

State Opera Orchestra, Anton Heiller, cond. A-V TAPE LIBRARIES AV 1038. 7-in. \$10.95.

If you nourish the delusion that tape is suited best or only to "background" music and non-participating listening, this jubilant No. 51 (above all its ecstatic final Alleluia) and endearingly lyrical Italian Cantata, No. 209, will electrifyingly jolt you out of it. In his July 1955 review of the LP version (Bach Guild-Vanguard BG 546). Nathan Broder justly noted some imbalance between obligato trumpet and solo soprano in the first aria of No. 51, but I must confess that Helmut Wobisch's bravura playing and ringing tone are so exciting to me that I can't regret their partially obscuring the vocal line and text. Anyway, Miss Stich-Randall convincingly demonstrates her own skill and tonal purity in other passages, and the recorded performances throughout are surcharged with irresistibly infectious vitality.

#### BACH

*Toccatas and Fugues: in D minor, BWV 565; in E, BWV 566; in F major, BWV 540*

*Prelude and Fugue in E-flat major, BWV 552; Toccata in D minor ("Dorian"), BWV 538; Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue in C major, BWV 564; Canzona in D minor, BWV 588; Alla Breve in D major, BWV 589*

Carl Weinrich, organ.

SONOTAPE SW 1011 and SW 5002. Two 7-in. \$7.95 and \$11.95 respectively.

Westminster's rapturous claims for the recording potentialities of the Church of Our Lady organ in Skänninge, Sweden, no longer strike me as extravagant after hearing these two tapes, which reveal the first completely felicitous marriage I know between the vivid tonal spectra of authentic baroque stops and modern sonic power and flexibility. Moreover, the acoustic environment seems ideal—with enough reverberation to provide the characteristic spaciousness of a church performance, yet not so much as to blur intricately woven textures. There are sure to be listeners for whom many timbres here will seem strangely "raw," and perhaps some for whom Weinrich's readings may seem unduly metronomic or lacking in conventional expressiveness. But even they hardly can remain unresponsive to the tremendous drive and novel lack of ponderousness in the usually overdramatized Toccata and Fugue in D minor. While others, who have long cherished Weinrich's Bach interpretations in spite of the wretched recording he has been given in the past, now can exult in hearing him in the most thrilling, best balanced, and most profoundly satisfying organ recordings I, for one, have ever encountered. For just one of many aural marvels, listen particularly to the pedal-points in the F major Toccata (or Prelude as it is more commonly known)! (Some, but not all, of the works played here have been released in LP versions, on Westminster W-LAB 7023 and WN 18148, which—as of April—have not yet been reviewed in these pages.)

#### CHOPIN

*Twenty-four Etudes, Op. 10, Op. 25*

Guimar Novaes, piano.

PHONOTAPES-SONORE PM 119. 7-in. \$8.95.

My mind says this is *not* the way to play most of these Studies; my heart and ears indignantly demand, Who cares about occasional muddling or miniaturization when we are bewitched by such lyric warmth and truly singing piano tone? In any case, no properly definitive version of all 24 Etudes has yet appeared and Novae's, for all its digital and formal flaws, is by far the most sensuously gratifying. Strangely, the Vox LP versions (PL 9070, April 1955, and PL 7560 of 1952) never have been coupled on a single disk, so the present tape has a special value even above its freedom from surface noise and its right-in-the-room piano reproduction—superb in Op. 10 and tonally only a shade less full-blooded, but no less ingratiating, in the older recording of Op. 25.

#### GREGORIAN CHANT

Roger Wagner Chorale, unaccompanied. OMEGATAPE OT 8003. 7-in. \$10.95.

Granted that the male voices of the popular West Coast choral group are hardly masters of the Solesmes tradition, and that a larger ensemble, recorded less closely and in a more expansive acoustic environment, might approach more nearly the ideal in plainchant reproduction—these 13 chants and 8 Intros in 8 Modes are otherwise sung and recorded with wholly admirable fervor, straightforwardness, and clarity, thankfully without the too frequently heard but always inexcusable "support" of an organ. No less importantly, the velvety background of tape reproduction enhances the atmospheric magic of the music itself as no disk possibly could—although, to be sure, I haven't heard the LP versions (Gregorian Institute LAY 106 and LL 111), unreviewed in these pages, or anywhere else to my knowledge.

#### RAVEL

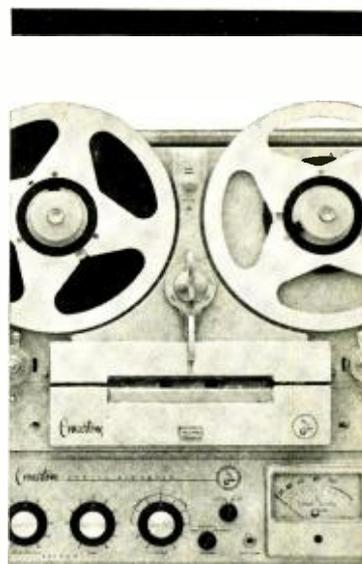
*Bolero; Alborado del gracioso; Pavane pour une Infante défunte; La Valse; Rapsodie espagnole*

Orchestre Radio-Symphonique de Paris. René Leibowitz, cond.

PHONOTAPES-SONORE PM 107. 7-in. \$8.95.

As I noted last month, one of the most delightful first rewards of my tape adventures was replacing my dirty (if not worn) LP of this Ravel program (Vox PL 8150, Jan.-Feb. 1954) with a tape less easily subject, if not impervious, to deterioration. But, except perhaps for the *Alborado* and *Pavane*, Leibowitz's way with the music itself still strikes me as uninspired, while the recording—ultra-sensational only a few years ago—has since been out-sensationalized. Under micro-aural comparison, the (clean) disk version retains a slight superiority in high-end crispness; the tape wins by an equally narrow margin in the mid and low ranges and in over-all sonic balance. And the tape enjoys an advantage that well may appeal to audiophiles dubious about the abilities of their pickups (and the disk-producer's lateral equalization) to cope

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