

American Record Guide



The Roy Harris Revival — part II

Allegro
Four Who Converged on Liszt

The Latest Direct and Digital Discs

contrasted against the brutally harsh sounds of war, and "Intent to Kill", an unremittingly martial *ostinato* building inexorably to a breathless climax). But the episodic nature of much of this score is aggravated by the fact that this recording is taken directly from the music tracks of the film, with no adaptation of the score for non-visual enjoyment. What editing has been done has

not been particularly successful—somehow the work has been given three finales, one after another. The mono sound is shrill, and the packaging and annotation careless, particularly in the matter of identification of sequences. It remains, however, a worthwhile investment not only for film music collectors but also for cinematically uninitiated listeners.

—Koldys

Director Digital

CHOPIN: *Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor*, Op. 31; *Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor*, Op. 58. Edward Auer, piano. RCA RDCE-7, \$15.95.

ROMANCE de AMOR (trad.); SOR: *Introduction and Allegro*, Op. 14; *Andante*, Op. 31, No. 4; BRITTEN: *Nocturnal*, Op. 70. Kazuhito Yamashita, guitar. RCA RDCE-8, \$15.95.

VIVALDI: *Concerti*, Op. 8, *Trial of Harmony and Invention*, Nos. 1.4 "The Four Seasons". Shigeru Toyama, violin, Vivaldi Ensemble Tokyo conducted by Masaaki Hayakawa. RCA RDCE-50112, \$31.90.

GOULD: *Spirituals for Orchestra; Fbster Gallery*. London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Morton Gould. Crystal Clear Records. CSS 7005, \$14.95.

PROKOFIEV: *Love of Three Oranges*, suite Op. 33; RAVEL: *La Vette*; DE FALLA: *La Vida Breve—dance*. London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Walter Susskind. Crystal Clear Records. CCS 7006, \$14.95.

CHOPIN: *Polonaise in A-Flat Major*, Op. 53 "Heroic"; *Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise in E-Flat Major*, Op. 22; *Variations Brilliantes on a Theme from Ludovic by HaMvy*, Op. 12; *Four Mazurkas*, Op. 6; *Contredanse in G-Flat Major*; *Tarantella in A-Flat Major*, Op. 43. Malcolm Prager, piano. Telarc DG-10040, \$14.95.

This mixed bag of direct-to-disc and digital records stimulates thoughts about both philosophical and physical differences between the two recording methods. Broadly speaking, direct-to-disc records are archival whereas digital records are creative. That is to say that direct-to-disc records provide a permanent record of a one-time event, substantially complete and unedited—except for whatever tinkering with balances, equal-

ization, or positioning that might take place during the recording session. On the other hand, digitally recorded performances can be edited by computer with ease and accuracy, allowing a creative flexibility during the recording process that is even greater than that possible with traditional recording techniques. Physically, there are also differences. I doubt that I could tell a direct-to-disc record from a digital record in a blind-fold test, but with eyes open I can hear apparent differences between the two. The direct records are shallower and more glisteningly brilliant in sound than the digital, which are richer and have an extended bass response. This latter, or perhaps all of the differences, may be accounted for by the half speed cutting that is possible with the digital process. The direct-to-disc sound seems more natural and cohesive and less overblotted.

RCA's direct-to-disc Auer record displays a sharp-edged, clean sound with enough hall ambience to soften the aggressiveness of the superbly captured piano. Auer displays a brilliant technique tempered by lyricism that makes these attractive performances. The sound of Yamashita's guitar is also stunningly captured; so much so that it needs a little more ambient perspective to bring it back down to a suitable scale of sound; the dynamic range makes it sound far larger than life. Yamashita plays with unyielding technical brilliance. Both these RCA records are among the best packaged that I have seen. The reusable plastic wrap should become standard for all records as should the plan of the microphone set-up, technical details and recording dates printed on the sleeve. The photographs and graphics are beautifully done, but the notes are in translatores and in one case confusing.

RCA's disc of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* has technically the best sound of all, so

much to the... tents almost clinical. The clarity and...;diacy is nothing short of miraculous. The performances are also good, similar to the I Solisti de Zagrebfiangro version on Vanguard HM-15. Because this is a direct-to-disc record, the performers have to play each concerto through in one session and the microphones are left open between movements so that the sound of page turns enhances the illusion of participating in a live event. The sleeve cover is most eye-catching, but there are no notes on either the music or the performers.

Both Crystal Clear direct-to-disc records are cut at a lower level than normal, and the volume has to be turned up quite a bit before the sound comes alive. Both discs have smooth, well integrated sound, but the Susskind record lacks clarity when the full orchestra is playing. Susskind's performances are uninspiring. The Gould disc is another matter altogether. Allied to the spectacular sound—at high levels—and the fine depth perspective of the orchestra, are spectacular performances of great verve. This record shows how wrong the opinion can be of the direct-to-disc process as one that dictates careful and safe performances. Again, open microphones between each section of the music enhances the you-are-there quality of the performance. Both Crystal Clear discs have dull sleeves with skimpy notes.

Telarc's digital recording of Malcolm Frager has sound that blows up the sonic image of the piano so that it is distorted and very much larger than life. The sound of Frager's BOsendorfer Imperial Grand is nothing like the attractive sound of the same piano that I heard live while writing these reviews. This is in keeping with Frager's brilliant but hard-driven performances. The sleeve notes expend considerable space on belittling the qualities of direct-to-disc records. A direct comparison of this disc with the RCA Auer record shows that indeed the digital recording is more sonically "spectacular". The sound of the piano displays a richer bass but also a strident treble whereas the direct-to-disc RCA has a better integrated and more natural piano sound. Also, contrary to the suggestion of the Telarc notes, the direct-to-disc recording contains freer, more poetic performances.

A Cut Above. *Ellington Medley; Brubeck: The Light In the Wilderness—Forty Days, Sermon on the Mount; Unisphere; Three to Get Ready; Blue Rondo a la Turk; Unsquare Dance; Take Five.* The New Brubeck Quartet. Direct-Disk Labs DD-106, 2 LPs, \$22.95.

Tommy Newsom: Live from Beautiful Downtown Burbank: *Chimes Festival; Just the Way You Are; Lay Down Sally; Staying Alive; Evergreen; Send in the Clowns.* Band conducted by Tommy Newsom. Direct-Disk Labs **DD-108**, \$14.95.

Better Than Live. *The Fire Serpent; In the Spanish Mode; The Midnight Sailor; Mirth; The Secret One; Just Like Being Born.* Larry Coryell and Brubeck Brothers. Direct-Disk **Labs DD-109**, \$14.95.

By Request. *Gone With The Wind; The Carioca; That Old Feeling; Laura; Cute; Everything I've Got; Here's That Rainy Day; Topsy; On Green Dolphin Street; All The Things You Are.* The Art Van Damme Quartet. Sonic Arts LS-12, \$14.95.

The packaging of the Brubeck albttbn is superior: two discs in a folded sleeve album with six pages of interesting notes on heavy stock. Don't be put off by the unsuitable front cover illustration. The sound is superb, well integrated throughout the frequency range and appearing to hover in front of the speakers. Brubeck *pb.e's* piano is captured in a most natural ambience—producers of piano records please note. These discs contain the best reproduction of drums and percussion that I have heard. Dan Brubeck's rolls on cymbals and percussion snap out of the speakers and around the room like rapid rifle fire. Everyone interested in an exciting fusion (pun intended) of sound and music should not miss this record.

Tommy Newsom's safe, attractive music is reproduced in clear, close-up sound with little ambience or depth. The electronic display of Coryell and the Brubeck Brothers is recorded with outstanding clarity yet restraint and the sleeve has striking graphics but maudlin texts. The **Art Van Damme** Quartet record has particularly clear and natural vibraphone and percussion sound. Pleasant listening, to which the translucent blue vinyl adds nothing.

Equipment used Shure V15111.
*Morons TD 125 II, Rabco SL8E, Crown 1C150, Dahiquist °Can, Crown DC300, Southwest Technical Tiger 01, Magnaplanar 1-f5, Hartley 25 in Jastak transmission line enclosure,
—Payne