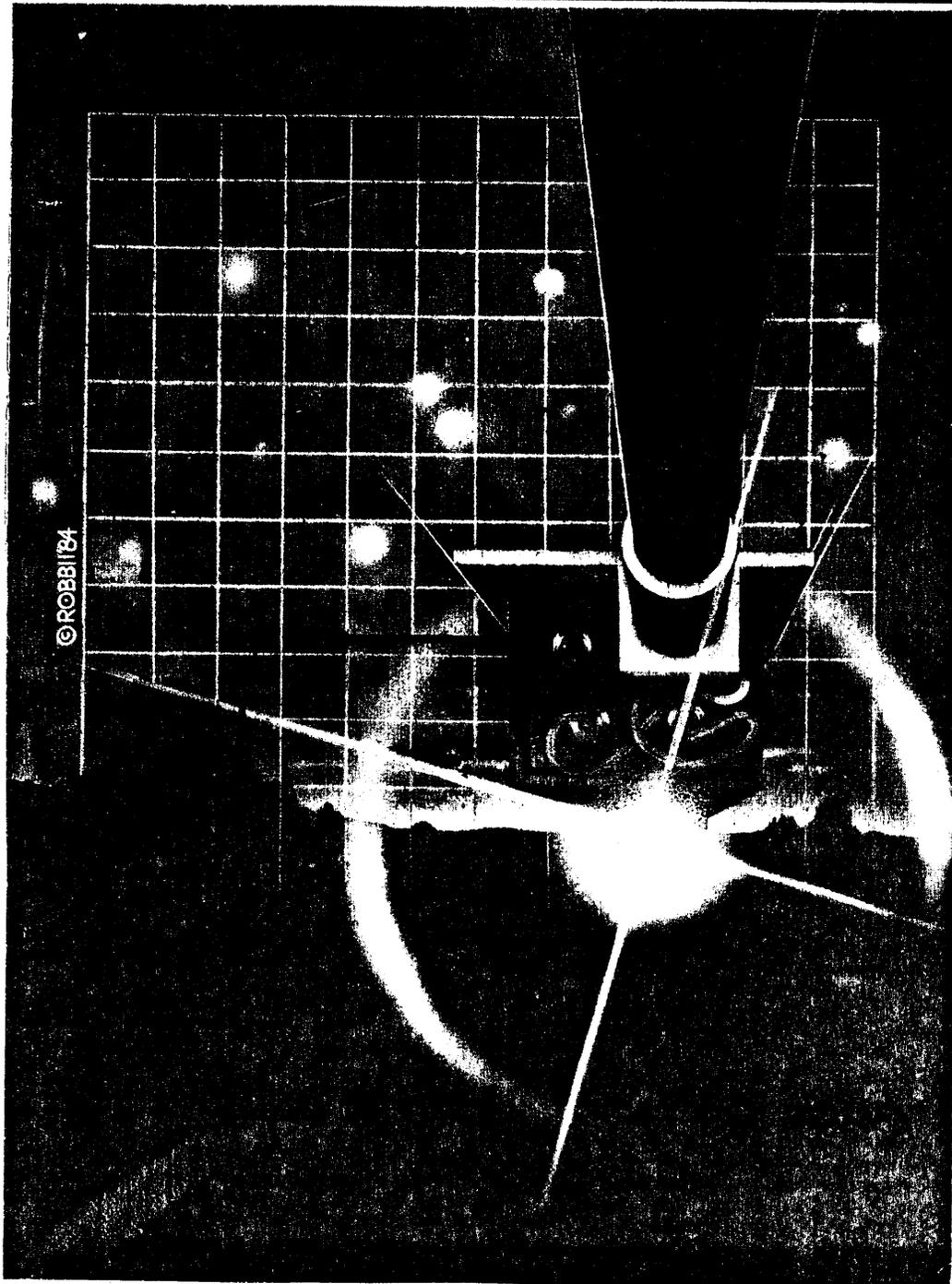


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volume 9

number 35

autumn 1985



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## AUDIOPHILE DISCS & CLASSIC RECORDINGS

ALWYN: *String Quartet No. 1 in D Minor; String Quartet No. 2 "Spring Waters"*. Quartet of London. [Martin Compton (prod.); Ralph Couzens (eng.)]. Chandos ABRD 1063.

Recordings of William Alwyn's music have appeared on (Lyrita) with a sound quality notable for its naturalness and impact. I looked forward to hearing this disc in the hope that some of that quality might have rubbed off on Chandos. Unfortunately this was not the case.

I am an Alwyn fan. I find his symphonies fascinating in their contemporary romanticism—easy to listen to, yet utterly of our time. These two quartets are no exceptions. Alwyn is a British composer born in 1905. He was a professional flutist who played for a period when with the London Symphony Orchestra. He was appointed professor of music at the Royal College of Music in 1926 and remained there until 1956. In recent years he has received quite a bit of attention owing to the success of his opera *Miss Julie* (also on Lyrita and reviewed in Issue 33).

The first quartet was composed in 1955; the second in 1975. As the subtitle, *Spring Waters*, suggests, the second is an evocation of the emotions of the various stages of the composer's life. Alwyn is a colorist, a composer who can create atmospheric tonal landscapes as well as music that is attractive rhythmically and melodically, and he is at his very best in the *Quartet No. 2*.

This virile music is played with energy and contrasting lyricism by the Quartet of London—if not, perhaps, with notable subtlety.

The overall sound of the recording (digital) is tonally brash, hard edged. On occasion, I hear disconcerting effects—the instruments when playing softly are farther away than when playing loudly, when they seem to move forward toward the plane of the loudspeakers. The soundstage is large enough, if neither spectacularly wide nor three-dimensional. There is a blurred quality to individual images that worries me. The sound is generally loud and forward, without being "alive".

The obvious comparison with regard to sound quality is with the similarly digital Nonesuch recording of Prokofiev Quartets performed by the Sequoia String Quartet (Nonesuch 79048). It has a thinner sound (less harmonic richness) but the sound is

more dimensional and it has a more pleasing representation of the soundstage.

So, the sound quality is nothing to jump up and down about, but the music is gripping and stimulating.

The front sleeve, by the way, consists of a reproduction of a landscape painted by the composer.

—IP