

HISTORISCHE AUFNAHMEN

RAMEAU: Premiere Livre; Recueil de 1724; Nouvelles Suites; Pieces en Concert--5 Pieces. Marcelle Meyer, pianist. EMI References (France) C 151-10493/4, 2 records.

Marcelle Meyer was a surpassingly fine pianist whose few recordings are mostly very scarce collectors' items. Even so, they are easier to find than information about her. Even the program notes of the present issue, in which the focus of interest is presumably the performer (complete recordings of Rameau's keyboard works played on the harpsichord being common enough), say absolutely nothing about her.

Meyer made a few prewar 78 recordings for French EMI, mostly of 20th century music. Only one of them, as far as I know, has been transferred to LP: a superbly joyous account of Milhaud's Scaramouche with the composer at the second piano, still available on World Records SH 227 ("Composers' Interpretations"). After the war, she made an extensive series of recordings for Les Discophiles Francais on 78s and early LPs. These, oddly enough, were mostly baroque music (much Bach, Couperin, Scarlatti and Rameau), but she also recorded all of Ravel's major piano works, two Mozart concertos and a few solo pieces, a bit of Schubert, and the piano music of Chabrier with Francis Poulenc joining her in four-hand works. There was also an astonishing recording of Stravinsky's piano music, including a version of the scenes from Petrouchka which in some respects has yet to be equalled. Haydn Society issued some of the recordings in the U.S., but even these are scarce and those issued only in France are great rarities.

Not having heard most of the D.F. LPs passed up by Haydn Society, I think I would have chosen the Chabrier set for reissue, since the music is too seldom heard and one imagines a pianist of Meyer's ability could do much for it. Rameau would probably have been my last choice, since his music doesn't usually transfer well to the piano. All those elaborate figurations tend to sound fussy on the piano, and without them the music seems bare. Still, I am not too surprised to hear that Meyer does very well with this music. She plays with a tone that is crisp, clear, and transparent yet lovely and not percussive. All those little ornaments and turns are in there, but she tosses them off lightly enough so that they don't weigh down the music at all; on the contrary, they are bouncy and add to the delight of the pieces. Each piece has its own expressive character, and where virtuosity is called for it is very impressive. In short, this set is a superb collection of masterful pianism in the service of fine music.

The recording, which dates from 1953, is excellent, with the exception of an occasional tape burble (nothing too serious). I am not surprised at its quality after seeing the name of Andre Charlin credited as recording engineer. We have to do without bands between pieces,

but that is the price for having all this music, nearly two hours' worth, on two records. My only real complaint about the production, already mentioned, is the total lack of information about the pianist (although we do have two photos). Even World Records bothered to mention that Meyer was married to the actor Pierre Bertin, although that's all they had to say.

For lovers of great pianism in baroque keyboard works this set is unreservedly recommended. I hope that more of Meyer's recordings will be forthcoming from EMI...especially that elusive Chabrier set!

Leslie Gerber