

Pearl GEM 123. Stanford—The Complete Recordings. STANFORD: Overture to "Shamus O'Brien", Op. 61 (1896); Suite of Ancient Dances, Op. 58, nos. 2 (Sarabande) and 1 (Morris Dance) only; Masque from "The Critic", Op. 144 (1915); Irish Rhapsody no. 1, Op. 78 (abridged). The Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer. "Songs of the Fleet", Op. 117 (cycle of songs to poems by Sir Henry Newbolt, set for Baritone solo, male vocal quartet or chorus and orchestra) (1910). Harold Williams, Baritone; male quartet and London Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer.

Pearl GEM 126. Gustav Holst Conducts. HOLST: (2) Songs without Words, Op. 22 (1906): No. 1, Country Song; No. 2, Marching Song. Beni Mora, Oriental Suite in E minor, Op. 29, no. 1 (1910). London Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer. St. Paul's Suite for string orchestra, Op. 29, no. 2 (1913). String Orchestra conducted by the composer. (4) Songs for voice and violin, Op. 35. Dora Labbette, soprano; W. H. Reed, violin (in the 4 songs).

Pearl GEM 127. Ralph Vaughan Williams Conducts. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS The Wasps, Overture; Old King Cole, ballet music. Aeolian Orchestra conducted by the composer. On Wenlock Edge, song cycle to poems by A. E. Housman for tenor voice, piano and string quartet; Songs of Travel (R. L. Stevenson), Set 1, no. 3 only, "The Roadside Fire". Gervase Elwes, tenor; Frederick B. Kiddle, piano; London String Quartet.

The proprietors of the Pearl label, Pavilion Records Ltd., 48 High Street, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, England, first came to note in the field of historical reissues with their massive documentation of the early recordings conducted by Sir Edward Elgar, done under the supervision of Jerrold N. Moore. In the past three years they have moved farther afield in British music with the issues listed above.

Of the three collections under consideration, two were necessarily bulked out by performances not involving the composer, owing to a dearth of material.

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924), upon this re-exposure remains steadfastly in the class of an Interesting Historical Figure. The music on side one is all very competent and pleasant, but resembles nothing so much as German-Anglo-Irishized Glazounov. The song cycle occupying the whole of the second side is not the most distinguished representative of this genre. Stanford has been entirely successful in catching the tone of Newbolt's poetry, alternately mawkish and raucous. The final song of the set, "Farewell", is an extraordinary amalgam of these repellent traits. The material on side one was reportedly recorded in one session by HMV on November 6th, 1916. The recordings are representative of HMV's orchestral recording technic of the time. The copies

transferred are reasonably clean, with only one side join necessary and routinely accomplished. The "Songs of the Fleet", in contrast, was not recorded well, and is very opaque even for its day. Transfer copies were evidently very clean. Stanford's shaping and balance would be quite acceptable today; he admits a minimum of tempo inflection. No dynamic contrasts survive the recording process. As is the case with all the reissues under review here, Pearl does not indulge in such refinements as de-clicking or outer-to-inner groove equalization, and their side joins are at best casual. They have taken the trouble to pitch each side, and the pressings are adequate, if not up to the fondly recalled British standards in effect a few years back.

Everything on the Holst record was recorded by Columbia during 1924. With the exception noted below, all copies were very clean. The Two Songs without Words are typical of Holst in their transparent scoring. The Country Song is properly pastoral and atmospheric; the Marching Song is negotiated briskly. The latter is the only work on this record to receive a later electrical recording under the composer, issued in the USA as an odd side in the Planets set. Beni Mora's large-orchestra requirements are not well served by the acoustic recording process. The performance is cold and cursory, and the last movement degenerates into chaos in the absence of control of balance. In St. Paul's Suite, the composer's tempi are very fast--too fast for clarity in the first and last movements. This work was conceived without much compromise for a body of student string players, and it is difficult to account for the quality of treatment it receives here, at the hands of a presumably picked group of professional string players. Intonation is vile, the ensemble is more often than not fuzzy in the extreme, and the whole performance is rife with small rhythmic bobbles. Somehow the music is strong enough to survive all this. The Four Songs are given an open, free and very expressive performance by Labbette and Reed. The transfer copies betray more wear than anything else on these discs, and could have done with a general de-clicking.

The Vaughan Williams reissue, for reasons that I am not at all clear about, even after a half-dozen auditions, is very attractive. Certainly it is not the orchestral playing that accounts for this. In spite of a performance that sounds like a provincial high school orchestra on an off day, the Wasps Overture goes very well. The composer's tempi in the outer sections is half again as fast as I have ever heard done, and faster than I could possibly imagine would be practical. The effect perhaps is of greater cohesion in spite of poor playing. Old King Cole receives a similarly spirited-but-utilitarian performance. It is not difficult to conceive of this recording as being practical as a dance accompaniment, especially in the flat-footed folkstyle that Vaughan Williams doubtless intended. Side joins are audible but not very disturbing, and Aeolian-Vocalions orchestral recording

is bright and clean.

Gervase Elwes' performances of On Wenlock Edge have been characterised as "legendary", and it is good to have the physical evidence of his thoughtful musicianship once more. Of the three recordings of this cycle known to me, this one seems to be the least mannered and melodramatic, and it gains in effectiveness in proportion. Balances favor the singer and pianist over the quartet, but a mental adjustment remains possible, and the London Quartet's excellent playing is clearly audible throughout. On balance for the information contained here, I think all three of these reissues are essential for any collection pretending to cover British music, or the early 20th century.

R. Albert Hall