

THE ART OF DINU LIPATTI

- and a cautionary tale

THE ART OF DINU LIPATTI. RECORD 1: BACH Partita No. 1 in B flat, BWV 825; Chorale Preludes: Nun Komm', der Heiden Heiland, BWV 599, Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 639 (arr. Busoni); Jesu, joy of man's desiring (Cantata 147) (arr. Hess); Siciliana (Flute Sonata No. 2) (arr. Kempff) MOZART Piano Sonata No. 8 in A minor, K 310 RECORD 2: SCARLATTI Sonatas in E, KK 380, and D minor, KK 9 CHOPIN Barcorolle in F sharp, Op. 60 LISZT Sonetto del Petrarca No. 104 RAVEL Alborada del Gracioso ('Miroirs' No. 4) CHOPIN Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58 RECORD 3: CHOPIN Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11 (with Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra conducted by Otto Ackermann); Etudes in E minor, Op. 25 No. 5 and Op. 10 No. 5; Nocturne No. 8 in D flat, Op. 27 No. 2; Mazurka in C sharp minor, Op. 50 No. 3; Waltz in A flat, Op. 34 No. 1 RECORD 4: MOZART Piano Concerto No. 21 in C, K 467 (with Lucerne Festival Orchestra conducted by Herbert von Karajan) ENESCO Piano Sonata No. 3 in D, Op.24. (recorded 1943-1950)

Not a note of Lipatti is unconsidered, nor yet is there one which does not sound utterly spontaneous and beautiful; not a phrase does not lift itself in a life-enhancing way yet remain precisely calculated in relation to the next and to the whole. But, alas, almost every comment to be made about these, for the most part, well-known recordings must by now be a cliché. So, while giving due thanks to Angel for these superb pressings (it's true! Just two ticks on one side, otherwise remarkable silence) and reserving a little criticism for later, I'll concentrate for the moment on what's new.

In 1966 Angel first issued a Chopin E minor Concerto played by Lipatti, orchestra and conductor remaining obstinately unknown over the years. Fourteen years later, Mr. Michael Matthews in England heard a BBC transmission of it one evening, and was struck by its resemblance to a performance in his collection by Halina Czerny-Stefanska with the Prague Radio Orchestra conducted by Vaclav Smetacek. He wrote to Robin Ray, popular British broadcaster, who regaled us one Sunday morning in March 1981 with proof of Mr. Matthews' perceptiveness: played and recorded simultaneously on two tables, they sounded as one.

Over to EMI, who admitted their mistake and, with the propriety which has marked their conduct throughout this astonishing and hilarious story, withdrew the current British counterpart of the present box and paid Miss Czerny-Stefanska an appropriate sum for the 60000 plus copies of her recording sold in Lipatti's name.

What happened, according to EMI Classical Manager Peter Andry in a broadcast interview a few weeks later, was this. A Swiss Dr. Kaspar told Mme. Lipatti that he had a tape of her husband playing this concerto. She

contacted Walter Legge who went out to hear it; in this he never succeeded. Kaspar offered him the tape, but when EMI asked to whom royalties should be paid, he disappeared, sitting on the gold, Fafner-like, as Legge remarked.

Later Mme. Lipatti was offered by a Mr. Kaiser another, different tape of her husband playing the same work. It was authenticated by her, Ansermet and Legge, who thought it was a rehearsal for Kaspar's concert tape, which, as Mr. Andry remarked, he would never have done had he managed to hear the latter. This was the one issued in 1966. Mr. Kaiser, a Lipatti enthusiast who, like everyone else in the story acted in good faith, was given the tape in Munich by a Mr. Collins, a collector from the USA. Mr. Collins had asked Mr. Kaiser, whom he knew to be a Lipatti collector, whether he had some tapes of folklore, offering him the Chopin concerto tape in exchange for those which he was duly given by Kaiser. That is as far back as the solid facts go. Beyond that, it seems that someone unknown had copied the Czerny-Stefanska tape -- not a disc -- while it was under licence in the USA from Supraphon.

Back now to 1981. Dr. Marc Gertsch of Berne, a friend of the Lipatti family, was the one man who had access to Dr. Kaspar's original tape. When he was fourteen, he made a copy of it by holding up a microphone to the recorder. Dr. Gertsch supplied a cassette of his copy to EMI in 1981 and this now appears for the first time in the USA in the present box. This really is Lipatti: the three Chopin encores on the tape were those which he played at the concert on 7 February 1950, and the Nocturne (available on DISCO 541) is preceded by the few measures of prelude which characterised Lipatti's practice.

Was it worth the wait? A pointless question in relation to any Lipatti performance. The sound is limited, but enthusiasts have had to cope with much worse (Keith Hardwick really has worked wonders here). The orchestra sounds seedy and at times lumbering; perhaps it is fortunate that the opening tutti is drastically cut. No matter; Lipatti gives a performance exceeding one's dreams. Such strength, delicacy, breadth, volatility - all held in perfect equipoise, with a continuous stream of what the watery and wavery sound still discloses to be the most lovely tone. The two etudes, too, are treasurable additions to the Lipatti discography. The "black keys" study ripples with utmost grace and vanishes, leaving one incredulous at such sovereign ease. But the Nocturne is not here. Surely it should have been, even at the risk of duplication.

This brings the first complaint. Four discs of selections from "The Art of Dinu Lipatti" means the return of many old friends and a welcome for the rare Enesco Sonata to be added to Lipatti's other recordings of his godfather's works on Electrecord ECE 0766/7. Moreover, some of these selections are in sound superior to that of previous editions. But if the Chopin Sonata, why not the Chopin Waltzes? If Chopin No. 1 and Mozart K 467, why not the Grieg and Schumann? Two more discs would have encompassed these; indeed, leaving aside the separately issued last recital, all of the Lipatti EMI legacy of commercially-issued discs could

have been fitted on six discs. Why leave the odds and ends out? It is time that this was done properly, so giving us the benefit of Keith Hardwick's work throughout. Electrola's recent seven-disc da Capo issue (1C197-53 780/86M) overlooked oddments (the Chopin Waltz Op. 34 No. 1 recorded in 1947 and included in this box) and botched some transfers - the Ravel Alborado and Chopin Barcorolle wow and flutter unacceptably.

And this brings me to the second complaint, which I mention with diffidence since Mr. Hardwick's ears are so often right and others wrong. To my surprise the sound of the issues in this box is by no means always superior to da Capo. In some items it is: the Chopin and Enesco Sonatas have greater solidity and body, and the Ravel is immeasurably superior, Lipatti's stunning display more vivid than ever before. The Mozart items sound different but are certainly as fine as da Capo. But the Bach Partita has acquired some flutter on sustained notes; the work doesn't contain enough of these to make this distressing, but the same defect invades the shorter Bach items, particularly "Jesu, joy", with disastrous results. This is not apparent in da Capo, or at any rate is fully disguised in a warmer, more rounded sound.

Whatever my reservations, this box falls in the "don't delay -- must hear" category: the Chopin Concerto and many of the new transfers demand this. The insert contains full discographical information, photographs of the artist and a good essay about him by Jeremy Siepmann.

By the way, the "Gramophone" review of Miss Czerny-Stefanska's recording, issued in the United Kingdom by DGG in 1958, pronounced it very dull and ordinary. What's in a name? Actually, it's very good, though not, like Lipatti, extraordinary.

Christopher Dymont