



## French Mercury

RESPIGHI: *The Birds; Impressioni Braziliane*. London Symphony Orchestra; Antal Dorati (cond.). French Mercury 131.012 MSY.

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The strange record number gives this away: It is a *French* pressing of a Mercury recording. The caption on the front of the sleeve proclaims: "Magie du Son."

And magic is exactly what this is.

As befits a disc whose full number is given as DELUX 131.012 MSY, the record is impressed on a thick biscuit of vinyl reminiscent of those wonderful Crystal Clears of recent memory.

I am here to tell you that there was, and remains, an instant love affair between this recording and me.

I do not know the original—doubtless HP will help me out with a footnote giving the original release number and the name of the engineer and the date of the recording\* (since none of these is provided in the French liner notes)—but for once I cannot, for a moment, believe that it could have been as beautiful sounding as this fabulous pressing, so much is it superior in tonal balance and airiness to my other original Mercurys.

The music itself is, of course, a delight. Both works were composed in 1927. *The Birds* was an attempt to repeat, with another imaginative reorchestration of early music, the success of the *Ancient Airs and Dances* suites. The *Brazilian Impressions* came about as a result of a visit the composer made to Brazil. Why this colorful work remains so relatively unknown beats me. It's a knockout.

This highly attractive music is given a gorgeous performance by the London Symphony Orchestra and Dorati. Never have I so much admired Dorati's delicacy of touch and his structural grasp, as well as his control of orchestral balance. But what makes this recording so special is that the quality of the sound goes hand in glove with the quality of the performance and the music. All seems ethereally as one.

The soundstage is wide and spacious with a good representation of depth. However—the only slight drawback—I had to adjust the left/right balance slightly more to-

wards the right than normal in order to achieve the best presentation of this soundstage.

What is truly fine is the imaging and dimensionality of the instrumental sound—to say nothing of the clean transients and sheer "presence" of the sound. Most splendid of all is the wonderful reproduction—by this I mean the clarity of resolution—of the complexities of the upper frequencies required by Respighi's brilliant orchestration, especially in the *Brazilian Impressions*. This, combined with the firmness of the lowest frequencies represented here, makes for a sound that is tonally richer than that sometimes associated with Mercury, especially, in my experience, the otherwise magnificent recordings made with the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra. There are, in other words, none of the "frizzies" (slightly metallic upper frequencies and thinned-out partials) that mar the perfection of those recordings.

Delicacy. Purity. Musicality. These were the words that came to mind for this disc. Mostly, though, I just sat in wonder at the sheer beauty of it all.

Sorry, I can't tell you where to get a copy of this pressing, since this was an incongruous find among an otherwise motley bunch of used records in the bin labeled "M" for "Mozart" in a little store I know. But it is a mint pressing. And I am almost ashamed to admit, it cost me precisely 1.80 (\$2.60)!

Move heaven and earth to find a copy. It will be a sour heart and ear that is not dazzled.

—IP