

**Kenyon C. Rosenberg, A Basic Classical and Operatic Recordings Collection for Libraries. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987. xi, 255 pp.**

Mr. Rosenberg's book is essentially a guide to the available recordings of the so-called basic repertoire, a risky business at best. The preface sets out the criteria for inclusion, an explanation of symbols, suggested vendors, and finally a section with tips on care and handling of discs and tapes ("Don't put your grubby fingers on the playing surfaces.")

The discography itself is a list of recommended recordings arranged alphabetically by composer, wherein the works cited are arranged alphabetically in broad categories (also by the alphabet, Chamber, Choral, Concerted, etc., where an order based on logic might have been more helpful and easier to anticipate, the reader not having to second guess the correct term) if the number of works included is large. Each composer's listing is introduced by a biographical-critical sketch, the length of which varies--not necessarily in proportion to importance, popularity, or longevity.

The format is difficult to use with its undifferentiated typeface. An extreme example is under Debussy's En blanc et noir, where the entire contents of the Kontarsky Brothers' set of the complete Debussy and Ravel four-hand/two-piano music (not to mention each movement of *Ma mere l'oye*) is listed in a paragraph with only underscoring of titles to help one find one's way. The use of letters A, B, and C to indicate the degree of "basicness" (explained in the preface) makes the entries confusing, particularly as the first letter can be mistaken for the indefinite article.

Symbols are used as a combination rating and guide to pricing; "best" appears to be equated with most expensive, as the two aspects are combined into one series of dollar signs, exclamation points, and asterisks. This must have been a last minute decision, for after defining his \$'s, !'s, etc., the author states: "Instead of prices for recordings, price ranges are indicated by symbols, which are described below." Unless by "below" he means "above" the description never materializes, and even then it does not quite seem to be what we are led to expect.

The expressed audience for Mr. Rosenberg's books are "school, public and academic librarians (other than those whose libraries support programs of music schools or conservatories)." Even as such it is too narrow ("Many composers of the rank following Rachmaninoff or Dvorak or Elgar are ... excluded. This means that the likes of Bottesini, Cage or Quantz ... " Or Webern! I fear the librarians intended are those with little or no musical or music library training. Even then, any library with pretensions to community or academic service would need to have the "likes of [at least] Cage" represented. And double-bass

virtuosity is given short shrift without Bottesini.

The author is too concerned about the "classical charts" ("Exceptions are those odd composers who have one or more compositions ... sufficiently familiar or popular that their exclusion would cause audible [!] eyebrow raising [such as] Mouret ... and Pachelbel." This would, I assume explain the presence of Adam, Delibes, Ippolitov-Ivanov, and Thomas, among others; perhaps the inclusion of Bottesini, Cage, Quantz, and Webern would cause visible groans.

An indication of the author's view of his audience, besides the remark about "grubby fingers" cited above, are his composer sketches. Take Alban Berg who "was ... essentially an atonal dodecaphonist (what an epithet [indeed!]) despite his obvious lyrical gift. Further, many of Berg's works are characterized by being so condensed that they pass before the ears almost before they have begun (and to many listeners this is considered a blessing)." Perhaps the second sentence is meant to atone for not including Webern by conferring one of his attributes on Berg.

Compact digital discs are mentioned only in passing in the preface as being sold by one or two recommended vendors--not a word about them elsewhere, nor do any appear in the "basic ... collection" itself. 1987 is certainly recent enough a publication date to have them defined and listed, or to allow at least for some explanation as to why they are not.

In the end, there is no substitute for keeping in touch with the critical literature. It would have been helpful of Mr. Rosenberg to mention at least a few review periodicals. The librarian not involved with music sound recordings full time would do well to use a list in a standard music survey text and determine which recorded versions to purchase by consulting the "Index to Record Reviews" published in every issue of Notes.

It is unfortunate, but given its publisher, this book will probably end up on many a librarian's personal reference shelf.

David Sommerfield