

A LEXICON OF CONDUCTORS

John L. Holmes, Conductors on Record. Westport CT: Greenwood Press; London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd. Pp. 735 \$49.50.

In his introduction, John L. Holmes describes his basic intention in this work: "to include...all conductors, orchestral and choral, who have made gramophone records, since the beginning of recording in the first years of this century. Every conductor was to have a biography, a discography, and, where appropriate, a discussion of his style, importance, and place in the history of the art." Conductors on Record is, in fact, a more ambitious work than its closest parallel, the Kutsch and Riemens Unvergängliche Stimmen. The biographies of the major figures are considerably longer; the discographical information, though far from exhaustive, is markedly more detailed than the sketchy indications given in the Sängerlexicon; the evaluations are more substantial, and sometimes more critical. Holmes has made a monumental compilation, and one that will be welcomed by many collectors and librarians.

What ought we to require of such a work? First, that it be comprehensive in its coverage of the subject. Holmes himself estimates that as many as a quarter of recorded conductors have been omitted, "simply for lack of information." Checked against two major recent works, the book soon establishes its coverage: in the letter A, Holmes includes 27 names not found in either Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians (Sixth Edition) or The New Grove, among them Akiyama, three Alberts (Herbert, Rudolf, and Werner Andreas), Marc Andrae, Antonicelli, and Antonini. He has a further 9 names not in Grove, a further 15 not in Baker's. Conceivably, a well-stocked library with a variety of national reference books could supply information on some of these people, but many will be hard to track down otherwise, and especially in the English language.

Another standard of comparison is the current recorded repertory. Of 52 A's listed in the 1979 Schwann artist catalogue, less than a dozen are absent from Holmes--several of them very local figures indeed. A not-so-local figure among the missing is San Francisco's Kurt Herbert Adler, whose Decca/London disc of obscure opera overtures was released after Holmes's 1977 cutoff date. But Kurt Herbert also conducts the Pavarotti record that Holmes lists under the Met's Kurt Adler (with whom, we are warned, Kurt Herbert "is not to be confused"), while the Dreigroschenoper listed under Kurt was actually conducted by F. Charles Adler (and is correctly listed in his entry on the very same page).

Overall, I found relatively few significant omissions, people responsible for major recordings and about whom some information should have been traceable: Umberto Berrettoni (the Gigli Bohème), Ferruccio Calusio (the 1939 Monteverdi Orfeo, credited by Holmes to Galliera, who actually played continuo), Desiré Dondeyne (whose Garde Républicaine

band twice recorded the Berlioz Symphonie funèbre et triomphale), Eric Ericson (two big collections of choral music for Swedish EMI), Herbert Häfner (the first recording of Lulu), Alfredo Simonetto (early Cetra operas), Joseph Stransky (information about him is readily available in Baker's!), and Georges Truc (L'heure espagnole and excerpts from Pelléas on French Columbia 78s). Klaus Tennstedt is also absent, but the cutoff date of 1977 probably excludes his first recordings.

The coverage, then, is impressively extensive. Next, we inquire after the quality of the information. On the biographical side, FM programmers who have to plan "anniversary concerts" may not be the only people who regret that only years of birth and death are given, not exact dates (surely in most cases Holmes must have found dates as well as years in his sources, so his failure to transmit them means that someone else will have to cover the same ground again in the future). Occasionally, even the year-dates are missing. Franco Autori's birth year (1903) could have been found in Baker's. Those denizens of early electrical Italian opera, Carlo Sabajno and Lorenzo Molajoli, are both entirely dateless; Barton Wimble has traced obituary notices for them in, respectively, 1938 (at age 64) and 1939 (at age 70). (At least we are not told, as so often, that these two played important roles at Toscanini's La Scala in the 1920s; neither is even mentioned in Carlo Gatti's big Scala history and chronology.) Places of birth are generally given, of death only occasionally.

Training, professional appointments, important premieres--these are the principal biographical data that Holmes offers. Cross-checking with Grove and/or Baker's reveals a variety of minor discrepancies (his press agent confirms that Antonio de Almeida was born in Grove's 1928 rather than Holmes's 1929; Frederik Prausnitz's tenure at the New England Conservatory was 1961-69, not 1956-61, confirmed by programs in my files --and so on). There's more general misinformation, too: under Akiyama, we read that the American Symphony Orchestra "has been inactive since Stokowski's departure in 1972," news that will surely surprise its very busy members and successful fund-raisers.

More unsettling is the quotient of factual slippage in connection with careers quite well documented, such as Arturo Toscanini's. He was 18 (not 19) at graduation, 19 (not 20) when he first conducted; he led 11 (not 19) operas during that famous South American tour. His Italian professional debut as a conductor was in 1886 (not 1887), his Turin engagement began in 1895 (not 1896), and his first symphonic concert there (with the program listed by Holmes) was in 1896 (not 1898). His first Milan appointment began in 1898 (not 1899), and he did not conduct at La Scala between 1903 and 1906. He first conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in 1902 (not 1920). Although Toscanini didn't conduct in Fascist Italy after the 1931 Bologna incident, he did not quit the country immediately, as Holmes implies, but remained a resident until 1938. His Bayreuth tenure is first given correctly as 1930-31, but

further down the page we read that "He was the first foreign conductor to appear at Bayreuth (1931)." There may be some grain of truth buried in this sentence: "After triumphant appearances at the Salzburg Festival, he finally refused to conduct there in 1937 because Walter's performances at the festival would not be broadcast in Germany"--but, as we know from the Selenophon recordings, he did conduct there in 1937, and planned to return the following year, until the Anschluss intervened. At least misleading is the statement that "his last opera performance, a studio recording, was of Aida in 1954." Actually, Toscanini's last opera performance was of Ballo in 1954, while his last studio recording (and last conducting) was of passages from Aida and Ballo, to patch the "live" recordings of those operas.

Of course the general lines of Toscanini's career are not seriously distorted by these erroneous details--but they leave one worried about the care with which data have been gathered, transcribed, and proofread, and also about the quality of the source material employed. (Holmes's brief "Select Bibliography" includes several works of known unreliability and one that occasionally indulges in sheer fantasy, David Wooldridge's Conductor's World.) And the same reservations apply to the discographical information. Basically, what Holmes intends to supply in this area is a list (in run-on paragraph format) of the works each conductor has recorded, with the names of soloists and orchestras and labels--but no catalogue numbers and only occasional indications of recording dates.

In principle, this is a workable scheme, and anyone who has labored to compile a full-scale discography of even a single active conductor will appreciate that any such level of detail would be unattainable on the scope that Holmes embraces, at least within a human life span. In the smaller entries, the principle works well enough; there can be little objection to the (rarely confusing) omission of composers' names with familiar distinctively-titled works (but why not abbreviations for major orchestras, which would have saved a considerable amount of space?) or to the essentially "historical" ordering of the lists (from Bach to Berio, as it were). But things get complicated in the longer entries, which are often broken down by time periods (e.g., 78 and LP) or by orchestra or by musical category, and the resultant confusion is then compounded by oversights, duplications, and just plain errors. For example, the section devoted to Furtwängler's postwar recordings includes his own Symphonic dialogue with Fischer (prewar HMV), Mozart overtures (prewar Polydor), the Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto with Conrad Hansen (a wartime broadcast), and the Adagio from the Bruckner Seventh (wartime Telefunken); some posthumously published performance recordings are listed both here and in a subsequent section explicitly devoted to that category, while no attempt is made to distinguish between different performances of the same work or to coordinate different releases of the same performance. One has the impression that this listing started out in a clear and simple way and then, through accretion, reorganization, and retyping, got out of control. I can imagine a useful Furtwängler listing made along Holmes's lines, but this isn't it (and

the same has to be said of other complex major entries). Even with a clear presentation, reference to the existence of published scholarly discographies would not be amiss, but there are very few indications that the author is conversant with that literature.

A conspectus of the kinds of problems that plague Holmes's discographic listings, and of the degree of comprehensiveness, may emerge from the following notes on entries under the letter A.

Abbado: Berg's Lulu Suite has turned into the Lyric Suite, and the Milstein Mendelssohn/Tchaikovsky coupling turns up twice.

Abravanel: Holmes's praise for Vanguard's commitment to the Utah Symphony recordings is certainly deserved, but it should also be noted that a favorable provision in the orchestra's contract made them financially more attractive than recordings with other American orchestras.

Ackermann: Die Fledermaus is listed among the operetta recordings "which were made in the first years of LP with the Philharmonia Orchestra and with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf heading the casts." But Karajan conducted the Fledermaus in that series; Ackermann's recording, also with the Philharmonia, came around 1960, in stereo and without Schwarzkopf.

Adler, F. Charles: Most of his recordings are credited to the Alpha label, which is unknown to me; they certainly first appeared on SPA (Society of Participating Artists), not mentioned at all in the entry. It seems to me that bare-bones discographies, such as these, ought to cite the company that made and/or first published a recording, rather than the label of a licensed reissue. Adler's Bruckner First, as well as his recordings (unlisted by Holmes) of Stravinsky's Symphony in E-flat, Schoenberg's Begleitungsmusik, and works by Cowell, appeared on the Unicorn label, also unmentioned.

Albert, Rudolf: With the Cento Soli, he recorded Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements, not the Symphony in C. I don't know where the Mozart concertos with Schilhawsky [sic] appeared; it certainly wasn't on Nonesuch. Omitted is a Vega disc from a 1956 Domaine Musical concert, including Gabrieli canzonas, Stravinsky's Symphonies of Wind Instruments, and the world premieres of Henze's Concerto per il Marigny and Messiaen's Oiseaux exotiques.

Alessandro: His Brahms and Debussy recordings were for Allegro, not Brunswick.

Almeida: Holmes is inconsistent about "private recordings." Here we find the Penzance issue of the Gluck-Strauss Iphigenia in Tauris, but under Ackermann, for example, the same producer's publication of Busoni's Turandot is not to be found.

Amy: The Everest record listed here first appeared on Adès, who also issued a disc on which Amy conducted Berio's Tempi concertati, Jolas's D'un opéra de voyage, and Varèse's Offrandes, with Domaine Musical ensembles.

Ansermet: His recording career is said to have commenced in 1919, which may be a typo for 1929, since the first recording listed is the Decca set of Handel Concerti Grossi. Omitted are Stravinsky's Mavra, Schumann's Carnaval, and the concert recording of the Schumann Piano Concerto with Lipatti.

Antonicelli: Another garbled story: "He also conducted a recording of Un ballo in maschera with the Metropolitan company; it was released by Classic Editions, but was immediately withdrawn." This wording certainly suggests a studio recording, but of course the recording in question was a Met broadcast, and it was published with a false attribution to a number of well-known Italian performers; when unmasked, it was withdrawn under threat of legal action. There's quite a lot of such scrambled discographic lore, I'm sorry to say; the story of the Allegro Ring (under Keilberth), the facts about Bruno Walter's Philharmonic Beethoven Ninth(s), the date of Perlea's Rigoletto, the provenance of Muck's Parsifal recordings, Gershwin's role in the Victor recording of An American in Paris, the nature of Furtwängler's 1954 Philharmonia Beethoven Ninth, the extent of the Toscanini Society's Cantelli reissues--all these are significantly muddled.

Arbos: The list of recordings, like those of such prolific early figures as Coppola, Mörike, and Weissmann, is significantly incomplete.

Atherton: Alan Hacker, not Atherton, conducts Nenia--The Death of Orpheus on the Decca/Headline Birtwistle record. Such over-inclusiveness occurs frequently, the blame no doubt often to be laid at the feet of inaccurate catalogues.

Not encountered under A, but frequently thereafter, is the overlooking of complete operas in favor of excerpts only: thus, Hans Rosbaud is credited with "excerpts from Don Giovanni and Le nozze di Figaro," though of course the complete works were issued. Short shrift for hard-working Wagner conductors, too: neither Swarowsky nor Bohm is credited with having recorded a complete Ring, nor Konwitschny with Tristan (remember Margarete Bäumer?). As a final puzzler, can anyone unravel the facts behind the statement that "Jochum made his first records for Telefunken in 1932, when he accompanied Edwin Fischer in a Mozart concerto"? Could this be a distant descendant of the Reichsrundfunk listing of a movement from Beethoven's "Emperor" by those two?

Finally, we come to the evaluative material that Holmes furnishes for the more significant figures. This strikes me as less problematical --and not merely because, by its very nature, it is presented as opinion rather than fact. Salted with characteristic quotations from interviews and books, these sketches often give a vivid sense of what the conductor himself considered important. (Boulez: "Generally, the danger of maintaining a style or tradition is that, on the contrary, you maintain mannerisms." Erich Kleiber: "There are two enemies to good performance: one is routine and the other is improvisation.") Holmes's evaluations of problematic figures are both precise and tactful (e.g., Erich Leinsdorf), and, if his own enthusiasms remain clear, he nevertheless accurately reflects the musical world's general consensus about most conductors.

In summary, Conductors on Record is a sound conception, flawed in the execution. It can be relied upon for general impressions of careers and repertoires, but elaborate structures ought not to be built upon its specific data without confirmation from outside sources. The compiler expresses hope for a supplement containing corrections and additions, and asks for the help of readers, which I am sure will be forthcoming; this is an enterprise worth supporting and improving.

David Hamilton