

first) simply bowled me over. If that man wasn't a top genius of musical expression, then I'm an idiot.

In experiences of the sort you'll have in listening to this music, nobody can say for you what your feeling will be. Either you hear what Mahler writes, or you don't. The tremendously poignant, moving, expressive lines of melody, the almost hysterically eloquent dissonance, that never resolves yet never becomes harsh, rather—somehow—more and more personal, the extraordinary "line" of these complex melodic shapes, leaving tones hanging, unfinished, in the mind, weaving a complex web of emotional tension through melody itself, the marvelously simple harmonies, so endlessly fresh—all this is the sort of thing that is felt, without words, by your ear can take it in.

What more is there to say? Try it and see. If your musical sense is experienced enough to catch onto Mahler's language, you'll never forget this piece. If not—then, I say, come back to it and try again later. I don't know what possessed the Cleveland orchestra and Mr. Szell here but to me they sound positively angelic: it is a superb performance and worthy to stand beside any recorded Mahler by such as the more famous Bruno Walter. Extraordinary team work, of a sort you rarely hear today.

The recent Partita by the Britisher, William Walton, is perhaps an unfortunate team-mate on this record. It's a nice, bright, beautifully orchestrated piece, full of pep and color and not a little triteness, perhaps out of Sir William's extensive experience in writing movie music. By itself it is just fine, but after Mahler's soul-tearing music, it seems utterly flat and almost a desecration. Better play it first!

Dvorak: Violin Concerto.

Glazounov: Violin Concerto. Millstein; Pittsburgh Symphony, Steinberg.
Capitol SP 8382 stereo

Here are two big Romantic concertos, in a recording re-released for its stereo debut out of earlier Capitol material, and though the Dvorak is probably the most enduring work it is the Glazounov that makes the easiest listening.

It isn't that Glazounov is superficial so much as that he was a natural concerto man, whereas Dvorak was one of those composers who somehow flounder in immensity when they get down to concerto writing—they try to make their music lofty and timeless in the grand manner, where it would be better off in a simpler style. Oddly, it is in Dvorak's symphonies that he achieved the direct orchestral style that makes him so accessible to us today. For him, evidently the symphony was a less formal, more congenial medium than the concerto—which had to wear full dress, so to speak, as he conceived it.

You'll find plenty of good Dvorak lilt and melody here, but it won't hit you first-off, then. But perhaps after the tenth playing you'll be utterly bored with the more sensuous and colorful Glazounov, and delighted with Dvorak. Could be.

I almost left the performance and recording unmentioned; in truth, you can take it for granted as tops with these musical forces and Capitol's big, natural Pittsburgh stereo sound.

Chopin: Mazurkas (Complete). Nadia Reisenberg, piano.

Westminster XWN 18830/31/32

Reisenberg is one of those big, forthright lady pianists who manage to combine the feminine attributes of sensitivity and allure, pianistically speaking, with the masculine virtues of strength, authority, massiveness—also speaking pianistically. (You won't have to worry whether she weighs 110 or 210; you can't see her.) This is her second big set for Westminster, the complete Nocturnes having been already released.

I expected, somehow, to find these a bit on the hard side but I was delightfully surprised. Without sacrificing any part of her authoritative strength, Miss Reisenberg here plays with a bewitching and lovely tone, poetic, alive, lyric. There is give, elasticity, where too many newer pianistic virtuosos

bang and whang away; there is songfulness but well-styled and controlled.

This set of records made me remember again that Chopin himself is said to have played in a fairly gentle style, all things considered, and I can't help remembering, too, that his music is always more for the salon than for the huge concert hall. It is styled that way by Reisenberg, though with all the strength you can want in the louder passages.

Westminster's recording is superb, though it does not produce the effect, noted in Westminster's standard blurb, of the listener's chair being "in the most favored seat, acoustically, in the concert hall." Instead, it is close-up, fairly dry in sound but wonderfully natural and, in the big moments, astonishingly clean. A fine recorded effect any way you look at it, and right in your own home salon.

Bach: Brandenburg Concertos (Complete). Members of the Cento Soli Orch. of Paris, Scherchen. Omega OML 1039/40/41

These three discs (available separately) are the first non-stereo Omegas I've received and I assume that stereo is also available—since all the other recent and excellent Omegas with this French orchestra have been recorded in stereo.

Here, in the umpteenth—umptieth, I should say—recording of the six Bach Concertos, we have an odd combo, an all-French orchestra and a noted, if somewhat eccentric, German conductor. The results are erratic if, on the whole, very listenable. Scherchen is most likely to be noticeable in his often violently eccentric tempi and dynamics. Here, the Scherchen touch, which I would in this case call the kiss of death, comes in the last Concerto, Number Six. It is done in abysmally slow time, straight through—even the normally buoyant movement at the end—and without the slightest trace of expression or phrasing, absolutely dead-pan. Is he serious? Undoubtedly. But then, that's Scherchen, All or nothing.

Most of the other works play along at normal-sounding speeds and in fairly natural stylings, the orchestration modern and relatively authentic, with harpsichord continuo, high trumpet and the rest. In listening to these works we ought to remember, I think, that they are essentially chamber music for a large "chamber" and do not really require the services of a conductor; a group of good musicians can play the stuff beautifully without external help. Indeed, the only "conductor" envisioned in the original would have been the man at the harpsichord, who would have merely given a helpful nod now and again at points of change. (Since the music was never played in Bach's time, he didn't get a chance to accompany it himself at the keyboard.)

The French touch is evident here in two ways. First, there is a somewhat brittle, bright quality to the sound that comes in part from French ways of playing, as contrasted to the thicker, sweeter German approach. Second, the French instruments themselves contribute a rather typical sound, especially the wind instruments, the more nasal oboes, for example. And, of course, there are the French horns, which in France are played with a vibrato and sound like saxophones. Odd—but who knows whether Bach's own didn't do the same?

2. ANYTHING GOES

Music and Song of Italy. Collected by Alan Lomax. Tradition TPL 1030

If you like your folk music styled for night-club and restaurant, stay away. This is real country stuff, from one of the most primitive parts of existing Europe—racy, raw, often ugly. The men yell and the women scream sometimes, though they'd call it singing; the harmony varies from none to the sound of the thirteenth century, plus suggestions of every age since then, preserved ever since in these outlying and isolated areas of Southern Italy and Sicily.

I gather that this is material more or less left over from the huge Columbia series of folk recordings done by Lomax. It seems to fit in with that material, anyhow, and of

course Lomax made hundreds of hours of tape for each bit that found its way onto the final discs. This, in any case, is fascinating stuff and my only complaint is one that can't be answered—how to put enough of each item down, and yet cover the ground. Too many fade-outs just as things get interesting. But some of these items would be good to hear the long night straight through, as they were probably heard in the original!

Música Flamenca. Niño Ricardo, guitar.

Epic LC 3556

Flamenco Española. Bernabé de Morón (with other guitars, mandolin, dancers).

Hifirecord R311 stereo

These two came in together and I was intrigued to note that the second man was a student of the first. Not being a flamenco expert, I can't tell you which of them plays the better music—but the two records are interestingly different.

The Epic recording of Niño Ricardo is made close-up, with no liveness at all—it is in effect an absolute recording, the instrument itself without acoustic room coloration. The single guitarist plays alone, minus singing (though at this close range he can be heard producing a slight wheeze or groan along with his playing). For my ear, there's an uncomfortable feeling of restraint. We are much too close for pleasure and the man seems somehow to be out of his element, playing not for dancers and listeners but for the impartial microphone in some dead and formal studio.

Flamenco experts won't mind this a bit and I expect the music itself is spontaneous enough. But the rest of us will find this Epic recording easiest to listen to at a distance—in another room or around the corner, rather than face to face. That adds at least a bit of atmosphere and space to the sound, even if it is only our own home-style acoustics.

You have here a fine demonstration of absolute recording itself (I coined the term for my own convenience a long while back) but, even more important, a good illustration of our universal need for non-absolute recording—i.e., some species of liveness or atmosphere built into the recorded sound and reproduced along with it. Absolute recording is clinically revealing but strangely unconvincing.

The Hifirecord stereo adds just this element, in a number of useful ways. First, it is clearly made within an audible space, as you listen, and stereo helps to strengthen the effect. Second, the extra guitars (spaced out in stereo) plus the contrasted metallic sound of the mandolin every so often, make for the excitement of musical teamwork, a vital part of this type of music. Finally, a group of dancers is heard in the background, sometimes as a loud castanet accompaniment, sometimes in the actual foot work; the excitement of their actions is beautifully conveyed in the recorded sound.

Exact coordination of dancers and instruments in many of the shifting flamenco rhythms shows us, too, how these dance-and-music patterns are known traditions, shared by all the performers.

Both records are of excellent quality. The Hifirecord is one of the best stereos I've heard in sheer sound perfection, with superb string and footwork transients and a phenomenally quiet, rumblefree background.

African Jazz. Les Baxter & His Orch.

Capitol T-1117

If Les Baxter is African, then I guess this is African music, but it sure wasn't recorded in the jungle. More likely in the Capitol Tower, Hollywood & Vine.

You see, I got this one by accident: it was resting demurely inside an album cover labelled "Five Centuries of Spanish Music" with Victoria de los Angeles. Imagine my surprise. But I'm always ready to take Capitol up, surprise or no.

Anyhow (am I right, Mr. Robertson?), this is moderately cool and sophisticated jazz of a mildly progressive sort, replete with a number of exotic instruments and sound-effects which, I suppose, might be termed African. Very nice recording and I wish Capitol had tricked me in stereo, instead of mono. Very nice music, come to think of it.