleven French Harmonia Mundi recordings and the Musical Heritage Society series of eleven others are ignored, while Vanguard's similar releases of Harmonia Mundi recordings of Purcell's "The Fairy Queen" on Everyman and Byrd's Masses on Historical Anthology of Music are repeated in full detail without cross-references, even though their identity is not at all evident, since the Purcell is remastered on two discs and the Byrd works are recoupled. Furthermore, the Musique d'Abord reissues, which involve no change of number or format but only

packaging, are listed again in full with several (HM 929, HM 251, HM 593) to be found for the first time in this list, just as VRS 479 is found only as a reissue under Everyman SRV 299.

Third, there are numerous other illustrations of the validity of Lewis Foreman's repeated injunction in his basic treatise, Systematic Discography: "Be consistent." In a field in which most practitioners, like Powell, arrange their research to their own satisfaction, internal consistency can largely supply for conformity to a uniform system. Instead, of all the stereo numbers listed in this work, just one (VSD 2058) is labelled STEREO. With all other reissues listed in their own numerical sequence, just one (SRV 280SD) is placed next to the album from which it was drawn instead of in its own place. Of all the Vanguard HM series of reissues, just one has its old number cited (BG 635 after HM 14SD). In this same series, only HM 50-51 and HM 57-58 are omitted from the list, although the numbers are cited earlier as reissues under the original numbers. Of all the recordings that were licensed to different labels in other countries, only one has such a cited number (Pye PVL 7028 for BG 550). Of all the mono numbers to which corresponding stereo numbers are appended, only one lacks such a citation (VSD 2014 for VRS 1031). Of the several discs made up of recordings by several artists, Deller and the Consort among them, only two (LXT 2798 and HM 251) list the Deller item alone as if it were the only selection on the disc; the rest (OL 50102, BG 570-1, BG 576, HMD 219, HMD 223, HMD 224, HM 232, HM 241, HM 260, HM 929, HM 2-473) have no indication that Deller or the Consort are not taking part in the performance of certain works on the discs.

More than with any other sessions, the reader needs help with the Vanguard/Harmonia Mundi co-production of Gothic polyphony. Instead, the Machaut Mass is listed in three places and each Pérotin Gradual in four places without any suggestion that these are identical recordings; the four shorter Notre Dame works are not even mentioned every time. The original ten-inch numbers on Harmonia Mundi (HM 25143, HM 25147) and Lumen (AMS 5009, AMS 5010) are not given for the Pérotin and shorter works. The last item in the book gives two numbers for Machaut/Pérotin: HM 25148 (no mention of AMS 5005) applies only to Machaut, 1C 065 99718 contains not only these two works but also two of the shorter pieces. One entry embracing Die Seemannsbraut (a 7" disc) and a Byrd Mass on an unrelated reissue is garbled beyond comprehension.

Even if the original decision to limit issue numbers to the original ones had been followed consistently, as it was not in this case, it was a poor one, for the fragmentary distribution of his recordings was a problem not just for collectors but for Deller himself. His biographer states that he left Vanguard for French Harmonia Mundi because the former label was not regularly distributed in Britain (Vanguard had been issued on such labels as Nixa, Nixa Vanguard, Top Rank, and Philips Fontana--not to mention Philips Vanguard and RCA Vanguard after he left--but each label in turn released only a small part of the Vanguard

catalogue, everything was deleted too soon, and only a few discs were ever restored to circulation by subsequent licensees. It would have been desirable to furnish as many issue numbers as possible.

Hence the book is satisfactory to neither American nor British readers. American readers have the Vanguard numbers and the French Harmonia Mundi series, only lately available as imports, but the RCA Victrola and Musical Heritage Society numbers of the latter are missing, and it would have been an even bigger help to have filled in the odds and ends of other labels, such as Angel 45016, London LLP 808, London A 4385/OSA 1385, Archive ARC 3053, and Quintessence PMC 7143, next to their British equivalents (ALP 1265, LXT 2798, MET/SET 338-40, APM 14056, and Concert Hall SMS 2467). British readers are provided with virtually none of the maze of numbers under which the Vanguard recordings were released there, although the French Harmonia Mundi numbers are now valid there. (Deller must have been chagrined to find that for some years after his new contract began, the distribution of these recordings was completely lacking in Britain, except for the first two licensed to Oryx--not mentioned here, of course.)

Errors abound. It is careless, or worse, to refer to "His Master's Voice Recording Company Ltd.," "Columbia Records Ltd.," or "Decca Recording Company Ltd.," none of which is correct. The Purcell "Come Ye Sons of Art" is cited without any number at all (OL 53004). BG 551 is cited without any composer (Tallis). SRV 297SD is not "formerly BGS 5051 (70671)" but is assembled from material on those two separate discs. SRV 298SD is not "formerly BG 656, BGS 70656," for only the last three selections were on that record, the rest coming from three other discs. The program of motets on Harmonia Mundi HM 211 is missing, although it may be found under Vanguard HM 7SD. HM 212 is incorrect (it's the Byrd Mass for Four Voices). Harmonia Mundi HM 216/217 is not "4 records." The Purcell "Fairy Queen" is not HM 231 232 233 (it's HM 231, three discs); the correct HM 232 and HM 233 appear directly below this entry! The Purcell "King Arthur" is HM 252-3, not HM 253.

HM 2-473 here seems to involve three performing groups conducted by Jacques Grimbert, performing unspecified works by five composers. In fact, all of this material is drawn from four earlier releases, and Grimbert conducts only the Choeur National in Schütz, while the Raphaël (not Ralph) Passaquet Ensemble performs Lassus, and the Deller Consort performs works of the other three composers as well as four more not mentioned! HM 17016 does not involve Deller "with" Elly Ameling: each side of this seven-inch disc, Deller's Pérotin and Ameling's Schlick, is drawn from a separate source.

Rather than being "insufficiently explicit," I've run the risk of flogging a dead horse. Yet I haven't even mentioned other entries with only partial lists of contents (VRS 1031, HM 62 SD, HMU 202, HM 210, HM 251; HM 224 in one citation), the utter lack of typographical design (consistent word order as well as use of underlining, upper case, and

lower case for general title, composers, works, and artists, and a single place to cite cross-references), the careless spelling, the merely passable cloth ribbon on a manual typewriter, the unattractive illustrations which passed through the stage of electrostatic copying, the lack of any kind of index at all, and the dates.

Dates! Most entries have a month and year in parentheses, but nowhere is the meaning of these dates specified (by way of exception one line reads "recorded 1966" for a recording precisely dated on the Quintessence jacket). Some of them are certainly dates of recording, as shown on the jackets (BGS 5047, HM 249); some are dates of release (OL 50101, SET 338-40, BGS 70682); many are omitted (HM 252-3, recorded in October 1978 according to the jacket) and some are wrong. The dates I've seen for Pérotin and Machaut are October 1960 for Viderunt and January 1961 for Sederunt and the Mass; I don't know what September 1960 and April 1961 mean. LX 1286 must be earlier than June 1952, for it was released before WERM closed in April 1950. The glued binding is falling apart before I've finished my review.

Is it wanton cruelty to be so severe with a pamphlet which sells for just over \$2.50? Not if it illustrates a multitude of questionable procedures which confuse a reader instead of informing him. The faults can be reduced to errors, omissions, and inconsistency, apart from a few matters of judgment or taste, but there are so many different examples of each that the informed reader will be frustrated and the uninformed will be misled. Kelly et al. suggested that, at worst, the "actual damage" of an incomplete discography would be "pre-empting the publication of a subsequent and better version." In fact, that is what the Howlett discography accomplished for a decade, and now we can expect the field to be occupied by this third attempt for a while. I suggest that, if discographies serve any useful purpose, an inadequate example does damage in whatever way it could have been constructive. This pamphlet ill serves the memory of the artist, even if it was "published in aid of the Alfred Deller Memorial Trust."

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