

BACH: Cantatas, no. 11 (Praise our God); no. 67 (Hold in affection Jesus Christ); Jesu, joy of man's desiring (from no. 147). Edna Mitchell (soprano); Kathleen Ferrier (contralto); William Herbert (tenor); William Parsons (basso); The Cantata Singers; The Jacques Orchestra; Dr. Reginald Jacques, conductor. London R 23206, \$3.98.

There are three conceivable reasons for this reissue: a demand for Bach cantatas in English translation, the participation of Kathleen Ferrier, or, by way of encore, the favorite accompanied choral from Cantata 147. As far as the first reason goes, the recording is a mixed blessing, for hardly a word can be caught in the choral sections, and the texts of the solos have been awkwardly shoehorned into the music. Ferrier, who has one aria to sing in Cantata 11 (to music Bach later transformed into the Agnus Dei of the B minor Mass), one recitative in no. 11 and two in no. 67 - the second interspersed with chorus - has been heard to better advantage in other recordings. After an abrupt start, Jesu, joy of man's desiring is acceptably done, but it occupies only a small portion of side 2.

Cantata 11 (otherwise known as the Ascension Oratorio) is described by Arnold Schering as "one of the most powerful works bequeathed to us by Johann Sebastian Bach." The opening chorus is "one of those joyful hymns of praise with which in this composer's works we are so well acquainted," and the final chorus is "a fantasia on a grand scale." Aside from the contralto aria there is one for soprano which the writer of the liner notes calls "one of the most magnificent in all of Bach's church cantatas." The tenor, cast in the role of Evangelist, sings recitatives as in the great Passions. Unhappily, the cantata is cut. One tenor recitative is omitted; the admired soprano aria (in da capo form) is reduced to its first section - and even so the postlude is abbreviated. The repeat sign in the final chorus is ignored. Nor is the choral singing a model of clarity. Cantata 67 is complete but heavy in sound. The other soloists are hardly in a class with Ferrier. Need I add, there are better recordings of these cantatas?

THREE CENTURIES OF BARITONE ART: Berenice—Si, tra i ceppi; Semele—Leave me, radiant light (Handel); Nozze di Figaro—Non più andrai; Don Giovanni—Madamina, il catalogo; Zauberflöte—Der Vogelfänger; L'Oca del Cairo—Ogni momento (Mozart); Fidelio—Ha! welch' ein Augenblick (Beethoven); Pagliacci—Si può (Leoncavallo); Don Pasquale—Un fuoco insolito (Donizetti); Otello—Credo (Verdi); Midsummer night's dream—Bottom's dream (Britten); Boris Godounow—Tchelkalov's aria (Musorgski); Falstaff—Ehi! paggio!... L'onore! Ladri! (Verdi). Geraint Evans (baritone); L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande; Bryan Balkwill, conductor. London SR 33226, \$3.98.

If one wants to be a little sentimental one may take the recent

spate of LP reissues as an indication of the passing time. Sir Geraint Evans made his Metropolitan debut in 1964, and if memory serves this recital appeared not too long after that. His debut was made in his greatest role; neither of the alternative Falstoffs who appeared in that memorable Bernstein-Zeffirelli production - Colzani or Corena - quite measured up to Evans. He will be remembered above all for that characterization, though his Figaro, Leporello and Captain Balstrode (in Peter Grimes) are also noteworthy. The title of this recital may seem a little pompous, for it makes no pretensions as a historical anthology.

The choice of an opener is hardly felicitous, for Evans is not an outstanding Handel singer. *Si, tra i ceppi* is taken at a rather plodding tempo, and the baritone's tone here lacks firmness. The Semele number is better; it has poise, but he does not sing the familiar text - Leave me, loathsome light, receive me, silent night, and thereby something of the quality has been lost. In Mozart Evans is more at home. His Figaro has plenty of dash, and his Leporello is well characterized and not overdrawn. Nor does he overplay Papageno. The patter song from *L'Oca del Cairo* makes a pleasant novelty. I have heard nastier Pizzaros, but with the assistance of the chorus, he creates some excitement in the Fidelio number if he doesn't quite spit.

I suppose in the course of his career he must have sung Tonio in *Pagliacci*, but here he seems a little out of patience with the Prologue. One might think he was working against the old 78 rpm time limits. But he gets a nice lilt into the *Don Pasquale* bit.

His Iago has style. Another aspect of Shakespeare is presented by Britten's *Midsummer night's dream*; if one suspects that Britten knew his Verdi, he made his own uses of his knowledge. One may wonder at the selection from Boris Godounow. Taken from Act 1, it comprises the entire role of Tchelkalov, who, says Ernest Newman, "has only some thirty bars to sing, but Musorgski, with his curious faculty for characterizing people or situations that would appear insignificant to other musical dramatists, has made him not only a personality in himself but the voice of a Russia too inarticulate to find its own self-expression." This is something we may have overlooked in performances of the opera. Finally, the famous monolog from Falstaff reminds us of Evans' great performance.

The voice is not notable for size; perhaps the conductor might have held the orchestra down a little in the climaxes. But with the few reservations indicated above, I can recommend the recital.

P.L.M.