

HISTORISCHE AUFNAHMEN

BEETHOVEN: Violin Concerto in D, Op. 61. Yehudi Menuhin, violinist; Lucerne Festival Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. EMI Dacapo 1C 027-01 570 M.

Furtwängler and Menuhin recorded four violin concertos together, those of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Bartok. The Beethoven was the only one they did twice. Their later version of the Beethoven Concerto is familiar from numerous issues, but the earlier performance has been reissued on LP only in Japan (where it came as a bonus record with a huge set of all Furtwängler's EMI recordings). Now, here it is, available for the first time in the West since its original 78rpm issue (DB 6574/9).

Since this recording has been one of the scarcest of all Furtwängler items—I've never heard it before—it has excited considerable interest among collectors. I am very grateful to EMI for giving us the chance to satisfy our curiosity, and for (with one minor exception) presenting it so well on LP. I can also say that, while this is a beautiful performance, I prefer the remake on several grounds. Most important of these is that Menuhin plays better in the later recording. The earlier version has more patches of questionable intonation, and the later one is played with equal vigor but more eloquence and nobility. Furtwängler accompanies beautifully in both performances, making sure that every note in the orchestra comes across clearly. But I prefer his slightly faster tempo for the second movement in the later recording; the earlier one drags a bit. Finally, the Philharmonia Orchestra is a better ensemble than the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, and although the 1947 recording is excellent for its period the 1953 tape is clearer and more beautiful in tone. None of these differences is drastic, but in sum they lead me to a decided preference for the later recording.

The first 78rpm side of the second movement is plagued with quite a bit of surface noise and somewhat unclear sound; perhaps the original matrix was worn. Otherwise, the 78s have been superbly transferred to LP, so well that the improvement in sound six years later is only marginal. If you are one of those nuts (like myself) who insists on owning every possible Furtwängler recording, I'd advise you to grab this one immediately. Considering its limited appeal, it is unlikely to be around long or to appear again soon.

The notes on the performers by Sigurd Schimpf reach magnificent heights of gibberish, pretention, and doubletalk. So, "Menuhin and Furtwängler hold that spontaneity and intuition, which, just as little as the technique, can exist for their own sake, because they would open the door to the performers' arbitrariness, are the crucial point in the performance of a work; these qualities guarantee that the performer who is to re-create the music comprehends and fulfills the fundamental idea of the work, which, as they put it, is represented only indirectly by

the notes," do they?

SIBELIUS: Violin Concerto in d, Op. 47; En Saga, Op. 9. Jascha Heifetz, violinist (in Concerto); London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. Andante festivo. Finnish Radio Orchestra conducted by Jean Sibelius. Dacapo 1C 053-01 619 M.

The classic first recording of Sibelius's Violin Concerto has been published on LP several times before, and needs no further discussion as a performance. This is by far the best sounding transfer of the recording I have heard, in brilliant sound comparable with the best of the early LP era. EMI's engineers have done beautiful work with the entire LP.

Interest will naturally center on Sibelius's own performance, the only one by him to be preserved in any recording. Sibelius had conducted many performances of his own works when he was active as a composer, but by the time electrical recording came into use he had retired from public life altogether. This composition, unfortunately, is not a particularly significant one, and I don't feel this recording gives us any special insights into Sibelius "style." However, it is a fervent performance of the piece, and at least shows us that the composer could be an effective conductor.

BRAHMS: Piano Concerto No. 1, in d, Op. 15; Piano Concerto No. 2, in B flat, Op. 83. Solomon, pianist; Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Rafael Kubelik (in No. 1) and Issay Dobrowen (in No. 2). Dacapo 1C 147-03 081/2 M, 2 records; Turnabout/Vox Historical Series THC 65071 (No. 2 only).

Until the recent flurry of reissues, Solomon's LPs were among the most desired of classical collectors' items. And, among them, one of the scarcest was the Brahms First Concerto, now making its first appearance in more than two decades. The Second Concerto had never been issued on LP at all until now.

I am not personally a great admirer of Solomon's art. My reasons are set forth with clarity in an admiring essay by Sigurd Schimpf (poorly translated into English), included with the Dacapo set. Schimpf describes Solomon as "reserved, unobtrusive," and characterizes accurately the essentially objective, undemonstrative nature of Solomon's interpretations. Schimpf, of course, admires these qualities. My own taste is for subjective, communicative performances (always in fulfillment of a composer's intentions). These are, of course, matters of taste.

There are many impressive elements in Solomon's playing of the First Concerto. The pianist's facility and poise are awesome. I hear much expression, of a restrained sort, in the slow movement. In the end, though, I find the performance unconvincing. Too much power is kept in

reserve. The pianist seems unwilling to create too much excitement, as demonstrated (for one example) in the way he reins in the big double-octave passages in the first movement, holding back the rhythm just enough to dissipate their power. Kubelik's conducting is expert and effective, but he cannot convey the nearly frenetic energy of the young Brahms without the pianist's cooperation.

What I want to hear in this music is better provided by the young Backhaus (a fabulous version on 78s, never transferred), Schnabel (wrong notes and all), and the stereo recording of Malcuzyński.

I am surprised to find quite different qualities in the performance of the Second Concerto. Of course, the demands of the music are different. This is mature Brahms, not the young fire-breather of Op. 15. But the music still requires responsive playing, full of energy, and for once we can hear Solomon cutting loose with freely expressive, exciting, and moving playing. He is supported by magnificent conducting from the underrated Dobrowen, an asset which may have stimulated the pianist. Whatever the reason, this is one of the best recordings of the Brahms Second Concerto, and an extremely worthy addition to the LP catalog.

The Turnabout single record is obviously made from the same tape as the Dacapo issue, and the pressings are virtually identical in sound. So, except to Solomon collectors, I can happily recommend the Turnabout issue as an outstanding bargain. Sound quality is more brilliant in the 1952 First Concerto than in the 1947 Second, but in some ways I prefer the mellower early recording.

BEETHOVEN: Cello Sonata No. 2, in g, Op. 5, No. 2; BRAHMS: Cello Sonata No. 1, in e, Op. 38. Gregor Piatigorsky, cellist; Artur Schnabel, pianist (in Beethoven); Artur Rubinstein, pianist (in Brahms). EMI Dacapo 1C 053-03 078 M.

This same coupling was published a year or so ago by the Bruno Walter Society, but the new release represents the first LP publication of the Beethoven Sonata under "official" auspices, and the first such edition of the Brahms since RCA Victor LCT-1119 two decades ago.

In the Beethoven Sonata, recorded in 1934, I definitely feel Schnabel is the leader—appropriately enough in this piano-dominated piece. The performance has all the characteristics of Schnabel's greatest work — soaring lyricism, power (especially in the dynamic range), structural clarity, and even a puckish sense of humor (in the finale). Since Schnabel is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest of all Beethoven performers, it is a fine compliment to Piatigorsky to say that he carries his rather subsidiary role superbly, matching the pianist's musical lead all the way. The performance is beautiful and memorable. I loved it on 78s and I love it now.

The Brahms Sonata (from 1936) is quite different in style, reflecting

both change of collaborator and different composer. In the first two movements, Piatigorsky and Rubinstein indulge in frequent bending of tempo. The two themes of the first movement have entirely distinct tempi, various musical points are made with somewhat exaggerated rubato, and the minuet is mauled quite a bit. The finale comes off best; the style of playing seems best suited to this movement, especially since the fugal sections are played straight.

I prefer a more straightforward, less rhapsodic approach to this sonata, and I therefore prefer several other performances to this one. On the other hand, I must say that Piatigorsky and Rubinstein carry off their chosen conception with grandeur and flair. Rubinstein keeps his big passages down a bit too far in his (justified) care not to swamp the cello, but otherwise the balance between the instruments is quite good in both works.

Electrola's dubbing is quite good in tonal quality. It also has quite a bit of surface noise (worst in the Beethoven, but with some offensive passages in the Brahms also), suggesting that the dub was made from commercial pressings, without the use of a Packburn. I wish EMI's engineers in other countries would learn something from their English colleagues, who are currently turning out the best LP transfers from 78s in the world. However, I can say for the LP that it is better than listening to an average quality set of 78s, the realistic choice faced by most listeners.

MOZART: Piano Concerto No. 13, in C, K. 415; Piano Concerto No. 22, in E flat, K. 482; Sonata No. 12, in F, K. 332. Wanda Landowska, pianist; New York Philharmonic conducted by Artur Rodzinski (in the Concertos). POULENC: Concert Champetre. Wanda Landowska, harpsichordist; New York Philharmonic conducted by Leopold Stokowski. International Piano Archives IPA 106/7, 2 records.

All three of the concertos are taken from broadcast performances of 1945-49; dates are given on the record jacket. The orchestra is not named, but my identification is positive. The Mozart Sonata comes from unpublished HMV test pressings, recorded in France in 1938.

I can well understand why the Mozart Sonata was not published. It is a shockingly insensitive, romanticized performance, certainly the worst playing I have ever heard from this artist. Barely into the first movement, the end of the first theme slows down to a standstill, and this detail is but a harbinger of things to come. The recording date is too early to suggest the influence of LSD, but I wonder if some similar influence explains the departure from Landowska's standards, which I usually admire greatly.

The Mozart Concertos are also rather florid performances, but these remain well within the bounds of good taste. Landowska takes an improvisatory approach to these works, as we know Mozart did. Obviously the

figures she adds to the score would not be the same ones Mozart improvised, but they demonstrate legitimate ways of realizing Mozart's intentions. This is the Landowska I cherish, a musician whose individual approach to classic works illuminates the music. These are not the only admirable performances of Mozart's concertos, but they are cherishable ones. Oddly enough, K. 482, recorded in 1945, has somewhat clearer and fuller sound than K. 415, recorded the following year. Both, however, are above average for disc transcriptions of their period, with a minimum of surface noise.

As for the Poulenc, in the face of the composer's own ecstatic description of Landowska's performance further criticism seems useless. I will further admit that I have never gotten "inside" this superficial-sounding piece enough to have any opinion about a performance of it. This recording comes from an early tape recording, and the sound quality is quite good.

This same release was formerly available in a different edition with the same numbering. Aside from the loss of a few photos in a booklet with the earlier edition, the new package is an improvement. The records have been remastered, with higher-level, richer sound.

BACH: Partita No. 1, in B flat, BWV 825; MOZART: Sonata No. 15, in a, K. 310; Rondo in D, K. 485; MENDELSSOHN: Variations Serieuses, Op. 54; Prelude in B flat, Op. 104, No. 1; CHOPIN: Etudes, Op. 10—Nos. 2, 3, 4, & 11; Op. 25—Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, & 8; Mazurka in c#, Op. 30, No. 4; Mazurka in f#, Op. 59, No. 3; RAVEL: Valses Nobles et Sentimentales; DEBUSSY: Danse. Rosita Renard, pianist. International Piano Archives IPA 120/1, 2 records.

This set of records contains a complete recording of Rosita Renard's last concert, given at Carnegie Hall on January 19, 1949. The pianist, a native of Chile, had made a few obscure recordings in South America and had given occasional concerts and tours, but she was virtually unknown when she came to the United States for the last time. This recital should have marked the beginning of her recognition as a major artist, but after returning to Chile to prepare for a tour she contracted encephalitis and died in May, at the age of 55.

Renard's few 78s, along with the original publication of this recital (by the Society of Friends of Music of Bogota) and a privately-published LP of Beethoven pieces, have become legendary among collectors. This new edition, the appearance of which fills me with joy, is the first sample of Renard's art available to the general public in nearly half a century. It may seem an exaggeration to proclaim an artist as among the greatest in her field on the evidence of a single recital. Yet the pianist who played this recital must have been one of the greatest who ever lived, or she would never have been able to play like this at all.

I remember first being struck by the pianist's technical facility,

which strains one's credulity. Tempos throughout the recital tend to be fast, perhaps in part due to nervousness, and there are a few minor mistakes here and there. In general, though, the pianist supports her fast tempos with playing of incredible clarity and energy. Listen, for example, to almost any of the Chopin etudes, but particularly to Op. 25, No. 8, or Op. 10, No. 4. The combination of speed, force, dexterity, and emotional impact are quite literally enough to raise one's hair, as they still do to mine after many repeated hearings.

As with any art, it is eventually the emotional content which wins an audience. Here, perhaps, the highlight of the recital is the Mozart sonata, which Renard plays with almost unbearable intensity, giving us the full tragic impact of the music without violating the eighteenth century framework. This is pianistic artistry at its greatest.

By now, I have come to know nearly every detail of this album, and to feel that in its own way virtually everything in it is a highlight. For years I have been playing my copy of the original album (a \$100 collector's item) for every friend who would listen, finding unanimous agreement that Renard was one of the greatest of all pianists. I repeat, I am overjoyed to see the reappearance of this recording, and I urge it without reservation upon anyone who cares enough about music to be reading this review.

Unlike some historical items which must be borne with a mixture of delight and suffering, this concert was superbly recorded for its time, and the dated mono sound remains thoroughly satisfying.

LISZT: Nocturne, "En Rêve," Ballade No. 2, in b; *Années de Pèlerinage*, Third Year—*Sunt lacrymae rerum, en mode hongrois*; *Abschied*; 2 Legends of St. Francis. Ervin Nyiregyházi, pianist. International Piano Archives/Desmar IPA 111.

Frankly, the story of Nyiregyházi's life and career is so incredible and complex that I will not even attempt to summarize it here. You can read it in great and fascinating detail in Gregor Benko's program notes for this record. Suffice it to say that this is the same Nyiregyházi who, as a child prodigy, was the subject of Dr. Géza Révész's *The Psychology of a Musical Prodigy*. His only previous recordings were piano rolls. Program notes for an Argo LP issue of one of them said the pianist had disappeared, and you will find out why when reading Benko's history.

These recordings were made in 1973 and 1974. They are the work of a pianist who had disappeared from public life and had not even owned a piano for many years. Under any circumstances they would be noteworthy performances; their story makes them truly incredible. Nyiregyházi is a titan. His tone is enormous. Despite a few minor slips, he plays with remarkable facility. Best of all, he plays in an old-fashioned, freewheeling style that seems to come straight out of the nineteenth century. I can easily understand why credulous audiences suspected this

pianist of being a reincarnation of Liszt. I have no such belief, but I feel the pianist has penetrated to the heart of Liszt's music.

The first side of the LP was recorded in a studio in stereo, and the sound quality is beautiful. Side two was made at a recital on a portable cassette recorder, and it sounds horrible, tinny and shrill beyond my endurance. Professional equalizing could have made this a listenable recording, as I've had demonstrated for me at a studio. But the deficiencies of the recording are beyond the remedy of tone controls on home equipment. It's a pity that IPA went to the considerable trouble of producing this release without utilizing the best possible sound equipment. (I also don't care for most of this music, although that is a personal matter.) Still, it's half of a fascinating record, and the program notes are almost interesting enough to be worth the album's price themselves.

RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto No. 1, in f#, Op. 1; PROKOFIEFF: Piano Concerto No. 1, in D flat, Op. 10. Sviatoslav Richter, pianist; Large Symphony Orchestra, Moscow Radio conducted by Kurt Sanderling (in Rachmaninoff); Moscow Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kyril Kondrashin (in Prokofieff). Columbia Odyssey/Melodiya Y 34610.

The Prokofieff Concerto was the first recording by Richter to be published in the United States, on Concert Hall Society CHS 1316. Since then it has been reissued in numerous other editions, and was most recently published on Monitor MCS-2131, still available. The Rachmaninoff recording was made a few years later, and was issued here on Monitor MC 2004, also still available.

The Rachmaninoff recording always sounded pretty good, but the Prokofieff is a murky mess, with clangy piano sound and a congested orchestra. Columbia has done well mastering the recordings, and they have probably done as much for the Prokofieff as one can do. Still, you can make your choice between Odyssey and Monitor on the basis of coupling.

These recordings show the brilliant younger Richter of a quarter-century ago. Richter doesn't play this kind of virtuoso repertoire any more, but he was magnificent with it when he did. The Rachmaninoff is his only recording of the work. It is one of the few notable recordings of this seldom-played concerto, passionate and fiery, and the collaboration from Sanderling and the orchestra is strong.

Richter made a slightly later recording of the Prokofieff Concerto, with Karel Ančerl and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, for Supraphon. It was once available here on Artia ALP-123. Supraphon's recording was superior to Melodiya's, but I find the playing on the Russian performance even more exciting. Richter is, of course, one of the great interpreters of Prokofieff's music, and his tremendous energy makes an exciting experience out of the concerto.

I have listed the orchestras as Columbia does. However, I should also note that the orchestra accompanying the Prokofieff Concerto was originally listed as the "Moscow Youth Symphony Orchestra," which might help explain their congested sound and a few botched solo passages in the winds and brass. (I don't believe there is a "Moscow Symphony Orchestra.") The other orchestra is our old friend, the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, in the Russians' preferred translation.

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 5, in E flat, Op. 73. Rudolf Serkin, pianist; New York Philharmonic conducted by Bruno Walter. Columbia Odyssey Y 34607.

Columbia provides no recording date for this, but I believe it dates from 1941. It was issued on 78s as Columbia M 500, and was also one of Columbia's first LPs (ML 4004).

The performance is lovely without transforming the concerto into an engrossing experience—but then, I find it more and more difficult to become engrossed by this work, so perhaps I am not the ideal judge of the performance. Serkin plays with bold vigor through most of the piece, melting appropriately in the slow movement. Walter and the orchestra provide strong, full-bodied support, and while the tonal qualities of the recording are not kind to the orchestra the balance is good.

Serkin made two later recordings of this concerto. His stereo recording (with Bernstein leading the same orchestra) is as well played as this one if not better, limiting the appeal of the reissue to Walter completists, bargain hunters, and perverse collectors who prefer somewhat fuzzy mono sound to decent stereo.

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Concerto in e, Op. 64; **TCHAIKOVSKY:** Violin Concerto in D, Op. 35. Nathan Milstein, violinist; New York Philharmonic conducted by Bruno Walter (in the Mendelssohn); Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Frederick Stock (in the Tchaikovsky). Columbia Odyssey Y 34604.

Both of these recordings were prominent in Columbia's late 78 and early LP catalogues. The Mendelssohn, originally M 577, was reissued as ML 4001, Columbia's very first LP. It was also reissued by Bruno Walter Society. The Tchaikovsky, M 413, was first issued on LP as ML 4053. It was then reissued as Entre RL 3023, and, with Milstein's Bruch First Concerto, as RL 6631 and then as Harmony HL 7083. The new Odyssey is its fifth LP edition, and the fourth at bargain price.

Someone at Columbia must like the Tchaikovsky very much. So do I. It is one of the finest recordings of the piece I have ever heard. Milstein's approach to the piece is emotional and intense, with plenty of scoops and slides, never exceeding the bounds of good taste. His

fervent playing is just what the music needs, and it is supported by exciting facility. The spiccato passages in the finale, for example, are so crisp and speedy they tingle the hairs on the back of my neck.

Unfortunately, while Stock directs an excellent accompaniment, the orchestra is severely underbalanced in the recording, and its sound is rather muffled. However, the violin tone is warm and true, and I enjoy the performance well enough to put up with deficiencies of recording. There is a very odd brief cut near the end of the finale which sounds like a splice, but it is too close to the end of the piece to be a side break.

The sound quality of the Mendelssohn recording—which must be at least five years newer—is greatly superior, particularly in the comparatively brilliant orchestral tone. I don't care as much for this performance as for the Tchaikovsky, though. Both Milstein and the often gentle Walter push the Mendelssohn Concerto too hard. The first movement sounds downright aggressive; the second lacks repose; and the finale sounds like another Russian rondo, which of course it isn't. This is not bad playing, but it's also not very satisfying.

BRUCKNER: Symphony No. 7, in E. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Jascha Horenstein. Unicorn UNI 111.

This interesting curio was the first electrical recording made of a complete Bruckner symphony, in 1928. I believe it was also Horenstein's first recording, the opening of a glorious phonographic career which was to continue for nearly half a century.

The performance is an amazing achievement for a conductor not yet thirty years old. Although Horenstein did develop as a musician, and his later recordings of Bruckner's Eighth and Ninth Symphonies are superior as performances, the essentials of his style are present in this early effort. I think of these qualities as patience (particularly in building climaxes), good judgment, poise, and warmhearted emotional response to the music. The tempo for the scherzo is quick but not trivial. Overall I find this a convincing and moving performance, one with special meaning for one who reveres the memory of Horenstein as I do.

Transferring so early an orchestral recording is a tricky job at best. Overall, the job has been done quite well. (Unicorn gives no credit to the engineer; I am told it was Jerry Bruck.) Surface noise, always a problem with Polydor pressings, is kept to a minimum in most places, although it rises at the end of some 78rpm sides and side two of the first movement is noisy throughout. The strange noises at the beginning of the Adagio are present in the originals and could not have been eliminated; they sound like interference from a faulty tube in the original recording amplifier. Inevitably, the original recording is distant and somewhat muddy, but it sounds well-equalized and few details are lost. Bass and tympany register with satisfying impact. Best of

all, there is none of that offensive whistle often heard at the end of Polydor (and some Victor) record sides. I also like the recording engineer's splices. In places where he had to judge the length of silences, they sound just right; this requires a good musical ear. Some aspects of the transfer might have been improved (especially a quieter copy of side 2, such as the one I own), but overall the transfer is praiseworthy and preserves the recording in listenable form.

I do not like the producer's decision to publish this performance as a single LP. This causes the inevitable jarring break in the Adagio, which I found offensive. Unicorn could have done the Symphony as a two-record set, filling out the additional space with some of Horenstein's other Polydor recordings, all of which are worthy of resurrection.

Leslie Gerber