

Patricia Turner: Afro-American Singers: an index and preliminary discography of long-playing recordings of opera, choral music, and song; Minneapolis, Minnesota, Patricia Turner, 1976, 240 pp.; available from the compiler: \$10.00 plus \$.75 shipping: POB 14296, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

Patricia Turner has clearly worked so hard on this important and potentially valuable compilation, her first effort in the field, that the many of us who might find it useful should fervently hope for the early appearance of an edition free of the crippling organizational flaws of this first one. This reviewer's experience as a librarian suggests that users interested in the subject of this book (in Yale's case these would tend to be vocal students at the School of Music) would usually wish to know which black concert and operatic singers have made recordings, what they have recorded, and whether or not any black singer has ever recorded a certain piece of music. Afro-American Singers was designed to answer just these sorts of questions as well as to provide additional data. The book lists commercial long-playing records issued in the United States only, except for cases in which a record has only been issued outside this country. As stated in the subtitle, the work includes repertory which one would normally expect to encounter in the opera house or on the concert stage: that is, classical music and some material from the musical theatre as well as traditional songs of various sorts (e.g., Spirituals and hymns).

The first half of the book consists of two alphabetical sections. The first, by far the longer is of individual singers and provides, when available, places of birth, dates, selected quotations from published record reviews, and biographical references in addition to lists of recordings. The second is of choral groups and provides bibliographic references and excerpts from reviews as well as lists of records. Both lists begin each singer's, or group's, entry alphabetically by composer for complete works, groups of excerpts, or composer-collections, and end with more general collections arranged alphabetically by title. This method of listing seems sensible and efficient but leaves the user a good deal of hunting in order to discover the contents of such collections by one or more artists as "Operatic Arias", "An Evening with...", or "Song Recital". A system of numbering each piece of music in the second half of the book so that contents of records listed under singers could be briefly indicated might help readers considerably.

This problem, however, is minor compared to that of the arrangement of the second half of the book, which divides the material recorded into sections: Composers and Recordings; Arias; Spirituals (A); Lieder; Art Songs; Folk Songs, Traditional Melodies, and Miscellaneous Songs (A); Songs from Musicals and Other Popular Songs; Religious Songs (A); Christmas Songs (A). Sections marked "A"

run alphabetically by title.

Even if the compiler had stated clearly the standards for inclusion used for each section, this system would make research difficult for the user who might be seeking works by Schubert (Composers, Lieder), Verdi (Composers, Arias), Weigl (Composers, Art Songs), Nevin (found only under title of song in Folk Songs ...), Händel (Composers, Arias, Art Songs, Religious, Christmas), etc. Difficulties increase considerably when the reader discovers a lack of consistency in application of what might appear to be the standards for sections. A Mendelssohn song appears in Art Songs rather than Lieder; a song from Lost in the Stars appears under Art Songs and not under Musicals; Porgy and Bess as complete work and as excerpts appears under Composers, but arias from it are not under Arias, rather under Songs from Musicals; and so on.

All in all the structure of this half of the work would tend to leave the researcher in a wallow of uncertainty as to accuracy or completeness of search. This reader was left with the desire, which unfortunately had to be resisted because of lack of time, to rearrange the entire second half of the book alphabetically by composer (and within each composer by title), with traditional or anonymous works fitted into that alphabet, the result being a single simple index to the works recorded. Cross-references of titles of excerpts, variant titles, and first lines would also increase usefulness, as would the previously suggested idea of numbering the works in order to code entries under singers. Other readers may be able to invent other arrangements that might be at least as convenient.

The book includes the usual introductory material as well as a general bibliography and the compiler's initial list of over one hundred singers (for some of whom no recordings could be traced). Typographical symbols indicate black composers and records out-of-print (as of what date is not stated). The appearance of letter prefixes for the numbers of various series of records is inconsistent. Print is clear and spacing generous; this reviewer noticed no more typographical errors than might be expected in this sort of work.

Sampling disclosed a few total omissions, such as the European Concert Hall operatic recordings of Mattiwilda Dobbs, and a few apparently partial omissions, such as the actual arias cited as being on one side of Angel 35095 of Mattiwilda Dobbs, none of which appears under Composers of Arias (the reviewer could not resist citing this name twice as a tribute to a favorite singer).

The purpose of this book is too important for the work to be left in a condition so difficult for use. Reorganization seems imperative. When this has been accomplished, the opportunity for a most useful series of editions (as happens in the case of J. F. Weber's

valuable series) will be present in order to transform what is now an admittedly preliminary "selective record list" (term thanks to S. Smolian) into a real discography by the addition of information on places and dates of recordings, foreign issues, tape issues, 78-rpm recordings (with matrix numbers et al.), non-commercial issues, unissued recordings, etc. Thus could emerge full and accessible documentation of the recorded performances of Afro-American singers, a vital part of the history of music and recording in the United States.

Richard Warren Jr.