

**The Art of Louis Kaufman, Vol. VII:** Henri Sauguet, Concerto d'Orphee (Jean Michel Leconte, cond.), Darius Milhaud, Concertino de Printemps (Milhaud, cond.), and Bohuslav Martinu, Concerto No. 2 (Eugene Bigot, cond.--1954 French radio premiere), all with French National Radiodiffusion Orchestra. Orion cassette OC 787 (mono, Dolby). **Vol. VIII:** Lars-Erik Larsson, Violin Concerto, Op. 42 (Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, cond. Sten Frykberg), Saint-Saëns, Havanaise (Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Maurits Van Den Berg), and Khachaturian, Violin Concerto (Santa Monica Symphony Orchestra, cond. Jacques Rachmilovich). Orion cassette OC 799 (mono).

I hesitate to say this--with the loss of Heifetz and then Szeryng in recent months, these seem to be perilous times for great violinists--but as of this writing Louis Kaufman is still very much with us. Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1905, son of Rumanian immigrants, he is half a generation older than Szeryng (born in 1918) and a contemporary of Heifetz (1901). To these ears his recorded playing has always shared certain traits, in the portamento, the biting spiccato, the warm vibrato and a lunging force in the bowing, that align him with the Great One and his generation. His sound is very much his own, however, instantly identifiable, whether it be on the soundtrack of Gone with the Wind or in a Torelli Concerto Grosso. Given this vivid presence and the long and brilliant career in which it has been displayed, it has always been a mystery to me that Kaufman has not enjoyed (if that is the right word) a larger portion of the fame accorded the violinistic elite, of which he is surely a member.

Kaufman is, of course, well known to the breed known as "the serious record collector," as well as to a whole raft of composers who wrote for and/or played with him ("a Violinist's Violinist and a Musician's Musician," said the New York Times). However, I like to think that a normal, unsuspecting listener who came across these cassettes (and their predecessors) would be delighted at the discovery--despite their unmodern sound. That sound derives from a great variety of sources, in the tradition of the grab-bag nature of this Orion series. Of greatest interest to said serious record collector will presumably be the two items, one to a cassette, that have not had any kind of commercial existence before this among the welter of Kaufman releases and re-releases, the Sauguet and Larsson Concerti. Like the Martinu concerto, they come from radio broadcasts. The venue is not specified for either of them, but the notes do say that the violinist gave the first performances of the Sauguet in 1954 in London for the BBC Third Programme and in Brussels, Paris, and Luxembourg; the same commentator reports elsewhere that Kaufman played the Larsson concerto in Stockholm, Brussels, and Luxembourg in that same year, and both statements are likely to contain clues as to the sources of these recordings. This is particularly the case considering the identity of that commentator, who has released a significant series of Kaufman

recordings on his own Masters of the Bow label: James Creighton (it is hardly necessary to say here) is the most valuable discographer ever to devote himself to the cause of the violin, and his commitment to the art of Louis Kaufman ought to be the most convincing of recommendations.

Of the performances that have seen the light of disc before these cassette releases, the 1940 Khachaturian Concerto is perhaps the best known. It appeared first on Concert Hall 78s (set 126/9), then on an early LP (CHC-2). It is the first recording of this much-recorded work, for which my current tally is 21 versions (certainly the war delayed the first of the four made by its dedicatee, David Oistrakh, who, unlike Kaufman, rejects the composer's cadenza for his own). It remains one of the very best. There are recordings in which Kaufman's assertive style can seem somewhat relentless, but in the folk-derived rhythms and springing melodic lines of this work, that approach works to brilliant effect. The warmth of his playing--and that of the excellent, immigrant-rich orchestra, led by one of the most enterprising conductors of the post-war period, the Russian-born Jacques Rachmilovich--comes through well enough. The sound of this incarnation is not, however quite as smooth as that of the Discopaedia Masters of the Bow reissue (MB 1050, coupled with the first Piston concerto), and neither has quite the (gritty) impact of my Concert Hall LP--which sports an ancient, ominous warning stuck onto the label: "Long Playing, DO NOT Play on Big Machine," a plea largely unheeded, by the sound of things. The sound of the tape is acceptable, however; the small cuts in the score are there in the original recording, and this score has a history of being much toyed with, anyway.

The Khachaturian is coupled with the Larsson concerto, the first release of recording made by Swedish Radio in January of 1955 under the supervision, the notes tell us, of the composer. (The notes for this cassette, by the way, are by Annette Kaufman, an excellent pianist and intrepid musical scholar who has contributed much to her husband's career.) This powerful, brooding work was written for Andre Gertler, who premiered it in 1952 and shortly thereafter made a fine, deeply expressive recording of it released on Discofil and London (much later on Turnabout). The conductor, Sten Frykberg, and perhaps also the orchestra (on London it is called the Stockholm Radio Orchestra) are the same as in Kaufman's performance. Both feature Gertler's demanding first-movement cadenza; twenty years later, Larsson was to provide his own cadenza, premiered by Leo Berlin in his 1976 Discofil recording. Kaufman responds with particular effectiveness to the dramatic side of this work, although he does not neglect the reflective elements of what is surely one of the strongest products of this conservative composer's personal, lyrical art.

Like the Khachaturian, the Martinu performance has seen previous release in James Creighton's Discopaedia series (MB 1027), coupled there with Kaufman's world premiere broadcast recording of

Dag Wiren's Violin Concerto and a reissue of an old Concert Hall recording of two of Martinu's Pieces Breves. The concerto was written for Mischa Elman, who commissioned it. In fact, it was a rehearsal for that 1943 premiere that provided the occasion for one of those Modern Music stories: Elman is supposed to have taken his score to Martinu because he couldn't tell from the manuscript what a particular note was; Martinu is supposed to have responded, "I don't know. Play what sounds best to you." Actually, the work, although it represents a break in style from his previous two large violin/orchestra efforts, is very much in Martinu's mature idiom: pungent, dramatic, polytonal in places, accessible, and not at all a random occurrence. There have been two commercial releases of the work from Supraphon, an early stereo record with the sometimes rough but very effective Bruno Belcik (familiar here from its Artia release), and the magisterial 1973 account by Josef Suk, coupled with the first concerto. There is no denying that Suk in a sense "owns" this work and its predecessor, which he has recorded twice; he has been the principal champion of the two numbered concerti for decades.

Still, Kaufman's warmth and brilliance are wonderfully suited to the rhapsodic nature of this concerto. His affinity in tone with the generations that produced Elman and Heifetz as well as himself stands him in good stead here, and he gets committed support from the veteran Bigot and the Radiodiffusion Orchestra. And Kaufman's own Martinu credentials are impeccable: he gave the premiere of what may be Martinu's most striking (and difficult) violin con-certo, the Concerto da Camera for violin, strings, percussion and piano, in Town Hall in 1951, after the decade-old work had been rejected by others as unplayable. An account of the violinist's convincing the composer to render the work more playable is to be found in an interesting interview with both Kaufmans by John H. Yoell in the March/April 1986 Fanfare. To date there has been but one commercial recording of this work, a very fine version by Ulrich Lehmann on a long-defunct Amadeo LP. A tape release by Orion of Kaufman's performance (if it still exists) would thus be welcome for all sorts of reasons.

The Sauguet release is good news for largely the same reasons. This is the first commercial release of any kind for this work, a clever and effectively dramatic evocation of the tale of Orpheus mesmerizing the animals. The composer-provided notes describe the opening tutti as "Chaos" which represents "the noisy quarrelsome animals in organized disorder." This vanishes with the arrival of the "violin-Orpheus," who tames them (in part with an open-strings figure that inevitably, if irrelevantly, recalls the Berg Concerto), leads them, and finally captivates them with an extended, very flashy cadenza. This is no masterpiece, but it a well-made piece of work by this talented friend and colleague of Milhaud and Poulenc, and it provides an excuse for some memorable fiddling.

The filler on Volume VII, immediately following and in a language similar to that of the Sauguet, is a composer-led performance of Milhaud's Concertino de Printemps, also available on another Orion Kaufman cassette (OC 771, with the Second Violin Concerto and the Danses de Jacaremirim), before that on an Orion LP, and before that on an early Capitol LP. This brief, transparently scored 1934 celebration of spring may be a filler here, but it is also a masterpiece, one of its composer's most perfectly realized works. Milhaud led three recorded versions of this concertino, the first with its creator, Yvonne Astruc, for Decca and Polydor 78s, and the third and most famous with Szymon Goldberg for an Epic (and later Phillips) LP devoted to all four of the master's seasonal concertini. The Goldberg/Milhaud collaboration is, of course, a well-nigh perfect realization of this lovely score, but Kaufman's version, despite its dimmer sound, is every bit as effervescent.

The filler on Volume VIII, Saint-Saëns' Havanaise, a reissue of Kaufman's old recording for Musical Masterpiece Society (that beloved pioneer among mail-order recording enterprises), is also most worthy of mention. It too is on another in this Orion series (OC 773, with Saint-Saëns' Third Violin Concerto and a marvelous performance of the Chausson violin/piano/quartet concerto) and on an Orion LP. This much played musical postcard of old colonial Cuba gets an appropriately lush and brilliant playing in the hands of Kaufman. For those intent on acquiring all of this series of Kaufman cassettes, the practice of duplicating performances, even as filler status, may be a bit annoying--particularly since the large Kaufman legacy holds so many treasures that have not yet seen reissue. But this is a minor complaint. Given the wholesale demise (only partially compensated for by various revivals) of significant chunks of the recorded heritage in the face of the digital onslaught, it is refreshing that Orion doggedly proceeds with this important enterprise. May they persist and prosper.

-John Swan-