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New Recordings

LAST ROUND-UP

I HAVE just closed the gramophone on the last record I shall be reviewing for some little while—with some real regrets mixed with prospective pleasures. Regrets at missing the excitement of prospecting regularly for musical gold and discovering it, if not quite as regularly; pleasure at the prospect of being able to do some quiet listening on my own.

Record reviewing has the major disadvantage that it cannot be hurried. A book can be reviewed as quickly as you can read it. A record reveals itself at a leisurely 33 1/3 r.p.m. and, whether it be bad or good, you can't hurry it along. True, some discs produce their merits, or, more likely, their demerits early in the piece, but most demand at least one complete audition and sometimes, for the sake either of the music or the performance, several listenings. A pile of 30 or more discs lying on the desk can be an appalling prospect.

Sometimes, I think, a succession of immaculately produced discs can be almost as aurally numbing as a bunch of duds. Too much perfection has its own tedium. The trouble is that recorded perfection is, very often, a fictitious one. Many patient hours may have been spent by performers and technicians, playing, replaying and playing

By OWEN
JENSEN



again, cutting and matching master tapes until everyone is happy. Spontaneity and the immediacy of performance tend to be lost under the polish. And yet sometimes something goes wrong. The chromium plating comes out more than a little tarnished.

There seems to be some such error of judgment in the recording of Mozart's Symphony No. 29 in A Major, K.201, played by the Serenade-Orchestra of the Salzburg Festival conducted by Bernard Paumgartner (London DTL 93057). The Serenade-Orchestra infuse the proper vivacity into this, one of Mozart's most charming symphonies, but the technicians seem to have gone a little haywire with their microphones. There is an exaggerated dynamic difference between the soft spots and the fortes. It sounds as if the first violins more than took charge of their microphonic place-

ment. On the other side of the disc Germaine Thyssens-Valentin gives a quite lovely playing of Mozart's Concerto No. 23 in A Major for Piano and Orchestra, K.488, with the same orchestra and conductor.

Leonid Kogan is a violinist to keep an ear on. Recently reviewed were his playing of a Mozart and a Prokofiev concerto (Columbia 33XC 1395) and earlier a Bach programme. This time it's Brahms—Sonatas No. 1 in G Major, Op. 78, and No. 2 in A Major, Op. 100 (Columbia 33CX 1381). With pianist Andrei Mitnik, Kogan makes this a most admirable chamber music recital.

Forty minutes or so of orchestral Liszt is a bit much—for me, anyhow. What starts in *Mephisto Waltz No. 1* as an orchestral richness and music of some vitality becomes, after *Mazeppa*, *Hamlet* and finally *Prometheus*, very much a collection of instrumental and thematic clichés. But if you wish to get to grips with Liszt, who undoubtedly contributed much to the development of the orchestra, this is the opportunity. L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris, conducted by Karl Munchinger, is, however, somewhat lightweight for Liszt's flamboyant colourings (Decca LXT 5142).

The Quartetto Italiano are their usual suave selves in four Haydn Quartets—No. 39 in C Major, Op. 33, No. 3; No. 78 in B Flat Major, Op. 76, No. 4 (Columbia 33CX 1383). This is distinguished playing.

In the contemporary field comes a programme of Belgian music played by L'Orchestre National de Belgique conducted by Fernand Quinet (London TW 91120). *Troisième Suite d'Orchestre* (in the olden style) by Joseph Jongen is pleasant enough listening although not particularly original. Jean Absil's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (soloist, André Dumortier) owes something to Fauré and Ravel, but seems something of a fuss about nothing much. The same composer's *Hommage à Lekeu* has much more to it, the most interesting composition in the programme. The Belgian orchestra gives a fine account of the music.

The Trumpet, Volume 3 (Decca LXT 5287) provides interesting listening, mostly in the way of brilliant trumpet playing by Louis Menardi and saxophone music by Marcel Mule, which makes that much maligned instrument a nobler one than you may have thought it. Concerto for Trumpet and Clarinet Sextet, with its angular themes, is not very ingratiating music. The composer is Raymond Loucheur. But a Sonata for Trumpet, Horn and Trombone by Poulenc adds to the gaiety of the programme. Jean Rivier's Concerto for Trumpet, Saxophone and Piano—Menardi, Mule and Annie d'Arco as pianist—offers excellent opportunities for brilliant playing by all the soloists.

Wellington's Schola Cantorum is, alas, no longer with us. Some of this fine choir's past glories, however, can be recaptured on a long-playing disc put out under the label of "Process Recording." The recording itself is not all one would hope for, but the Schola is as you will remember it. If there is sufficient interest in the disc, I understand, may be generally available here.

And now, over to some private listening. Maybe, for a start, Leonid Kogan playing Bach, Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, a spot of Chinese opera, some Music from India, and a session with Stravinsky. And then, if all goes well, a refreshment of the palate with a richer diet of live music.

(This is the last review of new recordings by Owen Jensen, who is leaving shortly for England.)

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