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## Sound Recording Reviews

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### **The Art of Louis Kaufman, Vol. II.**

Samuel Barber, Concerto for Violin, Op. 14, with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra conducted by Walter Goehr; Quincy Porter, Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano, with Artur Balsam; Ernest Bloch, Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, with Pina Pozzi; and Milhaud, "Danses de Jacaremirim," with Artur Balsam. Orion OC 772. Volume V: Richard Strauss, Sonata in E-flat, Op. 18, and Paul Hindemith, Sonata in D, both with Artur Balsam; Ottorino Respighi, Sonata in B minor, and Frederick Delius, Sonata No. 1, both with Theodore Saidenberg. Orion ICM 784. Volume VI: Antonio Vivaldi, Concerti Grossi Opus 8, Nos. 6, 7, 11, 12, and Giuseppe Torelli, Concerto Grosso Opus 8, No. 9 (mis-labeled on the cassette as Opus 8, No. 8), Louis Kaufman, with Clemens Dahinden, conductor, and "The Vivaldi Festival Orchestra," with Theodore Sachs, continuo. Orion ICM 785. Volume IX: "The Romantic Violin," including the Duo for Violin and Piano of Franz Schubert, with Pina Pozzi; the Four Romantic Pieces, Opus 75, of Antonin Dvorák, with Artur Balsam; and short works by Schubert (the Ave Maria, arr. Wilhelm), Tchaikovsky (the Andante Cantabile from the first String Quartet, arr. Kreisler), Rimsky-Korsakov ("Hymn to the Sun," from *Le Coq d'Or*, arr. Kreisler) and Londonderry Air, also arr. Kreisler, all accompanied by Paul Ulanowsky; and Joseph Achron ("Stimmungen," Opus 32), Zoltan Kodaly (Adagio in C), and Jean Sibelius ("Epilogue," Opus 2), all with Theodore Saidenberg; and the Milhaud "Danses de Jacaremirim," with Balsam. Orion ICM 793. *Louis Kaufman, "The Yankee Fiddler"* (PBS program, "The Record Shelf," with commentary by Jim Svejda, KUSC broadcast of October 22, 1988, issued in cassette form): Copland, "Hoedown" from *Rodeo*, Triggs, "Danza Brasileira," McBride, "Aria and Toccata in Swing," Still, "Blues" from *Lenox Avenue Suite*, and Helm, "Comment on Two Spirituals," all accompanied by Annette Kaufman; Bennett, "Hexapoda (Five Studies in Jitteroptera)," accompanied by the composer; Copland, Sonata for Violin and Piano, also with the composer; Wayne, "Ramona," with Louis Spielman, pianist; Kern, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and "The Song is You," with Leonard Berman, pianist; program opens with a fragment of the Barber Concerto recording.

Perhaps the most wide-ranging, widely read modern history of violin playing is *Great Masters of the Violin*, by the late Boris Schwarz, originally published in 1983. Although deserving of its reputation as a masterful survey by a knowledgeable practitioner and scholar of the art, it has distortions and omissions. The most glaring and least forgivable of the latter is the absence of the name "Louis Kaufman."

The omission is particularly odd because Schwarz gives proper coverage to Franz Kneisel, Jacques Gordon, Sascha Jacobsen, Joseph Fuchs, and William Kroll, all important figures, but none with a discography or an impact upon the history of recording as significant as that of Kaufman. In his discussion of Sascha Jacobsen, Schwarz includes Jacobsen's role as founder of the Musical Art Quartet without mentioning that the original violist of this pioneering group was Louis Kaufman, eight years Jacobsen's junior, and also a graduate of the Institute of Musical Art under Kneisel and also a winner of the Institute's highest honor, the Loeb Prize.

Kaufman's omission may be another sign of prejudice against studio musicians (he was Golden Age Hollywood's premiere instrumentalist), often an oppressed class in terms of cultural snobbery, if not economics. Or perhaps it is just another piece of bad luck. In the detailed "Performer Index" of the 1948 edition of *The Gramophone Shop Encyclopedia of Recorded Music*, Louis Kaufman's name again is missing, although his wife Annette is listed. Fortunately, both the violinist and his excellent accompanist wife are mentioned in the body of the work as performers of works by William Grant Still, their friend and Hollywood colleague who at that time was one of the few Black classical composers to have any recordings. Indeed, one of those performances is found in the final cassette listed above, along with transfers containing most of the set of 78s from the Vox 627 recording.

Such speculation about the vagaries of fame are beside the point, however, especially with the generous crop of recent Kaufman reissues, most of them under the auspices of James Creighton's Masters of the Bow series and, even more abundantly, the industrious Orion label. Unfortunately, Orion has apparently gone out of business, and the future availability of its rich and varied (if also variable) catalog is in doubt. A similarly adventurous firm, Music and Arts Programs of America, plans to release a number of Kaufman performances on CD starting in the fall of 1989.

The cassettes under review are certainly of variable quality in terms of their sonics, even considering the early vintage of the original sources. At times they reflect a style of playing not currently in vogue. Nevertheless, this series stakes a large claim to the attention of posterity.

It is ironic that Kaufman's performances of Torelli and Vivaldi in Volume VI sound their age in terms of contemporary performance practices, especially those involving original instruments. It was Kaufman, after all, who championed the Italian Baroque in performances based upon the original scores and more authentic-sized performing ensembles during the late forties and early fifties when this music was usually heard as filtered through a different aesthetic. It is well to remember that Fritz Kreisler's performance of Vivaldi's Concerto in C passed for authentic Vivaldi until 1935. The album notes for his 1946 recording describe this work as having "all the rhythmic, harmonic and melodic simplicity, the alluring freshness and style of eighteenth-century music." To our ears, educated by Louis Kaufman among others, the Kreisler performance sounds more like Kreisler than Vivaldi, with its orchestra of three dozen strings and a Hammond organ.

The Kaufman-Swoboda recording (Concert Hall CHS 1001) of the first four concerti of Vivaldi's Opus VIII, the ubiquitous "Four Seasons," was winner of the Grand Prix du Disque in 1950, and the first that paid serious attention to performance practices. This performance retains "the alluring freshness and style" of the composer, as do the other Kaufman recordings of Opus VIII, three of which are on the cassette under review. It was his experience of the Seasons recording that inspired Kaufman to search for the remaining numbers in the set, then considered "lost" in the

primitive world of Italian Baroque musical performance scholarship. After discovering these scores in a Brussels library, Kaufman presented acclaimed premieres of the complete set in New York and Paris, while also recording all eight of them with the pioneering Swiss conductor, Clemens Dahinden.

The Volume VI cassette lists Kaufman as conductor, and although he did serve as both conductor and soloist in many recordings, including the integral set of Vivaldi's Opus IX and Torelli's Opus VIII, he did not serve as conductor in the recordings under review. Volume VI also claims to contain the eighth concerto in the above-mentioned Torelli set, the key (E minor) is correctly listed, but the number is wrong. The performance is not from Kaufman's integral set for L'Oiseau-Lyre, nor is it listed in Creighton's *Discopaedia*. Dr. Kaufman has indicated that he made this recording in Switzerland, again with Dahinden, and that the experience marked "the beginning of my interest in Torelli," an interest that led to important research and the famous set (still the only complete version?) of the complete Opus VIII. As in the Vivaldi performances on this tape, Kaufman's approach is appropriately straightforward and rhythmically accurate, but has enough throb and portamento of the romantic style to date it in comparison to modern practice. At the same time, the fiddle playing here is a great deal better than that of many modern specialists, and there is an energy and musical line that is often more compelling than is often found in the original-instruments movement. The greatest disability in this particular volume is not the performance style but the sound. While certainly listenable, this cassette, more than any of the others under review, suffers from heavy filtration and the use of worn originals. It would be a valuable (if commercially unlikely) undertaking to reissue Kaufman's Vivaldi Opus VIII and his sparkling Opus IX as well as the integral Torelli set. The sound of the originals is rather dry and boxy, but it certainly could sound better than this cassette.

The two cassettes devoted to twentieth-century repertoire are less problematic in sound and stand up well to the originals. The filtration is not too intrusive, particularly given the heavy surfaces of the old vinyl. The Barber is a well-known first recording (especially the 10" Musical Masterpiece Society version, MMS 105) that holds its own against all followers, in performance if not sonics. Kaufman's melting *espressivo* in the first movement is particularly winning. The Porter Sonata, from a Concert Hall DL 16 recording, is a vigorous and effective piece of late-twenties Americana that elicits some fine ensemble work and sterling virtuosity from both performers. Artur Balsam is a superb partner in all these recordings, although the engineering usually puts him a bit too much into the background. Serious discographic work on the legacy of this wonderful veteran is long overdue; I harbor a strong suspicion that he is the most recorded of all pianists. He is particularly brilliant in the Strauss Sonata (originally Concert Hall F 15), which features a piano part so full of youthful excess that a pianist I know once transcribed the work without difficulty for keyboard alone—not to slight the contribution of Kaufman who fully mines the work's lush lyricism.

As in the Porter recording and so much else in Kaufman's career, the Hindemith is a first recording of an important chamber work (its first LP incarnation is Capitol P 8063). The warmth of Kaufman's tone works well with the acerbic linearity of the composer's post-war (1920) style. The other Balsam collaboration on Volume II, Milhaud's "Danses," is used several times as filler material by Orion, as it had been on the old Capitol P 8071 which also contained brilliant composer-led performances of Milhaud's Second Concerto and his *Concertino de Printemps*, both reissued elsewhere

by Orion. The three short "Danses de Jacaremirim" ("little crocodile") reveal the impression of Brazilian music upon Milhaud. "Little Samba," "Little Tango," and "Little Chorus" whirl by in barely more than four minutes, being full of high-spirited charm as well as technical display.

Along with the Strauss Sonata, the Bloch and Respighi Sonatas also were championed in early recordings by Heifetz, whose first recording of the Strauss (a lifelong favorite) was made in 1934, well before Kaufman's. Kaufman's circa 1950 Bloch predates the Heifetz, but it is not a first recording, that honor apparently going to Joseph Gingold and Beryl Rubinstein in a pioneering Victor set. His Respighi, roughly contemporary with the 1950 Heifetz recording, was predated by Oscar Shumsky's Concert Hall effort with Artur Balsam. The first Bloch Sonata (1920) is a craggy, brooding masterpiece. The Kaufman-Pozzi collaboration stands up well to the competition, including the Heifetz, a recording that one should not be without, despite a persistent Heifetz tendency to push the worthy Emmanuel Bay into the background.

The original Kaufman disc of the Respighi Sonata (1917) on the Tempo label, MTT 2078 is a rarity. This performance, similar in its full-throated dramatics, is thoroughly comparable to that of Heifetz. Saidenberg is a stronger presence than the again-suppressed Emmanuel Bay in the brilliant piano part. Saidenberg also contributes significantly to the recording of the First Sonata of Delius, an elusive, intermittently beautiful work dating from 1914-15 which the cassette identifies only as "Sonata in d [minor]," revealing a confidence in key appellation not shared by most students of the composer, although parts of the Sonata do give a fairly stable impression of D minor. At the time of Kaufman's recording (a late set of 78s, Concert Hall 124/5, preceded by an HMV set made by May Harrison, sister of Beatrice, with Arnold Bax at the piano), Delius had very few American champions, and almost none for his chamber music. This was, and remains, an important contribution of Kaufman. One might not expect him to respond to the intimate side of Delius, but his understanding of that aspect of the work seems as complete as that of the more overtly romantic passages.

The violinist's identification with the music in the ninth volume of this series, "The Romantic Violin," is clearly evident. Even the great work in this volume, the Schubert Duo (or Sonata) which has been recorded often, receives a performance worthy of more famous names such as Kreisler/Rachmaninoff and Szigeti/Hess, although the lyric inwardness of the latter recording makes it the cream of the lot. Kaufman's recording is more compelling than that of fellow Kneisel students Fuchs and Balsam, and more convincing than current recordings.

Hearing the Kaufman approach to this repertoire reinforces the suspicion that many modern violinists do not believe in the lyric and romantic impulse that animated the creation of this music, however perfect their skills and meticulous their attention to literal detail. A comparison of Kaufman's playing of Dvorák's Four Romantic Pieces, Opus 75, with Sergiu Luca's thin and dutiful account makes the point.

None of these cassettes give source information, an annoying trait hardly unique to Orion, although most have a good general essay about Kaufman by James Creighton. Therefore, it should be noted that the Schubert Sonata originated on Concert Hall H 14, the Dvorák Opus 75 on a 10" Capitol (L 8112), the Ulanowsky-accompanied works on a Capitol encores disc, also 10" (L 8165), the Saidenberg items on Concert Hall CHC 58, and the Milhaud as noted above. The originals of the shorter

pieces are especially hard to find, so it is a pleasure to have them here. Let us hope that they are not bound again for oblivion.

That wish also applies to the material on the "Record Shelf" program transcription, the musical part of which is, or was, found in the Creighton Discopaedia series (MB 1032). Jim Svejda has been criticized for his freewheeling opinions, especially as collected in his recent book; but, it is refreshing to find someone so willing to share his enthusiasms and prejudices in ways that generally make it clear when he has adequate support and when he is just expressing a strong opinion. This vulnerability is combined with acute musicality and abundant knowledge, a rare and winning phenomenon in these self-protective times (especially for those who cherish memories of the crazed, wonderful DeKoven and his "Barococo" programs).

This opinion would hold even if Svejda chose not to focus his attention on Louis Kaufman, but it is certainly a confirmation thereof that he did. There are excellent words and abundant music on this cassette. Unfortunately, it does not include words from Kaufman himself, or his wife. They have given a number of fascinating published interviews, the most recent in *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect*, edited by John and Susan Harvith and published this year, by Greenwood Press. Of the recordings in this cassette, the most important is the Copland Sonata, with the composer as pianist, made for Concert Hall (set C10) soon after its 1943 composition. There have been several good recordings of this work, though not enough, considering that it remains one of the best American violin sonatas. But there exist none so vibrant in rhythm, so sure-footed and beautiful (the Kaufman tone itself, not the dim recording) as this performance. Copland's fine pianism helps to establish the Kaufman/Copland team as the authoritative recording.

Such is also the case with the Kaufman/Bennett duo in the lighter but thoroughly engaging "Hexapoda," written by Bennett for Kaufman and played by many, including Heifetz who made a superb recording of it. Kaufman's last recording sessions in 1975 also include the "Hexapoda," as well as Bennett's *Song Sonata*, with Annette Kaufman as pianist, released on a Citadel LP with Kaufman's 1956 performance of Bennett's Violin Concerto. Although made some three decades after the recording on this cassette, which originally appeared on a Columbia shellac (70727D), that "Hexapoda" is remarkably similar in verve, and technical and tonal aplomb.

Annette Kaufman is also the fine accompanist in the series of short pieces by American composers that were originally part of a Vox 78 set (No. 627), selected by Svejda to underscore Kaufman's unequalled commitment to contemporary American composers. They are attractive pieces (the Helm is a particular gem), many very brilliant, and, as ever, sumptuously played. "Ramona," recorded for Edison in 1927, was apparently Kaufman's first solo disc; it and the better-sounding Kern demonstrate that the violinist approached the popular side of his art with the same dedication and mastery that he brought to his "classical" vocation.

The violin playing and the repertoire upon which it is so generously lavished in these cassettes far outweigh their occasional sonic difficulties. The Kaufman series constitutes the most convincing reason for saving the Orion label and its rich catalog. Thanks to Music and Arts, there will be at least a saved remnant. We can only hope for more. *Reviewed by John Swan*