

IN MEMORY OF THE CARNEGIE MUSIC SET

by

Philip L. Miller

If on some university campus there still exists intact one of the Music Sets given by the Carnegie Corporation thirty or more years ago, it must have been carefully guarded in its day, and probably did not fulfill its potential. And if a student today has access to the set he may well be amazed at its limitations. We have come a long way since the Second World War. I wonder if the younger generations have any idea of what the world of recordings was like in those far-off days. The Carnegie Set was an anthology chosen from American and European catalogs. That it did win friends for music and influence people I have been reminded many times over by some of those who grew up with it. For that reason it is a pleasure to remember the problems as well as the pleasures of putting it together.

In 1936 Eric T. Clarke was undertaking to revise the Carnegie Set, and I was asked to assist him in the selection of recordings. Accordingly I was borrowed from the New York Public Library for half time to listen and select. The assembling and supplying of the set was then in the hands of G. Schirmer, and we had an office in the 43rd Street store, equipped with a Capehart (the machine chosen to accompany the first sets) and supplied with any recordings we might consider for inclusion. Later we moved to the Lyon and Healy suite in Steinway Hall, where I spent most of my evenings. Parenthetically I may say this job was crucial in my own career, for it established my specialization in recordings, and as will presently be seen, it led to the establishment of some now accepted library practices.

But let us look a bit further back into the history of the set. It was not a sudden idea that developed

full-blown. In the early twenties the Carnegie Corporation, which had previously interested itself in such things as technological and scientific studies, or library and academic buildings, decided to shift some of its activities to the arts. The first fruit of this new interest was the Art Set, a collection of photographs, color reproductions, prints, books, etc., distributed to selected colleges in 1926. But already in 1925 some thought had been given to music. It was not a simple matter determining exactly what should be done. Thomas Whitney Surette, in a letter of 20 March 1925, suggested a set "for small colleges to enable the teachers to carry on music appreciation more thoroughly and extensively." Just what this set was to consist of is not spelled out. There were various other suggestions, and various consultants were called in. Howard Hinners, of Wellesley College proposed a collection of musical instruments, including a harpsichord (a rarity in those days), and of reference books; he expressly excluded the phonograph and recordings, though he recognized their usefulness as a teaching aid. His point was that mechanical assistance should not be used for illustration where human means could be made available. Something closer to the final solution was offered by John Erskine in 1929. He stated that mechanical reproducers had recently been greatly improved and suggested including a machine and records, along with miniature scores, portraits, books, etc. This concept was adopted at a meeting called by Howard Hanson in January 1930, and Jeffrey Mark was commissioned to draw up a survey to determine how the plan could best be carried out in the interests of the small college. Finally a committee was formed, including James B. Munn, Albert Stoessel, Archibald T. Davison and Randall Thompson; and Schirmer was engaged to assemble the first sets in 1933. As noted above, the records were accompanied by a Capehart, then considered the latest marvel in reproduction (but cursed with a murderous changer), and a book catalog. There were also reference books and scores.

Perhaps it is of some interest to look a bit further back into history. The idea of the phonograph in edu-

cation was by no means new. The Victor Company, by all odds the most far-sighted producer in those early days, had for years published an educational catalog in which an attempt was made to coordinate the treasures of its repertoire for use in teaching of history and appreciation. Along with the Red Seal discs of famous artists were listed modestly priced items recorded specially by the staff artists to make available music of less popular appeal. To give variety, as collectors remember, many pseudonyms were used--one got to know that Raymond Dixon was really Lambert Murphy; that Ralph Crane was Royal Dadmun; Alice Green, Olive Kline; Edna Brown, Elsie Baker; and so on. This educational list flourished until the advent of electrical recording; then it continued awhile in a rather shrunken form and finally died out. But it had indicated one direction in which recording could move. Three or four years before the first Carnegie Set, there appeared the first landmark anthology--Parlophone's 200 Years of Music, edited by Dr. Curt Sachs. History through Bach was compressed into twelve 10-inch discs, but nothing like it had been done before, and the set held its place in the catalogs for many years. Then there was the Columbia History of Music, produced in England under the editorship of Percy Scholes, still on 10-inch discs, but running to five eight-disc albums. Later, of course, came L'Anthologie Sonore, founded in France by Dr. Sachs, which issued individual discs periodically well into the forties.

Of course the Carnegie Set could take the cream from such ventures and combine the best performances of a balanced repertoire from all available catalogs. But I wonder if younger collectors realize how rich the material was in some directions, how slim the pickings in others. And "authentic" performances, such as we expect today, were a new concept at that time. It took the companies several years after 1925, when the microphone was introduced into the studios, to realize that it was no longer necessary to record opera arias with a studio orchestra. And not much thought was given as to the proper instrumentation for Bach or Handel. Indeed the Stokowski sound was

expected in Bach. Landowska was only coming into her own with the harpsichord; the baroque organ was being discovered. The period of revival was beginning, but we had far to go. And a great deal happened between 1933 and 1936, so that when I came into the act some yawning gaps could be filled. From that year on, with each subsequent revision considerably more could be added.

Aside from the repertoire, two big changes were made in the set. The Capehart, about which there had been many complaints, was discarded in favor of a new two-unit machine specially designed for the set by Federal Radio. And in place of the book catalog, we instituted a four-drawer card file. It was one of my problems to devise a card as far as practical in conformity with the New York Public Library catalog. And here we began to discover the many ways in which such conformity is not possible. The results of my labors led to a report delivered at an MLA meeting and subsequently to the establishment of the committee that produced the code on phonorecord cataloging. Ours was not a dictionary catalog. The four drawers were labeled "Composers," "Forms," "Media," and "Titles." In the "Form" and "Media" drawers we made every effort to bring out any information that could possibly be of interest to the teacher or the student--such as featured instrumental solos in the course of a symphony. It was decided to use a buff stock card with the idea that this might become standard for recordings, in case interfiling with the usual white catalog cards should be desirable. In order to make possible the most detailed and informational cataloging, the original typing was done on 5" by 8" cards, reduced to 3" by 5" by photo-offset.

The great problem we faced was to produce the most completely balanced program possible with the material available to us. Of course we began by drawing up a list of composers who had to be included; then we had to decide how many of the allowable number of discs could be given to each of them. Then, looking at it from the other angle, so-and-so many discs could be orchestral music, so-and-so many opera, and so on

through instrumental solos and songs to national and more or less primitive or exotic music.

There were other composers who came in because of some outstandingly fine recorded performance or because their works occupied the odd sides of sets or the reverse of some important smaller works. Another consideration was covering a versatile composer's work in various fields. Thus Beethoven was represented in the 1938 revision by four symphonies--nos. 2,3,6 and 7 (the obvious nos., 5 and 9, were dropped somewhere along the line on the theory that a collection with any records at all would be likely to have them). There were also three string quartets--early, middle and late; songs (An die ferne Geliebte in the magnificent Hüsck recording); two piano sonatas (played by Gieseking and Petri); the E-flat Violin Sonata (Busch and Serkin); three overtures; the Fourth Piano Concerto (Schnabel and Sargent); the Violin Concerto (Szigeti and Walter); selections from Fidelio (including the wonderful quartet record with Berger, Gottlieb, Wittrisch and Domgraf-Fassbänder); and so on. Coming at it from the other side, there were symphonies by J.C. Bach (a once famous performance by Mengelberg); Berlioz (part of the Roméó et Juliette by Harty); Boyce (from a complete set made by the already indefatigable Max Gobermann); Brahms (no. 1 by Walter, no. 4 by Weingartner); Bruckner (no. 7 by Ormandy); Dvořák; Franck; Haydn (Beecham and Walter); Mendelssohn (Koussevitsky's famous Italian); Mozart (Beecham and Walter); Rachmaninoff; Schubert; Schumann; Sibelius; Stravinsky (Symphonie des Psaumes in Stravinsky's first recording); Tchaikovski; and Vaughan Williams. It should be remembered that in the thirties Sibelius cut a bigger figure than he does today--we had a choice of several symphonies--but Mahler had not yet caught on and could be represented (not altogether shamefully) by the orchestral song Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen (an actual performance recording by Thorborg with the Vienna Philharmonic under Bruno Walter). Regretfully, we had to face the fact that Das Lied von der Erde took up 7 discs.

Among the larger choral works we could not omit Bach's B minor Mass, although nowadays the old Coates recording would hardly pass muster despite the beautiful solo singing of Schumann, Balfour, Widdop and Schörr: the choral parts were strictly in the three-choirs-festival tradition. On the other hand Beecham's first recording of Messiah, though severely cut according to the custom of the times, represented the first move in the direction of reducing the forces in the interests of clarity. And again the solo singing--by Labbette, Brunskill, Walker, Eisdell and Williams, set standards that have not too often been met. We felt we could afford only six operas--Faust (in the remarkable early recording with Journet as Mephistopheles); Don Giovanni (the famous Busch performance); Dido and Aeneas (the first recording, under Clarence Raybould); Iolanthe (D'Oyly Carte); Aida (in which the singing of Dusolina Giannini was outstanding); and Tristan und Isolde (from Bayreuth under Karl Elmendorff with Nanny Larsen-Todsén as Isølde). But there was the abridged Gluck Orphée (the French version with Alice Raveau), and selections from Pelléas et Mélisande under Truc (with Claire Croiza's memorable reading of the letter).

Although we set out to include only "modern" recordings presenting "authentic" performances, this rule was often overridden by vocal style. There was the beautiful "Piangerò" from Handel's Giulio Cesare, sung with all the wrong instruments by Hélène Cals, and cut down to size for a 12-inch disc. Another example was two Handel arias--"O sleep, why dost thou leave me" and "Angels ever bright and fair"--providing an object lesson in style by Corinne Rider-Kelsey. And though Povla Frijsch sang songs by the Russians Cui and Tchaikovski and the Czech Křička in French translation, the greatness of her performances was the most important thing. Again, because of the playing of Harold Samuel, Bach on the piano was readily admitted.

What is fascinating today is to be reminded of so many recorded classics. The recording of Mozart's Oboe Quartet by Leon Goossens and the Leners; the early Beecham Delius performances; the Teyte-Cortot

Debussy songs; Toscanini's Brahms-Haydn Variations and Siegfried Idyll (in the first versions); Beecham's overture to William Tell; Ponselle's singing of "Casta diva" and two selections from La Vestale; Schubert; Schumann; Brahms; and Wolf by such singers as Gerhardt, Schumann, Schlusnus, Rehkemper and Kipnis; those remarkable recordings, especially of Loewe, made by Sir George Henschel at age 79; beautiful Grieg songs by Eidé Norena--such things may be occasionally dubbed onto LP; they can never be outmoded.

There were surprising things to be had along with the standard repertoire. The Griffes Piano Sonata (played by Harrison Potter) was one. And the Medtner pieces played by Medtner, Poulenc by Poulenc, and Prokofiev by Prokofiev. Fauré's charming 'Dolly' Suite for piano four-hands, played by two youthful pupils of Marguerite Long; a suite for viola da gamba by Caix d'Hervelois, played by Paul Grümmer; songs by Robert Franz and Erich Wolff sung by Ernst Wolff (these were recorded by Columbia at our suggestion). Organ records were beginning to appear; those of Albert Schweitzer were perhaps of partly sentimental interest, but they were pioneers in the search for a proper organ sound. A French set called Trois siècles de musique d'orgue featured a baroque organ in Paris played by André Marchal, Charles Hens, Joseph Bonnet and Friederich Mihatch. We had one example of the clavichord, a Kuhnau 'Biblical' Sonata played by Erwin Bodky. An early example of split-tone music was Carrillo's Preludio de Cristobal Colon, and the first recorded song of Charles Ives remains the classic performance of General Booth Enters into Heaven, by Radiana Pazmør and Geneviève Pitot.

In our effort to touch all kinds of music, we had categories for band, jazz band (Ellington, Goodman and Armstrong), transcriptions (mostly, it must be admitted, odd sides of sets), and national songs. The last category included some American Indian, Eskimo and oriental music in untampered performances. And there were primitive-sounding drum-beats from the Belgian Congo. But in this category were also such

charming but artful items as the Canteloube Chants d'Auvergne (of course in Madeleine Grey's incomparable performance) and some Japanese songs in the Western Manner by Yoshie Fujiwara. Negro spirituals were included in recordings by Robeson and by the Hall Johnson Choir. And there were a couple of French folksongs informally sung at the piano by Reynaldo Hahn, as well as some racy Americana by Carl Sandburg with his guitar.

With all that we would have to choose from today the old Carnegie Set may not look too impressive. But there were plenty of performances in it to show the student what the music is all about.

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