

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

recordings so that Hassid could mature under Flesch's tutelage. While Crimp finds improvement in the 16 year old's playing, the performances are different and fascinating, with the later performance sounding closer to perfection in the display of technical command.

Hassid's recordings repeatedly summon up that much-abused notion of perfection. It isn't that these are necessarily the best versions of this music. Hassid's approach is often unusual and even unsettling. But each of these interpretations is a complete realization, a probing at the heart of the music that is rare in any performance, let alone that of a teenager. Recordings by the adolescent Menuhin have comparable depth and intensity (if a very different personality), but even he did not display this technical perfection. If any of these immortal sides deserves to be singled out, it is perhaps the Achron, which is beautiful and moving, that stands out even in this company.

"The Complete Hassid" is a legacy of incredible violin playing. The fact that it is complete on one side of an LP (and we can hope, eventually on CD) is a largely forgotten tragedy. As Thomas Clear put it, with the death of Hassid, "the musical world suffered one of its greatest losses." This will be regarded as hyperbole only by those who have not heard these recordings. But his death came some five years after his brief career had already come to an end, five years of mental suffering, memory loss, withdrawal and anger, diagnosed as schizophrenia. Death came after a desperate attempt at a cure by brain surgery. There was only that brief stretch of glory, a few wonderful concerts (some marred by memory lapses as precursors of the pain to come), and recording sessions with Gerald Moore in June and November of 1940.

We have Walter Legge and Fred Gaisberg to thank that the recordings were ever made, and Keith Hardwick to thank for their reissue. Although unable to compare this LP to the priceless originals, this reviewer found the sound in the reissue to be full (with an unintrusive modicum of surface noise), vivid, and natural; in short, a superb piece of work.

This is true of the transfer process on the record's other side, although the sound of the originals is apparently not as good as the Hassid. "The Young Ricci" is a worthy subject, but overshadowed, and what wouldn't be, by its companion on the disc. Around age 20, Ruggiero Ricci had behind him a decade of concertizing and growth out of the prodigy stage, a process not made easier by his fate as successor to Menuhin as Louis Persinger's star pupil.

The strengths and weaknesses of his early playing are summed up in the performance of Kochanski's transcription of Paganini's "La Campanella" for violin and piano. This hyper-brilliant and at times very exciting but somewhat uncontrolled performance is topped off with a torrent of octaves not called for by Paganini or Kochanski which the eager young virtuoso had obtained from the accompanying tutti at the close. This is entertaining in its own way, but Ricci's later performances dispense with the excess, which the original scores contain in sufficient quantities. A tribute to the strength and consistency of Ricci's long career is his performance of this movement 30 years later in the American Decca recording of the entire concerto which is just as admirable in execution and musically more satisfying.

Although comparisons of the mature artist are denied us in the case of Hassid, Ricci's long reign as one of the world's great violinists allows for a patronizing view of his first efforts. Still, there is remarkable playing here. The characteristic Ricci tone already is present (although it would become stronger and smoother), as is his verve, especially in the Sarasate selections. The "Zigeunerweisen" (why do we persist in calling a Spaniard's concoction from Hungarian Gypsy melodies by its German name?) is outstanding in both

its lyrical and brilliant aspects. The Ysaye is well done, and an unusual choice presaging his later willingness to champion unfamiliar literature. Michael Press's transcription of Rachmaninoff's beautiful wordless song also receives an expressive performance.

HMV's decision to group these two young artists was probably a marriage of convenience more than anything else, and it inspires musings about the ways of fate and fortune more than instructive comparisons of their playing. We should be very grateful for both sides of the record. The Hassid, however, is a unique event in the world of historical reissues that should be heard by anyone with an interest in great string playing, and in what might have been. *Reviewed by John Swan*

### **The Greatest Songs of Woody Guthrie.**

Sung by Joan Baez, Country Joe McDonald, Jack Elliot, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Odetta and the Weavers. Vanguard records VCD 35/36 (CD).

Woodrow Wilson Guthrie was born in Okemah, Oklahoma on July 14, 1912. His life experiences as a hobo in early years, survivor of the Great Depression and the dust bowl, merchant marine during World War II, and union activist are reflected in his more than 1,000 songs and musical adaptations. After being "discovered" by Alan Lomax in 1940, his particular brand of song writing became familiar through recordings and radio broadcasts which had a powerful effect on singers and song writers of the Folk revival during the 1960s. Guthrie believed that songs should have a message, and was not shy to speak out against social injustice and tout his favorite causes. After all, he did inscribe "this machine kills fascists" on his guitar. His interest in Communism (he wrote a column for *People's Daily World*) made him a target of the McCarthy witch hunts, but he remained a folk hero who actively performed and composed until he was hospitalized with Huntington's chorea in 1952. After fifteen years of slow, painful decline, he was laid to rest in October 1967, leaving the world with a legacy of music that endures to this day.

Of the recent collections highlighting the career of Woody Guthrie, perhaps the most familiar are the Folkways recordings *The Original Vision* and *A Vision Shared* which contain the songs of both Guthrie and Leadbelly. *The Greatest Songs of Woody Guthrie* and *A Vision Shared* contain Guthrie's songs performed by other people; the only person heard on one of four songs found on both recordings is Pete Seeger singing "This Land is Your Land."

*The Greatest Songs of Woody Guthrie* contains 23 songs (mostly from earlier Vanguard recordings) that serve as a showcase, not only of Guthrie's diversity, but also of the many ways in which his music has been interpreted by others. Several performers are friends and contemporaries of Guthrie's who appeared on stage or recorded with him. Performances range from the bluesy, earthy style of Odetta singing "Pastures of Plenty" to the tense, high-pitched style of Joan Baez singing "Pretty Boy Floyd" (probably from *Joan Baez in Concert*, Vanguard VRS 9112). Between those extremes fall the Weavers, whose vocal harmonies and instrumental playing provide a change of pace from the usual solo voice with subdued accompaniment. Cisco Houston, a close friend and traveling companion of Guthrie with a similar vocal style, appears on eight tracks while Guthrie himself sings on five.

This good selection of songs explores Guthrie's broad repertory, ranging from his popular children's songs represented by "(Take Me) Riding in My Car," to his songs of social commentary such as "Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)." The performances also are impressive, with a classic Weaver's rendition of "The Sinking of the Reuben