

OPERA ON RECORD, Continued

Carlo Marinelli, Opere in disco (da Monteverdi a Berg): Discografie di 25 (sic) opere e di 3 balletti. Fiesole (Firenze): Discanto Edizioni, 1982. Pp. 547. paperbound. Lire 30,000 (about \$19.00).

Guides to complete opera recordings are hardly thick on the ground, and guides with discographic pretensions are scarcer still, so Opere in disco has little competition. Its author, Carlo Marinelli, has been writing about opera and contemporary music for more than thirty years, and is described by his publisher as "one of the pioneers of critical discography in Italy"; he has six entries in Gray and Gibson, Bibliography of Discographies I, ranging from Rossini to Schoenberg. The book at hand began as a series of discographies prepared over the past twenty years for publication in the programs of major Italian opera houses-- American and British program editors, please copy! An appreciative foreword by Goffredo Petrassi commends both Marinelli's discography and his criticism, and the commendation is not unwarranted. So, even though the book is available only in Italian and only from Italy, it has points of interest for ARSC Journal readers.

Two earlier books also provide comprehensive opera discographies and critical comment. The first is Rodolfo Celletti's Il teatro d'opera in disco (Milan, 1976), which lists 1322 commercial recordings of 446 operas and has at least a few words about most of them. Some of those words are by Celletti himself, but more often he quotes or paraphrases from High Fidelity and The Gramophone, with proper acknowledgement of his sources. Better known to American and British readers is the more recent Opera on Record, ed. Alan Blyth (London, 1979), with commentary by Blyth and 21 other critics on 56 recorded operas, and with discographies by Malcolm Walker listing 1062 complete and abridged commercial recordings. Two sequel volumes to Opera on Record have been completed and at least one of these should be in print by the time you read this.

Marinelli's scope is narrowest of all, for he includes only 27 operas (not 25 as the subtitle says) and only 556 recordings of them, both commercial and "private." While Blyth has room for just about all of the standard repertory, and some less familiar works too, Marinelli must leave out some very popular warhorses. Which three Verdi operas would you include? Marinelli opts for Il trovatore, Aida, and Falstaff, a defensible choice, but Blyth adds to these Macbeth, Rigoletto, La traviata, Simon Boccanegra, Un ballo in maschera, La forza del destino, Don Carlos, and Otello. If there are three Verdis there can evidently be only two Puccinis, so Marinelli picks Madama Butterfly and Tosca, bypassing La boheme and Turandot. Perhaps in accord with Italian tastes, he finds a place for but one Wagner opera: Tristan und Isolde.

Other choices, however, seem to reflect his own preferences, for who else, limited to two Mozart operas, would have picked Die Entführung aus dem Serail and Così fan tutte? Who would have represented Bellini not with Norma but La sonnambula? Entführung and Sonnambula, by the way, are in Opere in disco but not Opera on Record, as are La serva padrona, Il matrimonio segreto, and Wozzeck; however, I expect that the sequel volumes will include most or all of these.

And Marinelli's commentaries cover less ground too, for he writes only about complete commercial recordings, while the contributors to Opera on Record discuss abridgements too, and even individual 78 rpm discs, while some make reference to private recordings as well. In compensation, Marinelli goes into greater detail about each recording he has heard, and he seems to have heard most of those he lists. He may devote a paragraph each to the performances of the principal singers, and he does not disdain to write about the Ruizes and Inezes as well as the Manricos and Leonoras. His method is descriptive and appreciative, rather in the manner of John Steane in The Grand Tradition but lacking Steane's illuminating comparisons and often stopping short of explicit critical judgment. Perhaps, in the enormous effort to get through hundreds of opera sets, many of them out of print and hard to find, he could not make many direct comparisons. There is evidence of this in his tentative handling of the two Bolshoe versions of Boris Godunov, which were expanded to four by substituting Reizen's Boris for Pirogov's in the earlier version and London's for Petrov's in the later. Marinelli suspects that this is what happened, talks about it a lot, but does not quite manage to clinch the point. He mentions major textual cruxes (Boris, of course, and also L'incoronazione di Poppea, Orfeo ed Euridice, Il barbiere di Siviglia, and Carmen) but is generally less incisive and informative than the contributors to Opera on Record. He also ignores the 1805 version of Fidelio (usually called Leonore) and the EMI/Arabesque recording of it--a decision, or oversight, which is surely a mistake, and one which Lord Harewood in Opera on Record does not make. All in all, then, I do not believe that Marinelli's commentaries are valuable in proportion to their length. The level of critical insight in Opera on Record varies from writer to writer and from piece to piece, but it is consistently high, even though usually expressed in fewer words.

The discographies, on the other hand, mark a clear advance over Walker's for Opera on Record, and indeed over all other predecessors. For one thing they are more complete: Marinelli has traced some recordings Walker missed, including several Cetra Opera Live sets of the late 1970's, the Melodiya L'elisir d'amore, the ur-Boris with Talvela on Angel, the first Tosca of 1918 with Lya Remondini, a Bolshoe Madama Butterfly (in Italian) published in Italy by EMI, and the Romanian Cav and Pag on Electrecord. The discographies are also more detailed, for the cast listings include all the secondary singers as well as the principals. As I said earlier, Marinelli also lists private recordings, separately from the commercial issues but with no less detail; his is the first book since Celletti's Le Grandi Voci of 1964 to do so. And greater care has been taken: there are fewer obvious errors in role attribution, and the

proofreading has been far more carefully done. I'm afraid the discographies in the first printing of Opera on Record were a terrible mess, though I am told they have been cleaned up for the later American paper-bound edition. So, especially for readers not fluent in Italian, the discographies are a prime inducement to get a copy of Opere in disco.

Unfortunately, however, there remain problems. A large number of abridged and private recordings have found their way into the lists of commercial complete issues, usually without any indication of what they really are. An Italian might be forgiven for not knowing that Discocorp is in the same business as HRE, MRF, and the rest of that piratical crew, and not a sort of West Coast Fonit, but Marinelli's preface acknowledges the advice and assistance of many who might have told him so, had he asked, including James Smart of the Library of Congress and Eric Hughes, the compiler of the enormous, still unpublished sequel to WERM. And since Marinelli actually listened to the abridgements he lists, among them all the Metropolitan Opera Record Club issues of the mid-1950's, he knew they were incomplete--but the discographies do not say so. On the other hand, four complete commercial sets are missing: the Leonore mentioned above, the German Odeon acoustics of Cav and Pag, and a 1949 Bolshoe Carmen on Melodiya. (Nine private recordings are also missing from those listings, but here I can hardly blame Marinelli; who can know everything in that murky field?)

There are signs that Marinelli's discographic research, though it helped him avoid some traps, does not go very deep. He penetrates few disguises, solves few mysteries. Moreover, he is often satisfied to copy uncritically from sources he trusts, such as Bauer's Historical Records 1898-1908/9: he accepts Bauer's claim that the 1906 Zonophone Aida is complete, though neither he nor Bauer can find more than 23 sides containing about two-thirds of the music. He also repeats Bauer in crediting Julius Lieban as both Alfred and Dr. Blind in the acoustic Fledermaus, a possible but rather unlikely double; as it happens, the Lieban who sings Blind is named Adalbert, as the old Gramophone catalogs show. Marinelli also trusts Le grandi voci, though not implicitly; he does not fall for my favorite LGV invention, the casting of "E. Bravest Heart" in the first Beecham Faust (doubtless as Valetin). But Marinelli does perpetuate a discographic ghost, as does Walker--an alleged but unnumbered Period issue of Fidelio with Kozlovsky and Antonova, which not only was never published but probably never existed. Marinelli's preface alludes to research trips abroad, but his travels evidently did not bring him to the Metropolitan Opera archives, or even to the Metropolitan Opera Annals, for his casts of Met broadcast recordings are full of needless holes. Beneath the tidy, reassuring surface, then, there are pitfalls aplenty for the uncritical reader.

Least trustworthy of all are the dates, or rather years, provided for all the entries. As in Opera on Record, we are never quite told what those years signify, perhaps because they turn out to signify no one thing, but we are surely meant to assume that they are the recording dates. If so, then six of the 24 commercial sets of Fidelio are misdated--

even Walker does better, misdating only three of his 15 entries for complete recordings. When Marinelli and Walker offer different years, sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both are wrong; even when they agree they may still both be wrong. Sometimes the year given actually is that of the recording, but often it is that of publication, or of the year before publication. (Walker sometimes gives a year after publication, an absurdity which Marinelli has managed to avoid.) Though Marinelli's dates often look more plausible, plausibility is not the same thing as accuracy. Too often both he and Walker appear to be merely guessing at dates they could not establish through research. Now, discography does sometimes call for guessing--or perhaps I should call it inference; authoritative sources sometimes turn out to be wrong, and too often such sources are not accessible, or do not exist, leaving the discographer to make what he or she can of whatever evidence there is. But to do so without informing the readers is bad scholarship, indeed something close to deception.

In contrast with these lapses from scholarly rigor, Marinelli elsewhere reveals a pedantic streak that sometimes helps but usually obstructs the reader. He indexes his volume six ways: by composer, by title, by conductor, by singer, by record reviewers cited in the text, and by any names not included in the other indexes. At least the artists' indexes are highly useful, referring as they do not only to Marinelli's critiques but to the discographies, providing full names and vocal ranges, and even sometimes giving dates and places of birth and death. (The one index in Opera on Record, by performing artist, usually gives only the last name, first initial, and references to the reviews--not the discographies.) Unfortunately, however, when I tried to use the singers' index I ran up against an obstacle: looking up "Callas, Maria," I found only a cross-reference to "Kalogeropoulos, Maria," which was the main index entry. I suppose I could train myself to look for Kalogeropoulos instead of Callas, or Gomez Cima instead of de los Angeles, but why should I? And in each discography, all roles are given in the language of the opera, which is usually no problem--operaphiles are a polyglot crowd, of necessity--but how many readers, looking up Boris Godunov, will know who or what "Khozjajka" and "Jurodivijj" are? Marinelli seems at times to forget who his audience is.

So, despite Opere in disco's real merits, it has little to offer ARSC Journal readers. Opera on Record is the book to have: it includes more operas, has wider-ranging commentaries, is in English, is easily available in British and American bookstores, and costs less. It and its sequels, which will doubtless maintain the high standard, promise to make English-speaking opera record collectors the best informed in the world.

John W. N. Francis