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New Recordings

CORONATION PAGEANT

A monthly review by
OWEN JENSEN

"ENGLISH composer — no composer" is an old jibe that now seems to be a thing of the past; but so for that matter is the new English musical renaissance. The English composer, today, must stand on his own feet. Decca has given him a further opportunity to strengthen his reputation with an issue of Coronation discs. None of the music is new, but some of it is unfamiliar. At the head of the list comes Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony*. Written in 1922, this is its first recording. The playing of the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult is fine and the singing of Margaret Ritchie in the last movement very charming (Decca LXT 2787). This symphony represents the Vaughan Williams of *The Lark Ascending*. A different aspect of his work comes in the long overdue recording of the *Mass in G Minor*, sung by the Fleet Street Choir under T. B. Lawrence (Decca LXT 2794). This is strangely magnificent music that does not woo the ear but nevertheless reaches down to the depths of the heart. Paired with the Vaughan Williams Mass is *Missa in Honorem Sancti Dominici*, by Edmund Rubbra. I find Rubbra more convincing here than in the symphony recently recorded, yet his tendency to shift his ground from astringent austere harmonies to a Brahmsian conservatism without apparent provocation can be, for me at least, somewhat irritating. Both works are sensitively sung.

No Coronation pageant would be complete, of course, without a slice of Elgar served with just a little sugar. Sir Malcolm Sargent, with the London Symphony Orchestra presents the *Enigma Variations* (Decca LXT 2786) without the sugar, a little stolidly and seemingly reluctant to yield wholeheartedly to Elgar's romantic sentiments. Nevertheless, this *Enigma* has moments of real beauty. The recording is technically good. The *Suite of Dramatic Music* of Purcell, which fills up what remains of the second side, includes the air made famous by Benjamin Britten in his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. Even after Albert Coates's editing, Purcell, weight for weight, comes off best beside Elgar.

The Coronation issue is topped off with a brilliant performance of Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, and Warlock's *Capriol Suite*, both played by the Boyd Neel Orchestra (Decca LXT 2790). While this Coronation music includes nothing new or startling, the high standard of both playing and recording of music that comprises far more than period pieces, makes one or all of the discs present and future collector's items. By the way, if you want a Coronation souvenir, Oriole records (MG 20003) have a disc which includes the main points of the ceremony.

Passages from the 18th Century

The light that glistens on the horizons of the 18th Century is not always a golden one. One of the duller patches is to be found on a disc of instrumental music which includes concertos (18th Century type) by Alessandro Scarlatti, Tartini, Vivaldi and a Sonata for Strings by Albinoni (Brunswick AXTL 1004). The playing of the Virtuosi di

Roma conducted by Renato Fasano tends to be dry and prim, and is not always rhythmically precise enough to bring this music (some of it a trifle desiccated) alive. A concerto for 'cello, strings and harpsichord by Vivaldi is the pick of the bunch. Turn, however, to Gerard Souzay (baritone) singing arias by Mozart, A. Scarlatti, Lully, Gluck and Rameau (Decca LX 3112) and you have some of the best of the 18th Century. The accompaniment of L'Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris enhances the singing.

The rediscovered music of Vivaldi is treasure trove indeed. The Red Priest is always irrepressibly the live spark. His setting of the *Gloria* for chorus, soli, orchestra and organ is one of the month's most exciting performances. Pierrette Alarie (soprano), Marie-Therese Cahn (contralto), with the Ensemble Vocal de Paris conducted by André Jouve (Ducretet-Thomson LPG 8556) recapture the lively spirit of the music. The well-known *Exultate Jubilate*, of Mozart, which occupies the reverse side seems, despite some bright singing by Pierrette Alarie, quite sedate beside the Vivaldi. Altogether different from the Mozart and Vivaldi is Haydn's *Missa Cellensis* in C—and a different matter from the Vaughan Williams and Rubbra Masses, too. It is performed by the Kademe Chorus of Vienna, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and soloists conducted by Dr. Hans Gillesberger (Nixa HLP 2011). This is a virile interpretation of vigorous and beautiful music—a little too consistently virile perhaps. What may be tape flutter imparts a wobble to some of the singing.

Joyous Music

When you're tired of listening with your head or your heart you can always listen with your feet. Music, not for thinking about or wallowing in, but for sheer joy, is hard to write, usually hard to perform, and quite hard to come by. Schubert's *Trout Quintet* surely comes in this category. The performance by Members of the Vienna Octet with Walter Panhoffer (piano) (Decca LXT 2533) does not realise all the fun of this music but, despite a sometimes overmodulated bass part, this is pleasant playing.

Some of my friends tell me that Brahms's *Liebeslieder Waltzes* should come under this heading, too. Personally, I find Brahms's somewhat heavy-handed good humour a little soggy. This is no fault of the Roger Wagner Chorus, and pianists Elaine Heckman and Beryl Lee, who make the best of the music (Capitol CTL 7028). The Roger Wagner Chorus, on the reverse side, sing some unaccompanied German folk songs: A *Nönet* by the celebrated Louis Spohr (1784-1849) is described on the record cover as to its last movement, as coming "as near to farce as instrumental music can," and indulging in "riotous humour." Maybe, but don't expect it to be Laurel and Hardy stuff. This is sedate 19th Century humour, innocuous and inoffensive—but some really smart wind playing by members of the Vienna Octet, with J. Nieder-

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