
SOUND RECORDING REVIEWS

Sergei Rachmaninoff—The Complete Recordings. Sergei Rachmaninoff, pianist and conductor, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Leopold Stokowski and Eugene Ormandy, conductors. Recorded 1919-1942. RCA Victor Gold Seal 61265-2 (10 CDs, ADD).

Forty years after his death, Sergei Rachmaninoff remains one of the most significant musicians of the twentieth century. As a composer, Rachmaninoff has been maligned severely over the years, indeed, even during his own lifetime, as an outmoded holdover from a bygone romantic tradition. Yet being outmoded is not sufficient justification for dismissing a composer's work, and Rachmaninoff certainly was not the first composer to be considered dated in his own lifetime. It is worth remembering that J. S. Bach also was considered "old-fashioned" near the end of his life. Rachmaninoff was certainly Bach's equal as a composer (he has much company) but he easily ranks with a large number of second-string, *not* second-rate, composers whose works occupy a significant place in the repertoire, including Respighi, Holst, and Scriabin.

Rachmaninoff's *Preludes* and *Études-Tableaux* are hardly a re-hashing of the solo piano writing of Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt. They are strikingly original works whose musical challenges are as significant as the more obvious technical demands. Of all the romantic pianist-composers, Rachmaninoff produced the most extensive output of music for piano and orchestra. Unlike Chopin, whose orchestral writing in his *Concerti* is quite inept, Rachmaninoff was a highly skillful orchestrator. This is not only evident in his *Second Symphony*, *The Isle of the Dead*, and *The Bells*, but also in his operas, which remain virtually unknown in the western hemisphere.

Regardless of one's view of Rachmaninoff as a composer, there is little dispute regarding his stature as a pianist. Among the handful of virtuosos who qualify for the title "greatest pianist of the century," there is much justification for placing Rachmaninoff's name at the top of the list. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that for the first half of his career as a performing musician Rachmaninoff made his living primarily as a conductor. Highly regarded as one of Russia's leading podium talents, he twice was offered the position of principle conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and also received a similar offer from the Cincinnati Symphony.

The Russian Revolution forced Rachmaninoff to leave his native land in December 1917. Heeding the advice of his friend and colleague Josef Hofmann, Rachmaninoff declined the opportunity to involve himself in the political intrigues associated with

leading a major American orchestra, deciding instead to concentrate on a new career as a concert pianist. Although Rachmaninoff had given over 240 recitals of his own music prior to leaving Russia, his only public appearances performing music of another composer were a group of memorial recitals for Scriabin in 1915.¹

Rachmaninoff commanded a staggering technique, but his playing was consistently devoid of virtuosity for its own sake. Rachmaninoff was a musician of extraordinary intelligence and integrity whose technical gifts were at the service of the music being performed. Those who saw Rachmaninoff live (including this writer's high school piano teacher), recall his reserved approach. Where many pianists seek to impress the audience with extraneous choreography, Rachmaninoff's pianistic fireworks were accomplished with minimal physical movement.

Rachmaninoff possessed an uncanny understanding of musical line and architecture, producing performances of remarkable coherence. He found a central line in every work he performed, and his performances are unflinching in their sense of direction and purpose. In contrast to the monochromatic pianists of the current generation, Rachmaninoff's playing incorporated a wide tonal palette. A physically imposing figure with extremely large hands, Rachmaninoff was a naturally powerful instrumentalist. In hearing his playing of works such as his *Third Concerto*, one is constantly aware that his physical assets were directed toward producing a full and rich piano sonority, rather than the raucous banging of so many of his successors. Yet his strength was combined with incredible agility and control. Rachmaninoff's 1935 recording of his fiendishly difficult transcription of the *Scherzo* from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* impresses the listener as having been "tossed off" with no effort whatsoever.

Although Rachmaninoff now is considered among the last of the pianists in the "romantic tradition," he was viewed as a "modern" pianist during his own lifetime. The interpretive liberties which characterized the performances of Hofmann, de Pachmann, Paderewski, and their contemporaries, as well as Horowitz in his later years, often are regarded as excessive by late twentieth century criteria. Yet Rachmaninoff's recordings are surprisingly free of these traits. Even his performances of his own works are remarkably straight-forward, devoid of the sentimentality often associated with his music. No musician has found a more ideal balance between the intellectual and emotional demands of the music he performed.

RCA Victor's CD collection is their second attempt at a complete collection of Rachmaninoff's recorded performances, the first having been issued on fifteen LPs in 1973, the centennial anniversary of his birth. The 1973 *Complete Rachmaninoff* was a flawed production, consistent with RCA's re-issue habits at that time, with often dim-sounding transfers made even more problematic by RCA's lack of careful attention to the correct playback speeds of the original recordings. Issued at the height of RCA's *Dynaflex* era—perhaps *Dynawarp* would have been a more appropriate trademark—disc mastering and pressing quality were mediocre at best.

With the issue of *Sergei Rachmaninoff—The Complete Recordings*, RCA Victor has rectified their past injustices to this extraordinary musician. Most of the original recordings have been transferred anew by Ward Marston, whose technical work has produced results vastly superior to RCA's 1973 LP-collection. According to Mr. Marston, metal parts still exist for many of these recordings, and were used wherever possible.

RCA Victor's newest Rachmaninoff edition is actually more complete than its predecessor. Rachmaninoff made two complete recordings of his *Second Piano Concerto*, both with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The best known of the two is the electrically recorded version made in April 1929. Rachmaninoff and Stokowski

also had recorded the work acoustically in January and December 1924, but only the second and third movements were issued by Victor. When RCA assembled the 1973 centennial collections they were unable to locate the third side of the first movement, so a brief portion of the 1929 electrical recording was substituted to fill in the missing material. This produced not only a rather shocking change in recorded sound, but an interruption of the musical continuity, as well. These performances are by no means identical.

In the nearly 20 years which have elapsed since the LP collection, RCA Victor has located the missing third side. It is interesting to note that all of the discs comprising the 1924 *Second Concerto* bear "C" matrix numbers with the exception of the newly discovered concluding side of the first movement, which bears a "B" matrix number. Victor used "C" matrix numbers for 12-inch discs and "B" matrix numbers for 10-inch sides. It is entirely possible that 10-inch discs were stored in a different location than 12-inch discs. When the 1973 collection was assembled, it may have been wrongly assumed that the missing side was also a 12-inch disc, thus accounting for their inability to locate the missing material. It was certainly unusual, though not unheard of, to mix disc sizes within a single work. RCA Victor notes that this is the "First complete issue of this recording since its initial 78 rpm release." In fact, this is the first complete issue in any form, since the first movement was never issued on 78 rpm discs.

Having the 1924 *Second Concerto* available complete for the first time, is, alone, a compelling reason for purchasing the new RCA Victor collection. Ward Marston has extracted remarkably good sound from these primitive discs; at times it is difficult to believe that one is actually listening to an acoustical recording. The performance is extraordinary, with even greater sweep and continuity than the ubiquitous 1929 electric remake. The intensity of the Rachmaninoff/Stokowski collaboration is revealed to a remarkable degree on these acoustic discs. During each of several hearings of Marston's transfer, this writer found himself completely absorbed in the performance, ignoring any limitations in recorded sound.

Rachmaninoff's electrical recordings of his *Four Concerti* and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* are definitive accounts of these works, enhanced by the superb playing of Stokowski's Philadelphia Orchestra. Although the generally pedestrian Eugene Ormandy was at the helm for the recordings of the *First*, *Third*, and *Fourth Concerti*, this was still very much Stokowski's orchestra. The performances conducted by Stokowski, particularly the *Paganini Rhapsody*, are more colorful and dynamic than Ormandy's, but Rachmaninoff's imposing presence in the Ormandy sessions undoubtedly produced a stronger musical result than would otherwise have been.

This is not RCA Victor's first CD reissue of the *Four Concerti* and *Paganini Rhapsody*. Two previously issued RCA CDs, 5779-2-RC and 6659-2-RC, also contained transfers by Ward Marston of these recordings. Unfortunately, post-Marston production added artificial stereo to 6659-2-RC, which contained the *First* and *Fourth Concerti*, as well as the *Paganini Rhapsody*.² For the current Rachmaninoff collection, Ward Marston has apparently used the same transfers he made for the previous two CDs, but the new edition is refreshingly free of any such post-transfer tampering.

Some of Mr. Marston's most impressive transfers are of the Edison Diamond Discs, originally recorded in 1919. The Edison discs are notoriously difficult to reproduce; although Edison's acoustical recording process was superior to Victor's in terms of both frequency and dynamic range, the excessive surface noise on most Diamond Discs invariably negates their virtues. RCA's 1973 transfers bordered on unlistenable; Marston's transfers are surprisingly quiet by comparison. The old RCA transfers also

were muffled, making the upper register of the piano dull and indistinct. Marston's transfers are remarkably clear, transforming these discs from mere historical curiosities into recordings which are quite satisfactory on repeated hearings.

Edison issued multiple takes of each of his Rachmaninoff recordings, each with the same catalog number, and contrary to the pianist's wishes. Although three takes were made of each disc, Mr. Marston told this reviewer that he was unable to locate more than two issued takes of seven out of the 10 Edison sides. Some of the takes which appear in the present collection are different from those which were issued on LP in 1973. Marston wisely chose the best sounding copies he could locate, most of which came from his private collection. His own self-critical attitude aside, Rachmaninoff's playing was remarkably consistent, and the lack of availability of every existing take is of little consequence.

Although not widely known, RCA Victor also substituted alternate takes of several of Rachmaninoff's recordings, presumably against the pianist's wishes, since he was rather meticulous about such matters. Victor issued at least two different versions of the 1929 electrical recording of the *Second Concerto* on 78 rpm discs, both of which are in this reviewer's collection. In the post-WWII issue, bearing the small diameter "RCA Victor" labels, nine out of 10 sides are different takes than the pre-WWII "Victor" pressings! According to Mr. Marston, the originally issued takes were used for this collection. RCA Victor's booklet lists the same takes as given in their documentation for the 1973 LP collection, yet a comparison of the pre-WWII 78s reveals that Marston, indeed, has gone back to the set as originally issued. It is worth noting that all LP transfers issued by RCA were from the post-WWII 78s, so the CD collection contains the very first reissue of the recordings as originally published. The differences in performance are very subtle, but this writer finds that the current assembly of the originally issued sides produces a performance just slightly more coherent than previous reissues.

It is indeed fortunate that Mr. Marston's transfers of the Victor and Edison acoustics are of such consistently high quality, since some of the repertoire captured by the recording horns never was remade electrically. Seven out of the 10 sides recorded for Edison never were re-recorded for Victor in any form, including Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, Scarlatti's *Pastorale* (arr., Tausig), the *Theme and Variations* from Mozart's *Sonata*, K. 331, Chopin's *Waltz in A-flat*, Op. 42, and Rachmaninoff's own *Barcarolle*, Op. 10, No. 3. Among the Victor acoustic recordings, Chopin's *Scherzo in C-sharp minor*, Op. 39, four of the *Chopin Waltzes*, his marvelous performances of Debussy's *Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum* and *Golliwog's Cakewalk*, as well as three of his own *Preludes*, never were remade electrically. The Debussy discs are particularly significant, since they are Rachmaninoff's only recordings of music by this composer. Pearl issued a number of Rachmaninoff's Victor acoustics on a single disc, CD-9457, but the noisy, amateurish transfers by Colin Attwell are vastly inferior to Marston's work.

It is regrettable that so few large-scale works by composers other than himself were recorded by Rachmaninoff. Among those that were, his 1929 recording of the *Carnaval*, Op. 9 by Schumann remains absolutely unsurpassed. No pianist has made such a unified whole of this often schizophrenic work, and the fierce technical demands appear not to have fazed Rachmaninoff in the least. Rachmaninoff's practicing habits have been well documented; he labored meticulously, often working through difficult passages for hours at greatly reduced tempi until his hands were able to convey the exact conceptions he envisioned. Yet his performances never were overly controlled. On the contrary, Rachmaninoff's performances often were delivered with a spontaneity that was absolutely riveting, and his *Carnaval* is one of the best examples of this.

Rachmaninoff may have a competitor or two with the *Sonata in B-flat minor*, Op. 35 by Chopin, notably Artur Rubinstein's 1946 account, another fine Ward Marston transfer for RCA Victor, CD 60047-2-RG. Nonetheless, Rachmaninoff's highly individual 1930 recording must be regarded as at least near-definitive. Rather than treat the *Presto* as a series of scales to be worked through as a technical exercise, Rachmaninoff reveals lines within complex fabric which elude other pianists. He was not averse to departing from a composer's directions, either, as his *Forté* in the return of the *Funeral March* illustrates. This is one of the great Chopin performances on record, making it most regrettable that Rachmaninoff did not record the *Sonata in B minor* as well.

Rachmaninoff and his close friend Fritz Kreisler concertized frequently together, and produced three sonata recordings in 1928, including Beethoven's Op. 30, No. 3, Grieg's Op. 45 and Schubert's D. 574. Despite their radically different attitudes toward recording, their collaborations produced truly remarkable performances. Kreisler would have been quite content to let the first take of every side stand, yet Rachmaninoff often insisted on making five to eight in his quest for absolute perfection. Kreisler's frustration with Rachmaninoff's perfectionism resulted in the Austrian's declining an offer by Victor to record a complete Beethoven cycle with his Russian colleague.³ Kreisler found Rachmaninoff a congenial partner in the concert hall, but Rachmaninoff's exacting recording methods proved far too grueling for Kreisler.

Contemporary accounts of Rachmaninoff's performances as a conductor make it all the more regrettable that his first performing career could not be documented on record. In 1912 critic Yuri Engel declared Rachmaninoff to be the only Russian conductor who could be compared to Nikisch and Mahler. Composer Yuri Nikolsky found him to be, in his own way, as "great and incomparable" as Nikisch, Mengelberg, Weingartner and Mottl. Similarly, Nicolai Medtner declared that "besides everything else," Rachmaninoff was also "the greatest Russian conductor."⁴

After leaving Russia, Rachmaninoff made only seven appearances on the podium, all with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The repertoire was limited to four of his own works, including *The Isle of the Dead*, his own orchestration of the *Vocalise*, *The Bells*, and *Symphony No. 3*. All but *The Bells* were recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra by Victor. Like his recordings of his own piano works, Rachmaninoff's orchestral recordings must be regarded as definitive. His 1929 recording of *The Isle of the Dead* is the most intensely powerful on record. Rachmaninoff conveys the same sense of musical architecture, line and tone color found in his recordings as pianist, and thanks to Ward Marston these aspects of Rachmaninoff's conducting can be heard to a much greater degree than on any previous reissue.

Despite the large number of recordings left by Rachmaninoff, the repertoire that he did not record is cause for regret. Only seven of his *Preludes* and a mere three *Études Tableaux* were recorded by Rachmaninoff. Other than himself, the composer he recorded most frequently was Chopin. Yet apart from the B-flat minor *Sonata*, the *Ballade in A-flat* and the *Scherzo in C-sharp minor*, his Chopin recordings are confined to small-scale works including Waltzes, Nocturnes, and Mazurkas. In addition to the *Sonata in B-minor*, one regrets the absence of the remaining *Scherzi* and *Ballades* from Rachmaninoff's recorded repertoire.

Pianist Rosalyn Tureck recently was quoted, citing Rachmaninoff as "the greatest Beethoven player of our time." She goes on to say that "Schnabel, of course, was a great Beethoven player, but Rachmaninoff was very much more dependable."⁵ Unfortunately, Rachmaninoff left only three recordings of music by Beethoven—the *Violin Sonata in G major* with Fritz Kreisler, 24 of the *32 Variations in C minor*, and the inconsequential

Turkish March. Not a single Beethoven piano sonata was recorded by Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff probably is not to be faulted for this. The Victor Talking Machine Company and its successor RCA Victor were notorious for filling their catalog with short, marketable works by artists capable of much more.

Individual comments on the remainder of Rachmaninoff's recordings would occupy an unreasonable amount of space in these pages. In addition to the composers mentioned elsewhere in this review, Rachmaninoff's recorded output contains work by Bizet, Borodin, Daquin, Dohnányi, Gluck, Grieg, Handel, Henselt, Kreisler, Liszt, Moszkowski, Mozart, Mussorgsky, Paderewski, Rimsky-Korsakov, Saint-Saëns, Scriabin, Johann Strauss II, and Tchaikovsky, as well as the traditional Russian song *Powder and Paint*, sung by Russian Gypsy singer Jadejda Plevitskaya, accompanied by Rachmaninoff.

Sergei Rachmaninoff—The Complete Recordings contains only recordings made for commercial release by Edison and Victor. Rachmaninoff's disapproval of broadcasting precludes the existence of any live broadcast material. Barrie Martyn's discography cites two experimental recordings of Rachmaninoff made by Bell Laboratories in 1931, including Weber's *Perpetuum mobile* and Liszt's *Ballade No. 2*, as well as a private recording of the folk song *Bublich*, made at a party in 1933.⁶ Whether or not playable copies of these items still exist is unknown. Perhaps they will surface at some future time.

The Ampico piano rolls, made between 1919 and 1929, are not included in the RCA Victor collection. These rolls have appeared on various LP reissues, the only remotely successful of which were three LPs issued by L'Oiseau Lyre in 1979. These were the first recordings of Rachmaninoff's piano rolls made directly from the Ampico originals using a nine foot concert grand piano (a Russian Estonia). Previous LP reissues invariably were dreadful, including three LPs on the Klavier label recorded using a six and a half foot Mason and Hamlin/Ampico reproducing piano far too closely recorded.

In the early 1960s, Superscope issued a series of LPs and open-reel tapes of piano rolls made for the Welte-Mignon Vorsetzer. Some of Rachmaninoff's Ampico rolls were adapted to the Welte system for this series, using a nine foot Bösendorfer, but much was lost in the translation. Both the Klavier and Superscope recordings give the impression of a machine playing the piano. The L'Oiseau Lyre recordings at least give a hint of Rachmaninoff in performance, but little more. The Ampico rolls contain a number of works not recorded for Victor or Edison, including some of Rachmaninoff's own compositions. The Ampicos of Rachmaninoff's own works originally recorded by L'Oiseau Lyre have been reissued on CD by London (425 964-2). Presumably the rolls of works by other composers will follow on London CDs.

Finally, a collector whose opinions are respected by this writer believes that an early 1970s single LP reissue on RCA's Victrola label entitled *The Great Rachmaninoff* may contain a 1935 alternate take of Rachmaninoff's transcription of the Bach *Prelude in E Major* from the *Violin Partita No. 3*. This CD compilation, as well as the 1973 LP edition, contains only the 1942 published recording. According to the discography in Barrie Martyn's excellent Rachmaninoff biography, eight unpublished takes were made in 1935 and 1936. Take 3, recorded Jan 8, 1935 was marked "hold" by Rachmaninoff, pending a possible re-recording. Martyn also notes that a copy of the held take survives.⁷ This writer did not have access to the Victrola LP during the preparation of this review. If any readers own this LP, their comments would be most welcome.

Sergei Rachmaninoff—The Complete Recordings is a high point in RCA Victor's rather variable series of historic reissues. This collection is a must for anyone interested in historic piano recordings. *Reviewed by Gary A. Galo*

Notes:

- 1 Martyn, Barrie. *Rachmaninoff—Composer, Pianist, Conductor*. Hants, England: Scolar Press (1990) (U.S. Agent: Gower Publishing Company, Old Post Road, Brookfield, VT 05036).
- 2 Nathaniel Johnson is credited with supervising the digital remastering of these recordings. Artificial stereo re-channelling appears to be a Johnson trademark, since several of the CDs which bear his name in RCA Victor's *Toscanini Collection* have been similarly maligned.
- 3 Tibbetts, John C. "Remembering Rachmaninoff." *American Record Guide*, Jan-Feb, 1993.

Conchita Supervia, Mezzo-Soprano. Club "99" CL 99-74.

Some artists, Chaliapin and Maria Callas spring immediately to mind, had to be seen in live performance to be fully appreciated. One such artist is Conchita Supervia (1895-1936). To the neophyte listening to one of her recordings, she is a mezzo-soprano with a bothersome vibrato and uneven registers who occasionally sings off pitch. Those who look deeper into her artistry will discover Supervia also had an extensive vocal range, a beautiful legato line and the Spanish idiom of "duende," a quality that cannot be taught or acquired with practice.

Her flawed vocal technique could be attributed in part to her debut at the tender age of 14 and subsequent performances in important opera houses (Teatro del Liceo, Barcelona in 1910 and Rome Opera in 1911 as Octavian in the Italian premiere of *Rosenkavalier*). This early start in demanding roles did not allow the maturation and assimilation of a solid vocal technique. This fact, however, did not hamper her development as an artist. Still in her late teens, she appeared with such great luminaries of the operatic world as Muratore, Dufranne, Damores, and Journet. Her personal success with these illustrious partners speaks clearly of her own individual merits.

All recordings included in this CD are electrical and were made during Supervia's middle thirties. The sound in this CD is acceptable, although it lacks the brilliance of the *Lebendige Vergangenheit* CD Mono 89023 which contains seven of the 13 selections on this Club "99" disc.

Of the selections included here, Supervia's *Nozze di Figaro* arias come to the fore. Her Mozartean style, as has been said of her Rossini, might raise some eyebrows in academic circles, but what freshness she brings to the music of Cherubino: her *Carmen* was said to have been "controversial," but everything Supervia did was either controversial or at the very least original. She never was dull. The *Rosenkavalier* selections, partnered with Ines Maria Ferraris, came some 17 years after their 1911 Rome Opera performance. However, the music still flows with the eagerness and freshness of youth. One item of special interest on this CD is her interpretation of Musetta's Waltz from Puccini's *La Boheme* sung in French a whole tone lower than in the original score.

In this day of homogenized performances in which singers' individualism is sacrificed to mechanics and exacting ensemble, Supervia emerges as a fresh flower permeating today's dull prophylactic operatic stage with the aroma of her unique personal style.

These are the words of critic Desmond Shaw-Taylor in describing Supervia:

She was incapable of dullness; even in the most trivial song there came a phrase so personal and so completely genuine that the listener feels something akin to physical contact. In whatever language she sang she filled each word with meaning, and lent the utmost grace and point to the turn of every musical phrase. Her moods and the color of her tone would change with lightning rapidity; and her sense of rhythm often gave a fascinating outline and precision to passages which seem quite ordinary in the score. No singer has conveyed a more infectious enjoyment of the sheer act of singing.

Thank you, Conchita Supervia! *Reviewed by Gustavo R. Halley*

Burt Bales 1947-1961. 1018 Club, San Francisco, 1947. Pier 23, San Francisco, 1961. Home recording 1961. Burt Bales, p; Bob Hodes, t; Frank Goudie, cl, vo; Al Conger, b. Total playing time: 73:03. GHB Records CD BCD-13.

The title of this CD could imply that the San Francisco pianist Burt Bales died at the tender age of 14. Actually, he was almost 75 when he left us a few years ago. The reference is to the period covered by the CD's generous 73 minute program.

Bales spent more than a dozen of those 14 years playing on a battle-scarred out-of-tune upright at a seedy waterfront saloon on San Francisco's Embarcadero, where half of these tunes were recorded.

This is sawdust-on-the-floor, bourbon-on-the-rocks music. It is happy, relaxed, and alive. It is also rough and imperfect, but always an ebullient personification of jazz heritage. It has been played this way since the turn of the century—often in dank, smoke-filled barrel houses like Pier 23.

The seven solo numbers that launch the set date back 46 years and reflect the primitive quality of the portable equipment that fortunately preserved these joyous sounds. Burt Bales recorded only a precious few dozen tunes during his long career, so this set will be welcomed by the cult of followers who exalt his work.

"She's a Good Girl," a recondite relic of the jazz age, is dramatically akin to Jelly Roll Morton's vocal and instrumental sound in the echo-filled auditorium of the Library of Congress where Morton poured his jazz-filled soul into Alan Lomax's mike back in 1938. "Mister Joe," Morton's tribute to King Oliver, is clearly patterned after Jelly's great solo in Commodore's "New Orleans Memories" album. The Mortonian aura is sustained on "King Porter Stomp." Burt Bales reached back to Morton's initial piano solo recording in 1923 to deftly underscore an unfaltering passion for the great New Orleans pianist-composer-band leader. Bales' strong left hand fuels the heated version of "Doll Dance."

Fortunately, the freewheeling Pier 23 session included the fine New Orleans clarinetist, "Big Boy" Goudie. These are possibly the only recordings he made in this country. This reviewer remembers hearing him with Bales at the bayside tavern back in the 1960s. He recently had returned from Europe after spending three decades recording with European greats like Django Reinhardt and many ex-patriot jazzmen then active on the continent.

Clarinetist Darnell Howard enjoyed sitting in at Pier 23. Bob Short's tuba frequently shook the beams, and Fred Higuera often played drums. The quality of the band varied from ragged to right depending upon who happened to wander in. The music sounded better after we had consumed a quantity of the Pier's generous libations.

An indication of the brilliance of Goudie's taut solos, displayed on those French recordings, is evident on "Lady Be Good," and "Big Butter and Egg Man." You even hear him order a drink after his vocal on "Georgia." "Struttin' with Some Barbecue," swept by its own momentum, rises to an inspirational peak led by Bob Hodes' heated trumpet chorus.

Unfortunately, the club owner, Hevelock Jerome, would occasionally claim the privilege of "singing" with the band, as he does here. We always forgave such indiscretions as "I Had Someone Else (Before I Had You)." After all, he had the good taste to employ Burt Bales!

The brightest gem in this group is saved for the closing spot when Bales reprises "Mr. Jelly Lord." The tempo is slower, the fidelity is higher, and Bales reaches for the deep feeling of the lovely melody. You will want to play No. 15 again—I just did!

Ken Mills' insightful liner notes are as rich and iconoclastic as Burt Bales' meaningful solo art. This CD, warts and all, recaptures many of those memorable moments some of us spent listening to him in various San Francisco hang-outs.

As Jelly's lyrics so eloquently state, "He's simply royal at the old keyboard!"
Reviewed by Floyd Levin

Jack Teagarden "A Hundred Years from Today" -Live at the Monterey Jazz Festival, 1963. Jack Teagarden, tb; Charlie Teagarden, tp; Pee Wee Russell, cl; Joe Sullivan, p; George Tucker, Jimmy Bond, b; Nick Ceroli, dr. Guests: Gerry Mulligan, bs; Sleepy Matsumoto, ts; Norma & Helen Teagarden, p. Monterey, California, Sept 20-21 1963. Grudge Music Group CD 4324-2-F.

Thanks to the efforts of producer Stephen C. LaVere, we are able to relive 74 minutes of Jack Teagarden's 1963 Monterey Jazz Festival performance that occurred just a few months before his death. On a personal level, LaVere's father, the late pianist Charlie LaVere, played with Teagarden on the famed Jump label recordings four decades ago.

While Teagarden was one of jazz's most innovative stars, he plowed few fresh musical furrows during his later years. A standard Teagarden program was a constant rearming of his old chestnuts. Most of them he could justifiably claim as "his own." In that category, and included here, are reverently performed versions that reaffirm the true ownership of "his" "Basin Street Blues," "Casanova's Lament," and "St. James Infirmary Blues."

The familiar fare is warmed by the sentimentality of a musical family reunion. In addition to his brother Charlie Teagarden on trumpet, we hear Jack's sister, pianist Norma Teagarden, and his mother, Helen Teagarden. "Mama T," then 74, romped through a pair of lusty 1889 rags by the Nashville composer Charles Hunter. Norma, introduced as "the artist of the family," followed with a demure "Body and Soul."

Additional guests are Gerry Mulligan on baritone sax and Sleepy Matsumoto on tenor sax. The latter proved that the twain can meet on the common ground of a stomping "Sweet Georgia Brown."

This CD will reintroduce a pair of almost overlooked giants whose contribution to music has not been properly emphasized. Charlie Teagarden's soaring musical rhetoric ranks with many other trumpet stars who have achieved far more acclaim. The blistering restrained energy in his muted trumpet on "St. James Infirmary" should convince any doubters.

There is a temptation to suggest that pianist Joe Sullivan's pile-driving beat and melodic fluency probably creates the most memorable moments on this CD. On "I've Found a New Baby," he recalls his monumental Brunswick recording 35 years earlier with a group of Austin High friends who established the Chicago style of jazz.

There may be a few out there who have not yet succumbed to Pee Wee Russell's quaint phrasing and unique tonal projection. He reads a mountain of pathos into his two choruses of Johnny Mercer's blues, "Casanova's Lament." On "Pee Wee's and Gerry's Blues," Russell gracefully spans an age and stylistic disparity by blending his flutteringly delicate clarinet with Mulligan's robust baritone sax to create an airy blues pastel. Russell's poignancy adds a bitter-sweetness to "Sugar."

Jack Teagarden introduces each number with his warm Texas drawl. While his interesting anecdotes reveal the emotional depth and love Teagarden had for his friends and relatives, it is questionable whether the comments will withstand repeated listening.

Twenty-eight years after his death, Jack Teagarden's flowing elliptical phrasing, his breathtaking "trambone cadenzas," and his soulful singing are still the definitive yardsticks by which a jazz performance is measured. Each of these highly individual characteristics is amply demonstrated here.

This is Jack Teagarden at his best. The arrive of this CD should spark a renewed interest in his extremely personal blues style of playing and singing. *Reviewed by Floyd Levin*

Stanley Series: The Stanley Brothers, with various bands Copper Creek Records, P.O. Box 3161, Roanoke, VA 24015 (703) 563-5937. Copper Creek CCss 1-1 through 1-4, 2-1 through 2-4, 3-1 through 3-3. 11 discs, each packaged and sold separately. Track and personnel listings, date and place of performance, song annotations and interviews.

Few bluegrass bands ever have equalled the power and excitement generated by Carter and Ralph Stanley and their group, the Clinch Mountain Boys. Ralph's fiery banjo picking and bone-chilling high tenor helped define the "high lonesome" bluegrass sound, while Carter penned some of the most enduring songs in that idiom.

Copper Creek, a small specialist label based in Roanoke, Virginia quietly has been releasing a series of rare live recordings from the Stanley Brothers' heyday during the late 1950s to mid-1960s. This review is based on two discs from the series (Volume 2, No. 1, and Volume 3, No. 3) which document Pennsylvania and Virginia concerts from 1956 and 1958.

Two things immediately are striking about these recordings: the first is the surprisingly good sound quality. While they were made by amateurs, one of whom was a young fan by the name of Mike Seeger, and under field conditions, these monophonic recordings are admirably clear and focused. Even if stereo technology had been in wide use at the time of these concerts, it would have been of little use in this case. The standard practice for bluegrass bands was to place one microphone at center stage and cluster the band around it. Soloists would approach the mike during their breaks and then back away. Recordings made in this manner suffer from atrocious balance problems; lead singers and instruments blare out at the listener while accompanists are all but inaudible. Focus, however, is not a problem in the case of these discs. Decent equipment was used and the sound is clear, with the exception of some saturation during especially loud passages.

The second striking aspect of the *Stanley Series* discs is the quality of the performances they preserve. Never intended for commercial release, these concerts present a candid "warts and all" side of the Stanley band. Yet there is no denying the raw power of this music. Even when tempos fly out of control and lame jokes and between-song noodlings intrude, the Stanleys have the ability to transfix the listener with their rough-hewn energy and instrumental virtuosity. Ralph Stanley's hair-raising vocals on tunes like "Man of Constant Sorrow" and "A Voice from on High" will renew the faith of even the most jaded in the earthy power of America's mountain music tradition. Scholars will find this series to be a treasure trove; the two volumes cited above feature fiddlers Chubby Anthony and Ralph Mayo and mandolinist Bill Napier, among other bluegrass luminaries. The packaging is serviceable, though inconsistent in format. Extensive liner notes and interviews are included. Research libraries with a strong collection in American folk music cannot afford to ignore these discs. More than just valuable documents, however, they are fun, exciting, and satisfying. *Reviewed by Rick Anderson*

Jimmie Rodgers Series. Rounder Records 1056-1063 (9 volumes, original mono). Each volume packaged and sold separately; booklets include track and personnel listings, recording dates and notes.

Jimmie Rodgers generally is regarded as the "Father of Country Music," and with good reason considering the effect of his songs and his singing on the development of that genre. Rodgers travelled around the country for years with vaudeville acts, billed as "America's Blue Yodeler." His distinctive voice, blues-based songs and unique yodeling brought him fame and fortune in the mid-1930s. Artists as diverse as Bill Monroe and Merle Haggard count him as a major influence.

With the help of Rodgers biographer, Nolan Porterfield, whose informative and insightful notes accompany each volume, Rounder has compiled a collection of classic Jimmie Rodgers singles and alternate takes which had been languishing in the vaults of RCA Victor for decades. The series consists of eight volumes numbered in chronological order: *First Sessions* (1927-1928); *The Early Years* (1928-1929); *On the Way Up* (1929); *Riding High* (1929-1930); *America's Blue Yodeler* (1930-1931); *Down the Old Road* (1931-1932); *No Hard Times* (1932); and *Last Sessions* (1933). These recording sessions, originally produced by Ralph Peer, are a gold mine of classic country music. Despite their age, Rodgers' reedy voice sounds surprisingly clear on most of the tracks; Bernardo Cosachov's transfers from the original metal masters and Jorg Siemer's remastering are beautifully done.

This collection is by no means a "best of" compilation; most of the tunes included are classics, but a few are far from inspiring. The weak links are included as historical illustration or to show the development of a song through multiple versions. Some of the classic, numbered "Blue Yodels" are here as well as such standards as "Frankie and Johnny" (in multiple takes), "Train Whistle Blues" and "My Rough and Rowdy Ways." But lackluster tracks such as "Land of My Boyhood Dreams," "I've Ranged, I've Roamed and I've Rambled" and the droopingly maudlin "Whisper Your Mother's Name" show that Rodgers, like any recording artist, did not always choose songs or deliver performances that were worthy of his talent. However, the inclusiveness of these discs is a boon to scholars, providing significant insight into *all* of Rodgers' work for RCA, not just his most important and enduring performances.

Writing for the *Washington Post*, Geoffrey Himes has said that half the pleasure of this series lies in "hearing a voice that can cut across half a century with its power intact." Jimmie Rodgers' songs have shaped American popular music more than many of us realize. Fans and scholars of blues, rock and country music alike will find a wealth of inspiration and information on these discs. *Reviewed by Rick Anderson*