

a user working with the collection. This chapter was, for me, at least, the most interesting and includes many examples of data entry windows which show how the system was put together and how it may be used.

The work ends with an examination of methods being considered for the future enhancement of the system to make it easier to use and more accessible for the Archives staff and public users.

The chapters to the book are enhanced by two appendices. The first appendix presents data elements in the archival sound recordings database and gives their MARC equivalent. This gives the reader a good idea of how much more detailed and complicated this type of cataloging than "standard" bibliographic cataloging of textual materials, especially when the entries include, as they must, an exhaustive physical description of the item(s) in question. The second appendix presents twenty-five flowcharts in which the author offers an overview of the archival sound recording database structure. *Reviewed by Peter G. Orr.*

***The Mercury Labels: A Discography. Volume I The 1945-1956 Era; Volume II The 1956-1964 Era; Volume III The 1964-1969 Era; Volume IV The 1969-1991 Era and Classical Recordings; Volume V Record and Artist Indexes.***

*Compiled by Michel Ruppli and Ed Novitsky. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press (Discographies Number 51) 1993. ISBN 0-313-27371-5 (set). \$395.00 per set.*

1995 marks the 50th anniversary of Mercury Records. This exhaustive, meticulously-researched set is a fitting tribute to a label which has not received its due credit as a major. Ruppli and Novitsky have given us a reason to look at Mercury, if not with the same respect as a Columbia or Warner Bros., at least with renewed appreciation for its musical output.

In that respect *The Mercury Labels* serves a similar function to the solid, though less ambitious history/discography *Liberty Records: A History of the Recording Company And Its Stars, 1955-1971*, by Michael "Doc Rock" Kelly (McFarland, 1993).

But the aim here is not to present an historical narrative. There is a brief historical note in the introduction and part of the preface. Since this set is meant to be sold separately as well, each volume repeats the above sections.

As noted above, the books are divided by era. They list not only Mercury Records, but subsidiaries (Emarcy, Fontana, Smash, etc.), and material either leased, purchased from other labels, or distributed by Mercury.

The format is sturdy: Volume V ties it all together with tables of stereo/mono equivalent masters (complete with record number or notations such as "rejected" or "unissued"). It also has a complete artist index for all volumes. This lists not only solo artists, groups or orchestras, but also supporting musicians or vocalists. Each entry is referred to the proper volume and page number. Each volume also has its own self-contained artist index.

The set's main organization is around recording sessions/master numbers. This may put off or daunt the casual reader, though librarians or music researchers should pick up the organization quickly enough. The main point to remember is that you won't find all recordings by an artist grouped together. For this reason, many libraries may need the whole set.

Each entry lists main artist, with supporting cast in some cases, or personnel of a band. It also has master number, record number (if applicable), and if known, year or date of session, which studio it was recorded in, and other notes of interest.

It's almost astonishing to see the range of music Mercury and associated labels have recorded in rock, jazz, pop, country, international and classical. This leads to the question, how can a label like this turn in such a lackluster sales performance?

At one time or another, their artists have included Rod Stewart, Bachman-Turner Overdrive, The Four Seasons, Rush, Def Leppard, James Brown, Jerry Lee Lewis, Edith Piaf and Nana Mouskouri.

Perhaps part of the reason is that Mercury didn't have bigger names than the above, and that some recorded for the label at the wrong parts of their career.

And perhaps because there were so many obscurities, deserved or not. Who remembers The Pallbearers, Fonda Feingold, Vicky, The Cascading Strings, Childe Harold, Kurt & Noah, The Love Stick, and The Electronic Concept Orchestra? I could go on, but it would be too cruel.

There are other oddities-artists we don't generally associate with Mercury, such as Aaron Neville, Jo-el (then Joel) Sonnier, and Sergio Mendes; and the curious collection of talk-show hosts (Mike Douglas, Merv Griffin and Regis Philbin).

The jazz lineup, however, was outstanding: some of the artists read like a Who's Who of Jazz: Oscar Peterson, Clifford Brown, Cannonball Adderley, Billy Eckstine, Quincy Jones, Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, etc.

Finally, if the current regime of Mercury (now part of the Polygram pantheon with Polydor, A&M, Island and others) wants some unsolicited advice, how about tying in the 50th anniversary celebration with these books, including the release of sampler CDs, videos, etc.

Possibly Mercury and Greenwood Press can put together a multimedia CD-ROM. It will make searching that much easier, and will give us a chance to see and hear some of the treasures we've missed over the years. *Reviewed by Bruce Rosenstein.*

### ***Legendary Voices.***

*By Nigel Douglas. London: Andre Deutsch' 1992. 305 pp, indexes, ISBN 0-233-98790-8. Available from Nimbus Records, Ltd., P.O. Box 7746, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7746.*

Companion CD: *Legendary Voices.*<sup>1</sup> Nimbus Prima Voce NI 7851.

Nigel Douglas is well-known to opera lovers in the U.K., having been heard in over two hundred radio programs for the BBC. He is, himself, a singer, trained at the Vienna Academy, with over eighty tenor roles in his repertoire, which he has performed with opera companies in Britain as well as on the continent. *Legendary Voices* makes no pretense at being a complete or definitive source of information on the greatest singers on record. Instead, it recalls the lives and vocal art of fourteen of the author's personal favorites.

Although the author heard most of these singers in person, it is through their recordings that their art survives. Mr. Douglas offers extensive and insightful commentary on the recorded legacy of each singer surveyed, including discussions of recent CD releases on a variety of labels. For the companion CD, Nimbus Records has selected a representative recording of each of the singers in Douglas' book. Four of them — Rosa Ponselle, Alexander Kipnis, Lotte Lehmann and Jussi Björling — merit two selections each.