

MONO HI-FI CONCERT

Reviewed by

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● **BACH**—6 Brandenburg Concerti. Members of the Paris Cento Soli Orchestra. Hermann Scherchen cond. Omega OML-1039/41 3 12" \$4.98 each

Musical Interest: A fascinating demi-dozen

Performance: Variable

Recording: Likewise

The enigmatic Mr. Scherchen is revealed here at his most enigmatic. His performances range from mediocre (in the Second Concerto) to superb (in the Fifth). The chief complaint centers around erratic tempi which usually are on the impossibly slow side (for example, the final movements of both the Third and Sixth Concerti); and yet the opening movement of the Second Concerto is taken at a jog-trot tempo which becomes ludicrous after a while. Furthermore, in the Second Concerto the trumpet soloist, the respected Roger Delmotte, goes completely to pieces; how this performance was approved for release is a mystery.

On the positive side, though, in addition to a brilliant account of the Fifth Concerto, with some marvelous harpsichord work by Ruggero Gerlin, the First and Fourth Concerti also receive superlative performances that abound in re-creative episodes of sheer magic (the *Polacca* section of the First, for example).

The trouble with this set of three discs is that each of the excellent performances is coupled with an irritatingly poor one. The adage, "You can't win," was never more applicable than it is here. In the bridge between the two movements of the Third Concerto, incidentally, Scherchen is content merely to play the two chords as Bach wrote them, with some very minor filigree, rather than allowing his harpsichordist, the highly qualified Gerlin, to improvise the cadenza, as Bach surely intended here and as Couraud does in this month's other integral edition of the Brandenburgs reviewed in the stereo section of this issue.

A word about the recorded sound: in general it is bright and clear, with good bass, but there are occasional spots of muddiness (the opening of the jinxed Second Concerto, for example). M. B.

● **BACH**—Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D minor (S. 903); Concerto No. 3 in D minor after Marcello (S. 974); Toccata in

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BEST OF THE MONTH

- Vox offers a best buy for cello fanciers with its "Vox Box" of all the **Beethoven Cello Sonatas and Variations** played by Joseph Schuster and Friedrich Wuehrer.—"They play with insight, power and a deep regard for the music." (see p. 82)
- United Artists has another stunning Stokowski release in Ernest Bloch's impassioned **Schelomo** with George Neikrug as solo cellist.—"Schelomo has never been recorded in such dramatic sound, nor in such vividly articulate fashion." (see p. 82)
- Angel's long-awaited 2-disc set of Gyorgy Cziffra playing the fiendishly difficult **Liszt Transcendental Etudes for Piano** lives fully up to expectation.—"Cziffra plays this music with real flair. He believes in every note." (see p. 86)

C minor (S. 911); Italian Concerto in F Major (S. 971). Paul Badura-Skoda (piano). Westminster XWN 18855 \$4.98

Musical Interest: Considerable

Performance: Good for piano

Recording: Very good

Badura-Skoda plays these pieces with insight, grace and facility. His tone is pleasing and his dynamic scale obviously is held within the bounds that are considered proper for the performance of this music on the piano. Therein is the rub. The music sounds right on the harpsichord and no allowances need be made for the instrument. Despite the actual greater power of the piano, harpsichord performances of this music *sound* more powerful. This begs the question: unless a performance of these pieces by a specific pianist is specifically wanted, and considering the ease of recording harpsichordists today, wherein lies the virtue of a piano recording? For me, there is no logic in it. Which does not mean that others won't prefer piano versions, and this is well-played and well-recorded. W. D.

● **BACH**—Organ Concertos after Various Composers: No. 1 in G Major (Prince Johann Ernst of Sachsen-Weimar); No. 2 in A minor (Vivaldi, Op. 3, No. 8); No. 3 in C Major (Vivaldi, Op. 7, No. 5); No. 4 in C Major (Prince Johann Ernst of Sachsen-Weimar); No. 6 in E-Flat (unknown). Hans

All records reviewed in this column may be played on either single speaker monophonic or two speaker stereophonic equipment. They are 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm records that should be played with the RIAA setting.

Heintze (organ). Deutsche Grammophon Archive ARC 3118 \$5.95

Musical Interest: For specialists

Performance: Good

Recording: Varies with acoustics

Just as many of the greatest masters of the art of painting made copies of earlier masterpieces in order to help develop facility in their craft, so did the young Johann Sebastian Bach at Weimar (1708-17) set to paper a whole series of keyboard concertos based on the music of other men. Six were for organ solo and sixteen were for harpsichord. Some drew on masters like Vivaldi, Marcello, and Telemann. Others were based on compositions by Prince Ernst, musically gifted son of his Royal employer at Weimar who died in 1715 at the age of 19.

Quite naturally, the "Vivaldi" pieces are the most interesting and vital—in particular the brilliant work in C Major after Vivaldi's Op. 7, No. 5 in D. Indeed, it was through Bach's arrangements that interest in the work of Vivaldi was finally stirred to the point where efforts were made to locate and collate the original Vivaldi mss. in Italy, culminating in the current post-World War II Vivaldi boom.

Herr Heintze turns out neat and straightforward performances, using two fine baroque instruments at Ottoheuren—the big St. Trinity Organ and the more intimate Holy Ghost Organ. The big instrument sound superbly in the "Vivaldi" scores, notably where echo effects are called for; but there is less blurring of texture where the Holy Ghost Organ is used, thanks to more intimate acoustics. A fine record for organ fanciers, Vivaldi enthusiasts, baroque music specialists. D. H.

● **BEETHOVEN**—Bagatelles in C minor