

Music on Tape

Mozart, Dittersdorf and Others by Webcor and Omegatape

USERS OF MAGNETIC TAPE will be gratified by the appearance of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, played by a string orchestra under the leadership of Leonard Sorkin, first violin of the Fine Arts Quartet, on a seven-inch Webcor reel, 7.5 ips, No. 2923-3, in company with other standard, admired music for strings. For *Eine k N*, in the recording industry, is a symbol of serene and confident stability: it is not issued at this date in the expectation of filling a void, but rather as an acceptance of the conventions of respectability. Every manufacturer of musical preserves must have it on his shelves. (This is a pretty good one, better than most of the discal versions in the honest style of its playing and the unstrained quality of the string reproduction.)

In fact, what impresses most deeply the listener is the general absence of sonic tension in this pile of tapes. The great diminution of background noise he would naturally expect and discount, but accustomed to disks he is always braced for the disturbance of a piano occasionally belling or blasting, and the deterioration of violins becoming strident when they become loud. Many disks have no sign of these defects, but everyone has heard them often enough to dread their appearance on any disk until trial has proved it uncontaminated. After a few minutes with the tapes we can relax and forget temporarily those particular ordeals of reproduction.

In articulation, resonance, and distinctness most of these seem above the average of the average disk and below the best. In brilliance and differentiation of timbre first-class modern disks are notably superior, but it is to be noted that most of the tapes in this survey are not scored for brilliant effect. An exception is Tchaikovsky's *Tempest*, with a crowded instrumentation, and the tape of this has insufficient volume to overcome background noise, the choirs of the orchestra are not in balance, and timbre is ambiguous. Sonically the best of all is the track devoted to eight short pieces for violin or cello and piano on Webcor 2923-2, very clear and most comfortably assimilable.

The three string quartets, by Dvorak, Debussy, and Dittersdorf, neatly played and registered with pleasant cleanliness, are as a whole the most successful musically of the batch. The Fine Arts Quartet, responsible for them all, have made many disks characterized by a steady probity of musicianship without concern for individuality, giving a product always acceptable and seldom ultimate. The Dittersdorf is new to reproduced music, has all the entertaining unimportance of the composer, one of the eighteenth century's most facile factories, and will suggest Haydn on holiday.

Only the first of the three Mozart Divertimentos, KV 136, 137, and 138, has found its way to a disk, so the Omegatape registration of them all is a contribution of real value to the coming Mozart Bicentennial. They are played with brave and telling élan and slighted shading; hard to resist and hard in tone. —The Piano Concerto, KV 467, has a similar excitement of bold adventure in the decisive outline given by the same conductor, and a similar disinclination to show contrast; but the piano tone is pearly and the woodwinds are beautifully distinct in a registration of high order, while the pianist shows a rippling symmetry of fingering worth orchestral support of higher finesse.

The Sorkin version of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings* has more polish than the Vicars, and the various smaller works under the Sorkin leadership are direct and honorable.

The piano-sound contrived for the McDowell miscellany is outstanding in that it cannot be faulted at any point, which would be a great rarity on a disk. On the other hand the best disks have a stinging vibrancy not evident here. The *pièce de résistance* on this track is Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*, surprisingly genteel for the



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devil's playing, but the three shorter works, by Granados, Ravel, and Liszt again, are poetically enunciated.

The voices of the John Halloran Choir have been impressively recorded in a standard glee-club sampling of the sacred and the profane, of tears and laughter. The *Organ Moods* of Miss Scott seem pretty morose no matter what she plays in the popular repertory, but the reproduction is excellent, imposing in the bass. The seven appetizers played by the Fine Arts Quartet on Webcor 2922-3 sound fine. There is an Omegatape demonstration reel "D" containing excerpts from the company's initial tapes besides five sections devoted to tests.

The issuance of music on tape is still a new commercial venture. We expect, and find, uncertainties of procedure, imperfect planning and perplexities of choice. Pretty obviously Webcor has decided that a seven-inch, 7.5 ips reel should contain as close to thirty minutes of music on each track as can be fitted. Thus a major work is followed by a movement from another major work and a complete minor work, be they compatible or not. The underlying intention, to give the public its money's worth, is laudable, but the results are hodge-podge and out of date. On disks excerpts except from operas have become very rare. Omegatape has not followed this path, but permits several minutes of silence to follow the end of music on one track and several more to precede the beginning of music on the other track. There is a naive honesty in this: the company is giving a generous length of tape; but unless we detest the company's music and erase it the generosity creates a nuisance. Webcor supplies no annotations and those provided by Omegatape are sketchy. The sides of the transparent reels are by neither company boldly marked to show which track is which.

The Webcors are available in seven-inch reels, single or double tracked, and five-inch double-tracked reels. Some of the works listed below have been issued in all three forms, making acceptability easier to the purchaser and cataloguing a curse to a magazine of limited space. Only the most inclusive form found is mentioned here.

C. G. BURKE

The following tapes are all Webcor, seven-inch, double-track, 7.5 inches per second, \$12.00 each:

- 2923-1. Debussy: *Quartet*; Haydn: *Andante from Op. 76, No. 2*. Fine Arts Quartet. *Piano Music of Ravel, Granados, and Liszt*. Robert McDowell.
- 2923-2. Dvorak: *Quartet No. 6, "American"*; Haydn: *Adagio from Op. 64, No. 5*. Fine Arts Quartet. *8 Items for Violin or Cello and Piano*. Leonard Sorkin, George Sopkin, Alexander Joseffer.
- 2923-3. Vivaldi: *Concerto Grosso in D minor*; Mozart: *Eine k N*; Bach-Stoessel: *Prelude in E*; Tchaikovsky: *Serenade for Strings*; Bolzoni: *Minuet*. Sorkin Symphonette.
- 2922-1. *Choral Miscellany*. John Halloran Choir.

The following are all Omegatape, five-inch, double-track, 7.5 inches per second.

- 5002. Tchaikovsky: *Serenade for Strings*. "Concert Artist Symphony of London", Mervyn Vicars, cond.; \$6.45.
- 5007. Mozart: *Piano Concerto No. 21, in C, KV 467*. Sergio Fiorentino; London Mozart Ensemble, Mervyn Vicars, cond.; \$5.95.
- 6001. Mozart: *Divertimentos for Strings, KV 136, 137, and 138*. (Labeled 3 Salzburg Symphonies.) London Mozart Ensemble, Mervyn Vicars, cond.; \$6.45.
- 6008. Tchaikovsky: *The Tempest*. Vienna National Opera Orchestra, Zoltan Fekete, cond. *Elegy*. "Concert Artist Symphony Orchestra of London," Mervyn Vicars, cond.; \$6.45.

The following are all Webcor, five-inch, double-track, 7.5 inches per second, \$8.00 each:

- 2922-2. *Broadway Miscellany*. Leonard Sorkin Strings.
- 2922-3. *Excerpts from 6 Quartets, and 2 transcriptions*. Fine Arts Quartet.
- 2922-4. Dittersdorf: *Quartet in E flat*; Turina: *Oracion del Torero*; Wolf: *Italian Serenade*. Fine Arts Quartet.
- 2922-7. *Organ Moods*. Adele Scott.