

## HISTORISCHE AUFNAHMEN

by

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A few brief comments. I never got to hear Murray Hill's allegedly complete set of all of Enrico Caruso's recordings (now, I understand, withdrawn for legal reasons, although I'll bet the vinyl shortage would have put a stop to a fourteen-record set selling for sixteen bucks!). But if Enrico Caruso Centennial (Everest 3339) is a fair sample of the dubbing in the Murray Hill set--and since much Murray Hill material has come from Everest, I would guess that it is-- I didn't miss out on much. Everest claims their dubs were made at correct speed, but the sound remains a wretched trial for the ears, as a result of poor filtering and incompetent equalizing. The selection of material on Everest's single record is odd, to say the least, mostly the worst trivia Caruso recorded with the Lucia sextet and Bizet's Agnus Dei (given on the album as "Agnus Die"), thrown in to give the enterprise a semblance of respectability. Avoid this one like the plague.

The famous and historic Jelly Roll Morton Library of Congress recordings have been reissued on eight records (rather than Riverside's original dozen) by the Swedish "Classic Jazz Masters" label. Unfortunately the sound quality of these transfers is pretty poor--I suspect they were done from the Riverside LP's--but the material is so important that it is worth having in almost any audible form. I found the first two volumes of the series (CJM 2/3) at a New York shop, and have not seen the others: can anyone out there provide information?

Curtain Calls (Box 426, Rego Park, N. Y., 11374), continues its series of previously unpublished material by Hollywood stars with several new issues. CC 100/2, Both Sides of Bing Crosby, presents a large collection of airchecks, recording session fluffs, and such ephemera, including some amusing cross fire with Bob Hope, and a performance in which Crosby gets lost in the middle of

a song and confesses to the audience that he hasn't learned it properly and he can't read music. CC 100/6-7, a two-record set, has musical items from the sound tracks of Babes in Arms and Babes on Broadway, two Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney films. CC 100/8 has the sound track of a musical Thank Your Lucky Stars, featuring (catch these!) Dinah Shore, John Garfield, Spike Jones, Eddie Cantor, Ann Sheridan, Errol Flynn, Bette Davis, Olivia de Havilland, Ida Lupino and several others. CC 100/9-10, another two-record set, has another two Garland-Rooney collaborations, Strike Up the Band and Girl Crazy. These records are quite well produced and, I think, of obvious interest for sound track collections. The single records sell for \$7.50, but the sets are only \$12.00. You figure it out!

Have you ever wished for the chance to hear Franz Clement playing the world premiere of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, or perhaps Joachim playing the Brahms? A roughly comparable opportunity has now arisen with the publication of the world premiere performance of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2, played by Zoltan Székely with the Concertgebouw Orchestra conducted by Willem Mengelberg. While Bartók was not able to attend the performance, he had coached Székely shortly before--and, after all, the concerto was written for Székely! I've long wondered why no record company took the opportunity to record Székely's performance of the concerto, since he has been playing even in recent years as first violinist of the Hungarian Quartet, still with fine command of his instrument. (There are, though, to the best of my knowledge, no previous LP's--and only a few 78's--of Székely playing any works for violin solo.)

Detailed description of all the interesting aspects of this record would fill my entire column, if not the whole magazine. I will therefore restrain myself to brief comments on the most obvious questions. The performance is superlative: even with the benefit of Bartók's advice, one is still astonished at the violinist's mastery of the work in a first performance. Those familiar with other recordings from the Dutch radio made in the late thirties and early forties will not be surprised that the sound quality is excellent, sounding much later than the actual 1939 date. Unfortunately, the recording was dubbed from shellac pressings in Székely's possession,

and there is intermittent surface noise, distressingly heavy at times (although never for too long). My only disappointment is in the packaging: the record, issued as a "supplement" to Hungaroton's complete edition of Bartók's works, has only a single photograph and a very brief annotation in four languages, a far cry from the superb booklets that have accompanied the rest of the series. Still, this record (Hungaroton LPX 11573), is one we are fortunate to have; I consider it both a major historical document and a moving musical experience.

World Records of England (distributed here by Peters International) has certainly put Sibelians in its eternal debt with two two-record sets, Sibelius: The Great Interpreters (SH 173/4), and Sibelius: The First Recordings (SH 191/2). (There is also a companion release, which I have not heard, of Sir Thomas Beecham's 78 set of Sibelius' Symphony No. 4, on SH 133.) Just a listing of the contents is enough to indicate the importance of these records. In SH 173/4 we have the Third and Fifth Symphonies, Pohjola's Daughter, and two excerpts from the Karelia Suite, with Robert Kajanus conducting the London Symphony Orchestra; the Symphony No. 6, with Georg Schneevoigt conducting the Finnish National Orchestra; and the Symphony No. 7, with Serge Koussevitzky conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra (a live performance from 1933). SH 191/2 is devoted entirely to Kajanus: the First and Second Symphonies, Belshazzar's Feast, and Tapiola. There seems to be little dispute among collectors ~~that~~ Kajanus is the most important Sibelius conductor on records; not only was he a friend and confidant of the composer, but he was also a great musician with a special gift of communicative ability (if somewhat less than the ultimate in technique). It seems difficult to believe, but except for the Koussevitzky Seventh (once on RCA Victor LCT-1151/LVT-1015) and some recent Finnish publications which were not generally exported, none of these recordings has been transferred to LP before. The telltale note, "Transfers supervised by Anthony C. Griffith," (hidden inside the album) will be enough to alert experienced collectors, but I should tell others outright: these are some of the finest sounding LP transfers of any 78's ever issued. The tonal quality and the amount of audible detail are astonishing, quite comparable with good recordings made twenty years later (these all date from 1930-34). Even

for a collector or library not exactly concentrated on Sibelius (like my own), these records are most highly recommended.

As far as I can tell, Delmark's latest Big Joe Williams album, Nine-String Guitar Blues (Delmark 627), is made up of material that has not been previously issued. However, the presence of the late Ransom Knowling as bassist on six tracks and the record existing only in mono, date the sessions back at least half a dozen years, if not longer. Williams is frankly amazing; in his late sixties or early seventies, and with a continuous recording history dating back over forty years, he is still turning out some of the most exciting and vital blues music to be heard. I think my favorite of Williams' Delmark albums remains Stavin' Chain Blues (609), largely because of the presence of the late J. D. Short on harmonica, but frankly I have yet to hear a poor session from this artist. The present collection makes about as good an introduction to his unique sound as any (powerful, rasping voice accompanied by fluently played nine-string amplified guitar), and will certainly be indispensable for Williams collectors. Williams is also, I might add, a particularly useful musician for anyone trying to demonstrate how rock and roll evolved out of the blues; his rhythm is hardly less powerful (if softer) than Led Zeppelin's.

Could I be the only person to consider Columbia's The Anna Russell Album (MG 31199) a historic reissue? I hope not! Included here are Russell's first two Columbia albums, Anna Russell Sings? (ML 4594), the fabulous program of mock repertory suggested for various types of "singers," and Anna Russell Sings! Again? (ML 4733), with the fabulous parody summary of Wagner's Ring and a couple of other routines. If the Ring isn't one of the greatest examples of musical humor ever, then I must have no sense of humor at all (and it isn't a half-bad job of summary, either). I would have preferred the original program notes to Charles Burr's new puff, but the chance to replace (or acquire) these two wonderful rarities for a bargain price remains irresistible nonetheless. This collection goes on the shelf with the Hoffnung Festival concerts--and with practically nothing else!

The recording of Haydn's Trio No. 27, in C, by Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, and Mstislav Rostropovich, issued on the English Saga label (XID 5311), must surely have been published somewhere before, if only in Russia, but this is the first time I have encountered it. It bears all the trademarks of this truly "historic" ensemble-- a superlatively executed and extraordinarily musical performance in all respects. Even though the coupling, the Trio No. 16, in D, has already been issued here as Westminster (XWN 18181), and Monitor (MC(S)-2066), and even though Saga's rechanneled stereo sound is a bit on the dull side (Westminster's was better), I found the appearance of the Trio in C cause for considerable rejoicing. I got this disc through Records, Limited (2818 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, Ca. 90006), which seems to offer excellent service on virtually all European imports.

One of the most highly specialized releases I have encountered, even for the Folkways label, is Irish Dance Music, edited by Reg Hall (FW 8821). This is a collection of just what it says it is, almost all old recordings dubbed (pretty decently) from 78's issued for the Irish market and without a trace of international sophistication. Some of the music is pretty good, more of it is quite dull in strictly musical terms. Hall's extensive notes place everything in some sort of perspective, and the release will be of interest either on ethnological grounds or to real Irish dancers. But I certainly don't feel that this material has the kind of intrinsic quality to transcend its appeal to a limited audience.

In Love Changin' Blues (BLP-12035), Biograph records has come up with a real barrel-bottom scraper. The recordings on side one are all of Blind Willie McTell, made in Atlanta in 1949 for the Regal label; only two of the six tracks were issued. I am hardly surprised: McTell was a major black artist, but these are not exactly his best recordings, and one, "Pa'l of Mine," (an atypical piece of material for McTell!), is downright embarrassing. Still, there are those like myself who feel that McTell was important enough so that almost anything of his is worth hearing, and these sides certainly do have their moments. Side two is even stranger, featuring the late Memphis Minnie in five 1949 rhythm-

and-blues tracks, also done for Regal, and concluding with a track by one Jimmy Rogers, which seems to have been included to make a sixth track and selected just because it was recorded just after Memphis Minnie's session. (Biograph thinks Muddy Waters may be playing guitar behind Rogers, but I certainly don't.) The well-known prewar style of Memphis Minnie adapts surprisingly well to postwar amplification, and these recordings are decidedly worth hearing for blues fanciers. On the whole, though, the album is recommended only to specialists. McTell in particular is better represented on Melodeon (MLP-7372--a Biograph production), and Yazoo L-1005. Finally, I wonder if even Biograph can explain why this record was released in "stereo" (the jacket doesn't even admit that the stereo is fake). With the 1949 date prominently displayed, who the heck do they think they're fooling?

The International Piano Archive (formerly Library) has recently published two lavishly produced sets, both obviously "historic" although neither is a reissue. Arthur Loesser "Con Amore" (IPL 5003/4) is made up mostly of a recital given at the Cleveland Institute of Music on January 11, 1967, in which Loesser played "little known works by well-known composers:" Haydn's Sonata No. 42; Adagio, K. 540, and Gigue, K. 574, of Mozart; Beethoven's variations on "Kind, Willst du Ruhig Schlafen;" Schumann's Sonata in F, Op. 14; and Chopin's variations on a theme from Ludovic, Op. 12, along with two better-known Chopin works (Nocture, Op. 9, No. 3, and Mazurka, Op. 59, No. 3). This recital is supplemented by a performance of Schubert's Sonata in A, Op. 42, D. 845, from a later Cleveland Institute Recital (February 21, 1968), which I find disappointingly bland and superficial. But one can certainly make no such complaints about the "Con Amore" recital, which presents one of America's greatest and least appreciated pianists, near the end of his life but still at the height of his musical and technical powers. Luckily, the recording is good quality stereo. The large booklet accompanying the records reproduces Loesser's own program notes for the "Con Amore" recital (he was, of course, a marvelously witty writer), along with reminiscences by the pianist's widow with numerous choice quotes from associates, photographs, and advertisements.

IPL 5005/6 presents most of the International Piano Library Benefit Concert, given on October 3, 1970, at Hunter College in New York. As one who attended the concert, it is difficult for me to judge how much of the charm and warmth of this event is conveyed by the records. Precious little in the way of profound musicianship is to be heard (mostly in Bruce Hungerford's lovely presentation of a group of Schubert Laendler), although one can certainly argue that profundity would have been beside the point in this kind of celebration. And you may certainly refuse to be deafened--more than once, anyway--by the sound of eight famous pianists playing Chopin's Polonaise in A Flat in (more or less) unison. But surely no one can deny the superlative quality of the pianism exhibited by Jorge Bolet in two Liszt transcriptions, or by the ageing Guiomar Novaes in her hair-raising playing of Gottschalk's Variations on the Brazilian National Anthem--an performance best known to collectors from Novaes' first recording of the piece, made in 1920.

Fortunately, the three items on the concert which I wholeheartedly disliked--Ivan Davis' banging of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12, Raymond Lewenthal's noisy paraphrase on Gliere's Russian Sailors' Dance, and Gunnar Johansen's labored encounter with the Strauss-Godowsky Kunstlerleben, have been eliminated from the records, although whether in the interests of saving time or ears I do now know. Rosalyn Tureck's Bach gags--a two-part invention played upside down, and a gigue played as if on two manuals, but on the piano, with one hand on the music stand--wear a bit thin without the visual element to support them, but Beverly Sills' fabulous potpourri aria is just as amusing on a record as it was in the hall. Also on these records are fine performances of amusing trivia by Fernando Valenti, Jesus Maria Sanroma, Lewenthal, Alicia de Larrocha (some particularly choice Spanish pieces she has not recorded), and the de Larrocha/Lewenthal/Johansen trio in an awful set of variations by Czerny. The whole shebang concludes with Carl Reinecke's Children's Symphony, a rather hilarious mess. Again the sound is good quality stereo, although some sections are afflicted with an unfortunate amount of hum--understandable under the conditions of live performance recording, I suppose. The booklet consists mostly of photos of the

performers at work, along with the program and reproductions of some reviews of the concert.

Each of these sets sells for \$17.50, and they are obtainable directly from the International Piano Archive, 215 W. 91st St., New York, N. Y., 10024.

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#### INQUIRIES

Wanted: Names and publishers of popular American song catalogues or discographies for cylinder and 78 rpm records released prior to 1945. Specific interest are songs appearing in Broadway musicals prior to 1945. Write: Edgar C. Hall, Jr., Seoul CPO 8th USA, A. P. O. San Francisco, 96301.