

D'INDY: Poème des montagnes (Danse rythmique), Op. 15; Tableaux de voyage, Op. 33, No. 9, Départ matinal (recorded in London, June 7, 1923). Vincent D'Indy, pianist. Symposium 1012 (78 rpm)
JENŐ HUBAY: The Violin Maker of Cremona--Intermezzo; Berceuse (recorded in Budapest, December 1928). Jenő Hubay, violinist, with Otto Herz, piano. Symposium 1013 (78 rpm)
BRAHMS-JOACHIM: Hungarian Dance No. 1 (recorded in Berlin, June 1903). Joseph Joachim, violinist, with anonymous piano accompaniment. **GRIEG: Norwegian Bridal Procession** (recorded in Paris, May 2, 1903). Edvard Grieg, piano. Symposium 1014 (78 rpm) Available from Symposium Records, 110 Derwent Avenue, East Barnet, Hertfordshire EN4 8LZ, England.

Symposium Records has been issuing vinyl pressings of G & T and HMV 78s which are said, on the Symposium labels, to be "direct pressing[s] from original master[s] recorded by EMI Records Ltd." We all know how poor, generally speaking, are dubs from 78s on to legitimate commercial or pirate LPs. Even if they are of the quality of A. C. Griffith's or Keith Hardwick's transfers for EMI using vinyl pressings from the original, metal parts and before the use of noise suppressors, they have generally not been free of wow, or not consistently so. With LP or CD dubs there is nothing one can do about this, but one can at least center a 78 on most good turntables (something the commercial dubbers and pirates never seem to take a lot of trouble over); thus what a tremendous idea to issue the 78s themselves in vinyl pressings. As I understand it, the shells (original metal masters) are destroyed in the production of one good positive for dubbing purposes, so these Symposium 78s cannot have been pressed directly from the masters but rather from stampers derived from those masters.

Although Symposium's labels are scrupulous in providing matrix numbers (visible on the records themselves in any case), date and place of recording, and speed, they do not, alas, give the original catalog numbers. A little researching, however, has yielded the following: The D'Indy pieces were originally issued on French HMV W.506, the Hubay on Hungarian HMV A.N.217, the Brahms-Joachim on G & T 047907, and the Grieg on G & T (10") 35517.

Non-owners of the original 78s may already be familiar with the Grieg from its appearance on Pearl GEM 107 and with the Brahms-Joachim from the dub on Pearl GEM 101. It was interesting (if not surprising) to discover that the unbelievably wavery sound in the Grieg is on the original and is no fault of Pearl--just another example of the apparently chronic illness of French cutting turntables, responsible also for the ruination of, among other things, Wanda Landowska's pre-war electrics of Scarlatti sonatas. The background is also extremely noisy. Still one can make out that Grieg was a player of some skill and charm, and it is worth having it for that reason.

The Joachim is, by contrast, an unusually fine recording for its time and the legendary violinist makes a striking impression. While he eschews vibrato almost entirely, he produces a marvelously solid and rich tone in the opening melody simply with bow pressure, and he imparts as much gypsy passion to the music as is more typically imparted by an intense and throbbing vibrato. There are some very impressive downward portamenti, impeccable fast downward runs, and the device of gaining expressive effect by playing just under the note. Though he was 72 when he recorded his piece, there is no sign of declining power. (Though it was recorded in Berlin, a distinctively American voice can be heard at the end saying what sounds like "Shouldn't that be over soon?")

The 70-year-old Hubay's portamenti and his occasional heavy bowing remind one of Joachim, who was his teacher, but otherwise he is quite different, having the sweet-and-sour tone and uneven vibrato which we think of as characteristic of Hungarian violinists--Szigeti in particular, but also Lener, Smilovits, and Roth of the Lener Quartet, all of whom, as it happens, were Hubay's pupils. The two pieces belong in the (high-grade) salon music category, and there is not doubt that their composer plays them (on his famous Amati) with considerable charm. The recording is absolutely first class and background noise deriving from the stampers themselves is almost non-existent. This is a memento of some importance which is also very agreeable listening.

D'Indy's pieces, otherwise unavailable, are certainly worth hearing. Luckily the acoustic recording is good of its kind and D'Indy is revealed to be a worthy and affecting interpreter of his own works if not a great virtuoso. The background noise deriving from the stampers themselves is slight.

I have spoken of background noise "deriving from the stampers themselves" more than once and that is because there is, unfortunately, noise deriving from visible pressing faults on all three discs. The D'Indy is the worst, being riddled with ticks and pops that are not scratches or dust marks but are clearly pressed in. Although the Grieg doesn't matter so much since the sound is inherently so poor and the background noisy, it is covered with small depressions, while the Brahms-Joachim on the other side has lighter-colored material near the surface which causes an audible swish. The Hubay is the best, though it too has visible pressing faults (small depressions as if it had been sprayed) on both sides. Clearly virgin vinyl was not used, nor was the pressing done with care. If one is going to go to all the trouble of obtaining original stampers from EMI, should there not be quality control in the pressing process? I should add that all six sides are pressed slightly off-center requiring adjustment in every case. These records are listenable, but minimum care could have prevented these flaws. Let us hope for more issues from this source, but with a more watchful eye on the final product.

-E.J. Bond-