

THE WORLD'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF RECORDED MUSIC:  
SOME REMINISCENCES

By Geoffrey Cuming

Almost as soon as I began listening to classical music, I began making lists of records. One of the first was of Mozart piano concertos: Compton Mackenzie had been complaining in The Gramophone about the difficulty of distinguishing the various concertos in B flat, so I sent in a complete list of all Mozart concerto recordings then available. It took up all of half a page in The Gramophone! But what really hooked me on discography was buying R. D. Darrell's Encyclopedia of Recorded Music in 1936. It immediately became a sort of bible to me, and I quickly set about keeping it up to date. At that time there were three sources of information about new issues: The Gramophone for England, Darrell's own monthly bulletins for the USA, and a monthly letter from the EMG record shop in London, which imported all the important European issues. In those days it was no great labour to write up the issues of one month, especially in the summer. I was also able to make some corrections in Darrell's book by listening to European radio programs.

Then came World War II. Apart from The Gramophone, the sources dwindled, and I myself was called up in December, 1940. At this point, a Mr. Francis F. Clough wrote to The Gramophone to say that owing to a breakdown in health, he was looking for some kind of therapeutic occupation, and was considering compiling a catalogue of gramophone records. Probably because of my list of Mozart concertos, the editor forwarded the letter to me, and I wrote to Mr. Clough. He was a lawyer by profession, living in North Wales. We rapidly agreed to collaborate, and I sent him all the material I had collected.

Our circumstances dictated our procedure: Clough had unlimited time at his disposal, but was unable to travel; I was on active service, but could from time to time get to a music library or record collection. Clough at that stage had little knowledge of classical music (his tastes were for Johann Strauss and Lehar); I knew quite a lot about music of all periods. So the obvious division of labour was that Clough should do the cataloguing and I should do the research. Research was very necessary, because in the 1930s record companies were nothing like as conscientious as they became later on (partly through our efforts) in labelling their products correctly. At the very least, when a record was catalogued, it was necessary to establish whether the music it contained was the same as that on any other record. This was particularly true of operatic arias: the same aria would be begun at three different places on three different records, and therefore appear under three different titles. Yet all three records contained substantially the same music, and would appear under the same heading in our listing.

This could usually be cleared up by reference to the score, but often required hearing the records as well, preferably with the score in front of one.

Again, the title on the record might simply be inadequate: "Scarlatti: Sonata," for example. If the printed music were not available at the same place as the record, I had to take down the opening bars from the record by ear, and consult the score elsewhere. I became fairly adept at this. The important thing was to get the melodic outline right; the note values didn't seem to matter so much. It was easy enough to do this at the BBC, but our assistants had a much more harassing time, playing records in shops, trying to note down the contents of a record labelled simply "Swan Lake," and then get away without buying the record.

Under wartime conditions, it wasn't easy to get access either to music libraries or record collections. Valentine Britten, the BBC gramophone librarian, was most helpful, not only allowing me free access to the BBC record library, but also answering innumerable queries by post, providing addresses of recording artists, and so on. Without her constant help, we could never have done the job. The BBC music library had been evacuated to the depths of the countryside, and on one occasion, finding myself stationed 30 miles away, I bicycled over and spent several hours there, solving an unparalleled number of problems in one day. Artists were almost always very ready to help repair the deficiencies of the record labels.

Meanwhile, Clough was building up a network of correspondents in Europe and America. He showed great skill in recruiting "gramophiles," as they were called in those days, in Sweden, Switzerland, and Portugal, who kept us up-to-date with the French, German, and Italian issues. In the USA, A. J. Franck and Jerome Pastene were particularly helpful. Some of them even managed to visit North Wales (quite a job in wartime) and became life-long friends. Like George Bernard Shaw, Clough favoured postcards as his usual means of communication, and a ceaseless flow went out to all our correspondents.

All the information received was written out in a series of notebooks, with references entered in the margin of his copy of Darrell's Encyclopedia. This was our first big mistake: we should have used cards from the start. The second mistake was to incorporate all pre-1936 records instead of starting where Darrell left off. Thirdly, we should have abandoned the attempt to indicate which records were currently available and which were not, information which very rapidly became obsolete. In these three ways, we made our task enormously larger than it need have been.

By 1941, the flow of new issues grew progressively slacker, and Clough decided to start writing out the work in full. Fourth big mistake: he wrote it in longhand in folio notebooks. This would not have mattered so much if we had drawn a firm line at that point in time and kept further new issues for another

volume. Instead, he went on adding new issues by pasting in fresh sheets, and this process went on until 1950! In the age of the word-processor, this method of working must seem incredibly primitive and inefficient, but we were working without any financial help. Every penny came out of our own pockets; we couldn't even afford a typist. But we both loved the job, and Clough was quite happy to go on writing and rewriting the manuscript.

As each composer was written out in full, a host of new queries appeared: missing opus numbers, false attributions, doubts about the correct key, and so on. If we had been using cards, these would all have appeared much sooner. Where composers didn't use opus numbers, we always tried to supply dates of composition. Our basic layout was the same as Darrell's, because we felt it could not be improved upon. (Nowadays, of course, we should have been expected to supply matrix numbers and dates of recordings, but this would have inflated the work to an impractical size.) New thematic catalogues kept appearing (Deutsch's Schubert, Schmieder's Bach, Kinsky's Beethoven, for example), and their numberings had to be incorporated. Haydn was especially difficult: I finished up by compiling a complete manuscript thematic catalogue (Hoboken's was still well in the future). The most tiresome job was with minor composers who didn't rate a full list of works in Grove's Dictionary. Palmgren, for example, used opus numbers, but these were often not quoted on the record label. So, to produce a consistent entry, we had to find a copy of the music to get the missing number. I gave myself a lot of extra work by supplying the author of the words of every song.

One of two examples will show the sort of thing we were up against in those days. Dvorak's Slavonic Dance no. 3 will indeed be no. 3 if it is played in the piano duet version; if it is played by an orchestra, it will be no. 6 of the piano duet version; and if it is played by violin and piano, arranged by Kreisler, it will be no. 16. Talking of Kreisler, he came clean about his "arrangements" of 18th century composers just in time to save me from hours of fruitless research into Pugnani and Francoeur. He's not the only one in this field: he's the one that's owned up! We discovered two or three others, who, when we wrote to ask them about pieces they'd arranged, replied that they had forgotten where they found them. One piece in The Great Elopement (Handel, arranged Beecham) I am convinced was composed by Sir Thomas himself; it's certainly nowhere in the 50-odd volumes of the Handel-Gesellschaft edition.

There was once a Haydn divertimento which I couldn't identify, but since it was conducted by Robbins Landon, I assumed it must be genuine. When he gave us the details, we found that the record company had simply omitted the first movement without telling him, or of course, the sleeve-writer. Incidentally, you cannot always trust the notes on the sleeve: the writer may well

never have heard the record. After the war, the companies became much more conscientious about identifying their products; that is, until guitar records became popular. One came into our hands including the titles "Haydn: Trio" and "Mendelssohn: Song Without Words." There must be over 200 trios by Haydn, with three movements apiece, and it wasn't any of those 600 movements. Then, as I sat humming the opening to myself, I thought, "Surely it should be an oboe playing this." I remembered that Segovia had arranged the minuet from a Haydn symphony, and there it was: the trio from the minuet of Haydn's Symphony no. 96! Flushed with victory, I went on to the Mendelssohn: it was none of the 48 piano pieces of that name. It wasn't the one for cello and piano, either. Then I got out the invaluable Dictionary of Vocal Themes, and found a song called "Liebesplatzchen." Quite logical: a Mendelssohn song with the words left out.

Another fruitful source of trouble were songs and arias in Russian. Nearly all Russian songs reach us via the French or the German, and the titles change a good deal en route. The same song appears on different records as "During the ball" and "The lights were flashing." When we started getting Soviet records after the war, they came in long typewritten lists, often without composers' names; and the titles had been translated by someone with a fluent command of colloquial English but little regard for literary style. Thus a song which we had been accustomed to enter as "Farewell, My Friend" appeared as "So Long Pal."

The one composer who defeated me was Bruckner. For every Bruckner symphony there are at least two versions going back to Bruckner himself, a version edited by one or more of his pupils or friends, the Ur-fassung edited by Haas in the 1930s, and the Bruckner-Gesellschaft edition by Nowak from the 1950s. I thought we ought to sort all these out. How to describe each version was a problem in itself, as the revised version was usually the first edition, and the original the second edition. Having finally gotten all this straight, we found that some conductors were using basically one version but with details from another. To do the job properly, we should have to play every recording with all the scores, and write a short essay on each recording. Even if we had the space, life is too short to spend all that time listening to Bruckner.

On the other hand, we have made the companies much more cadenza-conscious. In the 1930s, it was the exception rather than the rule for the authorship of a cadenza to be mentioned on the label. Now it is the other way round. We used to divide recordings of Mozart's Symphony no.40 into those which used clarinets and those which did not, but that sort of detail had to go by the board in the flood of LP recordings. With more co-operation from reviewers, we might have managed to continue doing so, but they were and are oddly reluctant to supply information of that kind, even with the record in front of them.

To return to the progress of our work: at the end of the

war, I went to train for the Church of England ministry in Cambridge, England, and the superb music libraries there yielded much hitherto unobtainable information. I was also able to use the British Museum for the first time. In 1947, I took up active parochial work, and my involvement rapidly decreased. Valentine Britten produced a BBC secretary, Miss Thorpe, who nobly volunteered to type out the whole work in her spare time. If she had realized how enormously complicated the manuscript had become, she might not have been so willing. However, having once started, she stuck to it and did a marvelous job.

Her expenses were paid by an advance from a publisher who had come forward. He stipulated that we must continue to work while printing was in process, so that a supplement could be added which would bring it more nearly up to date when it finally appeared. In 1952, The World's Encyclopaedia of Recorded Music was actually published, after twelve years' gestation. Clough chose the title as a tribute to the pioneering work of Darrell.

Clough had already gone over to the use of cards for the Supplement, and this enabled him to cope much more effectively with the ever-increasing flood of LP records. Apart from the sheer volume of output and rapid extension of the recorded repertory, the number of pieces on some records needed a new approach. We had carried on from Darrell the practice of indicating what was on the other side of each record, but with LPs this soon became impossible: one record might now contain ten or more titles. In the Second and Third Supplements we gave up the attempt to indicate when a record was no longer available.

The later volumes were only possible through the appearance of new helpers. Eric Hughes had quite independently been compiling his own encyclopedia, and paid a visit to Clough to compare notes (the two never met again!), and Clough invited Hughes to check the typescript when that eventually appeared. Hughes also began carding new entries, at first only English material, but later including foreign issues which Clough sent along to him. In the end, Hughes did virtually all the carding, while Clough concentrated on correspondence about the queries Hughes raised as he entered the new material.

Another recruit was Angela Noble, who wrote a letter of complaint, pointing out a number of identification errors in WERM, and was immediately invited to join the team, taking my place as research worker and paying a weekly visit to the British Museum or the BBC. She never got to meet Clough at all!

After the Third Supplement, our publisher threw in his hand; Clough's health had improved to the extent that he was able to work full-time at his profession, and I was similarly preoccupied. Hughes became a professional cataloguer for the British Institute of Recorded Sound, now the National Sound Archive, and I leave the rest of the story to be told by him.