

**EMANUEL FEUERMANN:** Recorded in Concert, 1940-41.  
**DVORAK:** Concerto in B minor for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 104  
**REICHA:** Concerto in A Major for Cello and Orchestra,  
 Op. 4, No. 1  
 Connoisseur Laboratory Series In Sync Cassette C4162  
**BLOCH:** Schelomo, Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra  
**D'ALBERT:** Concerto in C Major for Cello and Orchestra, Op.  
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**DVORAK:** Silent Woods, Op. 68, and Rondo in G Minor, Op. 94,  
 for Cello and Orchestra  
 Connoisseur Laboratory Series In Sync Cassette C4163  
 All with Emanuel Feuermann and the National Orchestral  
 Association, Leon Barzin, conductor

The publication of these treasures is the result of a chance meeting between In Sync's E. Alan Silver and the cellist's daughter, a happy happenstance which led to the rediscovery of the original acetates, recordings made in Carnegie Hall at the behest of the National Orchestral Association's President Mary Flagler Cary. In Jon Samuel's excellent Feuermann discography (published in two installments in this Journal in 1980, Vol. XII/1-2, pp. 33-77 and No. 3, pp. 196-239), the Dvorak and the Reicha concerti, both recorded 1/27/40, appear among the Noncommercial Recordings as Performance No. 23; the D'Albert, recorded 4/22/40, is No. 25; and the Bloch and shorter Dvorak works, all recorded 11/10/41, are listed as No. 31. This last entry follows by two months Feuermann's final commercial recordings, the Hollywood sessions with Heifetz and Rubinstein.

A case could be made--no doubt has been, many times--that the whole frame of reference of virtuoso performance of the past four decades was drastically altered by an extraordinary series of premature deaths: Feuermann, then Ginette Neveu (1949, age 30), Dinu Lipatti (1950, age 33), William Kapell (1953, age 31), Guido Cantelli (1956, age 36), and Dennis Brain (1957, also 36). These were more than promising artists cut off in their thirties; there is a strong consensus that this was the cream of the crop. Of course, one can extend the sequence--back, say, to Joseph Wolfsthal (1931) and up to Fritz Wunderlich (1966)--or add favorites (Ossy Renardy, Maria Cebotari), but then the point tends to fade into a general memento mori, which may well be where it belongs, anyway. Suffice it to say that the death of Emanuel Feuermann at the age of 39 following a routine operation in 1942 was the first of a particularly shattering half-dozen losses, from which the music world has not recovered.

Not that the world is particularly conscious of this

loss: in the preface to his discography, Samuels wrote, "It is terribly unfortunate that very little of Feuermann's recorded output has even been re-issued on L.P., and that almost none of it is presently made available by the commercial companies." While it is true that nearly all of the cellist's recordings of substantial works have found some long-play reincarnation at one time or another, it is also true that seven years later Samuel's statement is still grimly true with regard to commercial availability. The Heifetz-connected material remains in print, the Dvorak Concerto is offered on an Opal LP, and the Smithsonian has reissued the Stokowski Schelomo, but the Schubert, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn Sonatas, among other things, have disappeared from Schwann, and the ever-added standards of "the World's Most Consulted Record and Tape Guide," the Haydn Concerto is in some import limbo. Thus the appearance of these cassettes not only brings us heretofore unavailable Feuermann, but almost doubles his available legacy.

Because the original 33 1/3 rpm acetates were cut inside the hall, there is none of the sonic detritus associated with radio broadcast, but the recordings do exhibit plentiful signs of wear and, especially in big orchestral passages, some distortion. For the most part this is inevitable evidence of age and decay is kept to a very acceptable minimum by the expert restoration of Tom Owen and the Dolby B treatment. As with the rest of In Sync's splendid line, these cassettes are copied in real time without the imposition of compression or equalization. They are, however, analogue-to-digital recordings, and as a fellow traveller of the beleaguered and dwindling anti-digital band, I cannot but wonder whether the benign effects of the digital scrubbing outweigh its sterilizing effects. There is enough openness and body to the sound to suggest that it does--but the analogue troglodyte in me finds it especially discouraging that E. Alan Silver, creator of so many legendary analogue recordings in the old Connoisseur Society days and producer of these cassettes, has so enthusiastically embraced sound by bits.

Oh yes, what about the music itself? The Dvorak Concerto, probably of most immediate interest, is in a mode similar to that of the 1928-29 Feuermann/Taube/Weissmann Parlophon recording, with (naturally) less constricted sound. The soloist's approach is generally straight-ahead, propulsive (especially in the last movement) with little tarrying over phrases--not that they are rushed: the line is shaped with unfailing grace and clarity, and, particularly in the slow movement, with more expansiveness than in the commercial recording. As one would expect, the blood lines between both Feuermann performances and those of Janos

Starker are very clear: classical, cleanly proportioned interpretation at its best. The orchestra, composed largely of students (extremely good, pre-professional students, that is) is more than adequate in the 1940 performance, certainly more vivid than the early-electrical Berlin State Opera Orchestra of the Parlophon issue. It is as true of the later recording as of the earlier, however, that the orchestra suffers sonically a good deal more than the burnished Feuermann tone, which seems to be essentially impervious to the limitations of whatever recording media happened to capture it. There are moments of insecure intonation in the N.O.A. wind choir and elsewhere (understandable in any live performance), and the first movement--one of Dvorak's great symphonic statements--could use more final thrust. But in general Leon Barzin, the excellent Brussels-born conductor and teacher who served as principal conductor of this orchestra for over thirty five years, elicits expressive and forceful playing from his band, both here and in the other offerings on these cassettes.

Indeed, in the other performance for which there is famous Feuermann competition, the Bloch Schelomo, it could be argued that Barzin and company have the better of their (immortal) rivals, Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The Victor recording of a year and a half before the New York performance originally took a good deal of heat (some of it, I understand, from the composer himself) for the over-heated Stokowski approach. Barzin's forces do exhibit more restraint, although there is emotion aplenty, and Feuermann is (again) more expansive in spots. At this distance, however, the Stokowski reading must take the honors. The beauty and focus of the orchestral sound, even in the superheated passages, simply can't be matched by the New York forces--and it is a sound especially to be cherished now, when so few seem capable of (or even interested in) such intensity.

There is no such competition for the D'Albert and Reicha concerti. The former, the composer of which is best known as a pianist and as the creator of Tiefland, has received a couple of recordings, one currently available on CD from Schwann Musica Mundi. The concerto dates from 1899 and is an attractive, lyrically conservative work with moments of considerable technical challenge, especially in the vigorous finale. Even if the musical matter doesn't always hold the attention, the soaring tunes, the biting spiccato, and the unflinching musical impulse of Emanuel Feuermann do.

I know of no other recording of the A-Major Concerto of Josef Reicha, although two of his other concerti, in F Minor

and in G Major, have appeared on disk, the latter at least twice. Josef was the uncle and teacher of the better-known Anton, colleague of Beethoven and perpetrator of beautiful woodwind music. The elder Reicha was a cellist of considerable reputation, and from the evidence of his concerti one can readily see why. The A-Major Concerto is a wonderful work, reminiscent of both Haydn and the Mannheimers, full of fetching tunes and generous also with brilliant passagework which Feuermann attacks with joyful energy and mastery--although it ought to be noted that not all his bold flights into the stratosphere come off perfectly. This is not to his discredit, of course: it is reassuring to have evidence from somewhere besides the operating table that the man was mortal. (Although everyone agrees that Josef Reicha died in 1795, there seems to be some uncertainty about his birthdate; the New Grove and Jon Samuels in his informative cassette notes both give 1752, but two German sources at hand claim 1746. Something else to lose sleep over ...)

Of the two remaining works on these cassettes, both still generally under-recognized gems by Dvorak, the G-Minor Rondo was recorded by Feuermann in a abridged version for Parlophon in 1924 and also for the "Adventure in Music" film in 1939, but the beautiful Waldesruhe is represented in the Samuels discography only by this performance. Within its brief scope the unique amalgam of intensity and repose that this artist could command is fully audible.

Irving Kolodin once asked, "What would have been the odds as of 1940 that Pablo Casals, all but retired at age 64, would be playing the cello more than 25 years longer than Emanuel Feuermann, at the top of his worldwide prominence and only 38?" It is somehow telling that it is still possible to get up a debate over the relative merits of these profoundly different masters, the younger gone from us three decades longer than the older, but still able to cast a potent spell of his own. These cassettes won't settle any arguments, but whether or not one believes that one will find in them little evidence to the Emanuel Feuermann was the greatest cellist of the century, one will find in them little evidence to the contrary.

--John Swan