

The Music and Arts Programs of America CD offers the entire broadcast program of January 19, 1952, a typical though not particularly exceptional example of Reiner's work on the radio at this time. His Bartók "calling card" included the two Rumanian Dances in the orchestration of Leo Weiner (not Tibor Serly, as indicated). He recorded both the Debussy Suite and Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* music two days later with the same orchestra for RCA Victor, and had previously recorded *Til Eulenspiegel* with the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra, which included players from NBC. The gem of this present CD is the Ravel Suite, a superb reading of that composer's precise timbre and rhythmic subtlety. Possibly for legal reasons, the orchestra is labelled "The Symphony of the Air," a designation that did not appear until after Toscanini's retirement in 1954. Despite minor pitch problems, the CD transfer is acceptable for its vintage, if only because the RCA Victor recordings of the three principal works are no longer available.

Of these recordings from broadcasts, the two most important by far are the *Salome* and the *Walküre* Act II, not only for Fritz Reiner's conducting but also for their exceptional casting. In both releases, the sheer excitement generated by singers and conductor will overcome any sonic limitations. *Reviewed by Philip Hart*

### **New Reiner CDs**

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58 (Recorded Orchestra Hall April 22, 23, 1963); Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 (Recorded Orchestra Hall May 4, 12, 1961). Van Cliburn, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting. RCA Victor 7943-2-RG, one CD.

Bizet: *Carmen*. Risë Stevens, Licia Albanese, Jan Peerce, Robert Merrill, Robert Shaw Chorale, RCA Victor Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting (Recorded Manhattan Center, New York, March, June 1951). RCA Victor 7981-2-RG, 3 CDs.

Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 83; 5 Intermezzi. Van Cliburn; Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting (Recorded Orchestra Hall, May 9, 10, 12, 1961). RCA Victor 7942-2-RG, one CD.

Rachmaninoff: Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30; Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, etc. Vladimir Horowitz; RCA Victor Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting (Recorded Carnegie Hall, New York, June 4, 1951). RCA Victor 7754-2-RG, one CD.

Verdi: *Messa da Requiem*. Leontyne Price, Rosalind Elias, Jussi Bjoerling, Giorgio Tozzi, Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Wien, Wiener Philharmoniker, Fritz Reiner conducting. (Recorded Sophiensaal, Vienna, May, June 1960). *Quattro pezzi sacri*. Yvonne Minton, Los Angeles Master Chorus (Roger Wagner, Chorus Master), Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, Zubin Mehta conducting. London 421 608-2, 2 CDs.

As the flow of Fritz Reiner reissues continues, it has recently moved toward recordings in which the conductor was collaborator with other artists rather than the central figure on the podium. Three of these reissues bring us the conductor as the collaborator *par excellence* in major concertos, and in two of them he serves as a field marshall, as it were, in large-scale productions involving solo singers, chorus, and orchestra, one an opera and the other a Mass.

Bizet's *Carmen* was the only complete opera that Reiner recorded commercially under studio conditions, and for which the conductor had final approval. The other complete opera recordings bearing his name originated from radio broadcasts of variable quality that for the most part were issued posthumously without his knowledge and approval. *Carmen* was the opera in which the 19 year old Reiner made his conducting debut with a "Volksoper" company in Budapest. He conducted it frequently at the Saxon Opera in Dresden between 1914 and 1921, and again with the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company in 1932.

Although the cast is typical of the Metropolitan Opera Company of that era, the recording actually preceded the new production of the opera in January 1952 as RCA Victor's way of anticipating the Metropolitan's first new production of this popular opera in nearly three decades. Consequently, the "text" used by Reiner was essentially the traditional one used at the Metropolitan Opera for decades; the Guiraud accompanied "recitatives" and the interpolation of several sections from *L'Arlesienne*. The singing too was in the Metropolitan tradition of variable French idiom. Risé Stevens was the most highly regarded *Carmen* of her time, instinctively musical with sound vocalism, but when heard and not seen, rather lacking in temperament. On stage she reportedly filled out the character with convincing theatricality, for she preferred to sing the role *musically* while acting it vividly. As Don José, Jan Peerce was his customary musical and vocally characteristic self, conscientiously trying to master French vocal style with variable success. Robert Merrill was equally solid in a manner that just fell short of distinctive individuality. Despite her Italianate style, Licia Albanese created a vivid Micaela.

Holding the entire performance in continuity, line, and dramatic impact was Reiner's conducting, never obtrusive but always pertinent. It would have had even more impact if the pace and rhythmic flow of the opera had not bogged down with Guiraud's gloss on the *opéra comique* style, but Reiner did not insist on authenticity and accepted the procedures of this time. Within these old-fashioned limitations, he produced one of the best-conducted *Carmens* on records. The accompanying booklet includes a synopsis in English, French, German, and Italian, and a full text in French and English only. The ample access points on the CDs are listed with reference to the text. This was one of the first collaborations of producer Richard Mohr, engineer Lewis Layton, and Reiner, a combination that would produce some of the finest recordings of that time. John Pfeiffer was in charge of the CD version, in which the initially clean monaural sound is even more transparent.

Reiner spent nearly a month recording the Verdi *Requiem* in Vienna in the spring of 1960, during a series of sessions beset by delays and problems with the soloists. Unlike Reiner's great recordings with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, this was laboriously rehearsed and taped piecemeal in the Sophiensaal apart from public performance in proper sequence. The conductor would have preferred to record the *Requiem* in Chicago, but recording economics and international contractual arrangements dictated this ultimate venue. Leonie Rysanek and Giulietta Simionato failed to honor their commitments, so Leontyne Price and Rosalind Elias were brought in at the last moment. Leontyne Price had just sung the *Requiem* in Vienna with Giulini and was an immediate success with Reiner. Jussi Bjoerling was characteristically tardy, necessitating changes in John Culshaw's carefully plotted schedule; this proved to be the tenor's last recording, but his contribution was remarkable. Only Giorgio Tozzi was on hand as scheduled. All in all, this *Requiem* proved to be one of Reiner's rare failures in recording. From the extremely slow opening onward, there was a lack of over-arching

formal and rhythmic coherence. Although the conditions under which he worked did not help, the fault is basically Reiner's misconception of the score, as confirmed by an "underground" recording from a 1958 performance in Chicago. Although initially released in the United States by RCA Victor in its handsome Soria series, the recording actually was made by British Decca under a cooperative arrangement whereby it reverted to Decca-London after a number of years. Consequently, the current release is on London's mid-priced "Jubilee" label, with a "filler" consisting of *Quattro pezzi sacri* in performances conducted by Zubin Mehta in Los Angeles, a rather negligible contribution to the Verdi recorded repertory. An accompanying booklet lists frequent access points on the CDs and includes the Latin texts and English translations.

Among the conductors of his time, Reiner was always in great demand as a collaborator in concertos, a demand that engendered some resentment on his part at becoming RCA Victor's "house conductor." Among his most successful collaborations were two with completely different pianists--Vladimir Horowitz in the early 1950s and Van Cliburn a decade later, after the young American had won the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow.

Of his two collaborations with Horowitz, the Rachmaninoff Third Concerto in 1951 was especially successful, for the work was more congenial to the soloist than the Beethoven "Emperor" of a year later. Not only did Reiner have a special feeling for Russian music, but he also had the ability to "stick like flypaper" to Horowitz's highly individual performance. As in both of his other recordings of this concerto, Horowitz made several cuts which he maintained that Rachmaninoff had sanctioned. Despite the early monaural vintage of this recording, it sounds amazingly fresh on this CD transfer. Issued on RCA Victor's "Gold Seal" mid-price label as one of a series of Horowitz reissues, the package itself is simply designated "Horowitz Plays Rachmaninoff" on the front and spine. One must check the back of the plastic case to discover the inclusion of the concerto along with the Sonata No. 2 and several short solos.

On the two other concerto discs, however, Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra share billing with the soloist. Although Van Cliburn made his first recordings for RCA Victor with Kiril Kondrashin conducting an orchestra of former NBC Symphony players, his next six concerto recordings were made in Chicago, four of them with Fritz Reiner, with whom he enjoyed a singularly warm relationship. Onstage Van Cliburn and Reiner made a rather striking contrast, the tall curly-haired young Texan and the stocky saturnine Hungarian-American. But, as these records show, theirs was a hand-in-glove musical collaboration.

Thanks to his Russian triumph, Cliburn became the willing victim of a public that expected him, like Peter Pan, never to grow up and to keep on repeating the catchy Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff concertos *ad nauseam*. Both Beethoven concertos and the Brahms show a brilliant technical facility and generous spirit that were characteristic of Cliburn at his best, despite a tendency for his facility to keep the performance on the surface of the music. Yet there was an honesty in these performances and a warmth of communication that aroused admiration. At the same time, Reiner's influence on Cliburn's playing can be deduced by comparing the musical coherence of the Brahms concerto with the relative blandness of the solo pieces. The Beethoven record, produced by the legendary team of Richard Mohr and Lewis Layton, is a very generous coupling of two major concertos totaling more than 72 minutes of playing time. The Brahms disc is almost as long, 68 minutes, but the sound of the concerto lacks the clarity of the Beethoven recordings. Frank Miller was the eloquent solo cellist in the slow movement of the Brahms. The Beethoven G major Concerto was Reiner's last recording

in Chicago; four months later, in September 1963, he conducted Haydn's Symphonies No. 95 and No. 101 in Brooklyn with a free-lance orchestra. These were his final recordings.

The Verdi *Requiem* excepted, these are all major contributions to Reiner's recorded repertory, the *Carmen* being especially welcome for its stylish though old-fashioned performance. *Reviewed by Philip Hart*

### **Josef Hassid: The Complete Recordings, and The Young Ruggiero Ricci.**

(HMV mono LP, EH 29 12301; also issued as a tape, EH 29 1230 4).

Josef Hassid, violin, with Gerald Moore, piano: Elgar, "La Capricieuse," Op. 17; Tchaikovsky, "Melodie," Op. 42, No. 3; Massenet, "Meditation" from Act 2 of *Thais*; Dvorak, arr. Kreisler, "Humoreske," Op. 101, No. 7; Sarasate, "Playera" and "Zapateado," Op. 23, No. 1 and 2; Achron (trans.), "Hebrew Melody"; Kreisler, "Caprice viennois," Op. 2. Recorded in 1940. With Ivor Newton, piano, Elgar, "La Capricieuse." Recorded in 1939.

Ruggiero Ricci, violin, with Carl Furstner, piano: Paganini, "La Campanella" (3rd movement of B minor Violin Concerto, Op. 7) and "Fantasia on the G string"; Sarasate, "Zigeunerweisen." With Louis Persinger, piano, Ysaye, "Rêve d'enfant, op. 14; Rachmaninoff, arr. Press, "Vocalise," Op. 34, No. 14; Sarasate, "Habanera," Op. 21, No. 2, and "Introduction and Tarantelle," Op. 43. Recorded in 1938.

"A fiddler such as Heifetz is born every hundred years; one like Hassid every two hundred years." Fritz Kreisler made this remark after hearing Hassid (or Chasyd, the name with which he was born) in the late thirties at the invitation of the teenager's teacher, Carl Flesch. Kreisler's statement must be taken as hyperbole inspired by astonishment, a response shared by other invited guests such as Szigeti and Thibaud, but echoed with unsettling consistency by many veteran collectors of violin recordings. Today, only the most hardened of the breed have even heard of Josef Hassid.

The eight 78 rpm sides on four discs that comprise the entire published Hassid legacy have been among the most coveted objects of the violin record collector's endless search among the attics and Salvation Army stores of the world. Apparently, just one of these sides, the Achron "Hebrew Melody," has ever appeared on LP, included in an anthology of rare violin recordings (TLC 2580) issued in 1974 by Thomas Clear, collector and publisher of several fine reissues.

There exists a tendency among collectors, especially record collectors, to equate extreme rarity with great intrinsic value, even though discs may be uncommon only because they are uncommonly bad. However, a brief sampling of this long-overdue, beautifully produced set of reissues should banish any suspicion that the Hassid records earned their reputation by way of illusion. Brian Crimp puts it well in his exemplary jacket notes. "His technical security and cleanness of attack are awesome, his tone at once vibrant, virile, and indescribably pure and sweet. His right arm is not only capable of rare feats of *staccato* and *spiccato* but of spinning the most expansive and seamless of phrases; indeed the artistry of his phrasing breathes new life into even the most abused piece."

The selections recorded here are among the most abused encore pieces in the literature, but they are all that exist of Josef Hassid's playing. Thanks to a recent discovery in the EMI vaults, Elgar's delightful salon piece, "La Capricieuse," is presented twice by Hassid at age 15 and 16. A test recording was made by the 15 year old at the behest of the Gramophone Company which had been aroused by rumors of a phenomenal talent in the Flesch stable. Despite the brilliant results of the test, Hassid's agent, Harold Holt, took the high road and resisted offers for an immediate series of engagements and