

the absolute sound.

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**BUT REX, THAT'S
ONLY .05% TOTAL
HARMONIC
DISTORTION!**

A Classic Everest Reissue

KODALY: *Psalmus Hungaricus*. BARTOK: *Dance Suite*. Raymond Nilsson (tenor); London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, Janos Ferencsik (cond.). [Bert Whyte (eng.)] World Record Club SCM 66.

This is a reissue of an original Everest disc (SDBR 3022) and sonically it has many of the best qualities of those early Everests and also some of the features of a Mercury recording.

Nilsson is an engaging and attractively voiced soloist and the performance of the *Psalmus Hungaricus* is incisive and dramatic.

The *Dance Suite* is similarly good, given a biting, rhythmically virile performance that is utterly convincing.

As for the sound quality, despite the overall impressiveness, I'll deal with the drawbacks first: There is a slight graininess to the texture and a sense of congestion at high dynamic levels. These characteristics tend to make for stridency or aggressiveness of sound but there is no denying it's a gripping quality, also.

What struck me instantly was the wide soundstage, the excellent imaging, the terrific presence: The sound has great impact and there is a wonderful tonal richness (despite the slight roll-off at the frequency extremes).

Powerful stuff. Just listen to the lovely *collegno* rappings and guttsy brass growling during the *Dance Suite*.

I cannot off-hand recall any Mercury recording of vocals—you can all write in and list the scads of albums of singers recorded by that label—but for the moment, I'll just say that the *Psalmus Hungaricus* gives an impression of what vocal music might have sounded like had Cozart and Fine had the tape rolling.

But, even if you don't care for singing, I must also add that it's worth searching out the record for Ferencsik's gripping interpretation of Bartok's *Dance Suite*.

Chandos

BACH—STOKOWSKI: *Symphonic Transcriptions*. Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Robert Pikler (cond.). [Eric Clapham (prod.); Barry Smith, Rupert Mazlin (engineers).] Chandos ABR 1055.

This record has been on HP's Super Discs list; and although the sound does have some strengths (Messrs. Clapham and Smith were also responsible for the highly acclaimed* *Corroboree* on EMI OASD 7603), there are enough weaknesses to make me wonder whether there might be another, better, pressing.

Nothing is stated on the sleeve concerning the nature of the recording, but the sound quality leads me to swear that this was digitally recorded.

There is a curious lifelessness, overall, that you can hear, for example, on Telarc and other Chandos digitals. And worse, the upper strings sound thin and wiry.

There are impressive features also, not the least of which are the striking transcriptions (recreations would be a more accurate phrase, I think) made by Stokowski and also the high quality of the orchestral playing.

There is much to admire in the sound as well. The soundstage is impressively wide and deep (except for those violins, which sound as though they were papering the rear wall) and the bass—especially the sound of the double basses—is firm and rich.

The sound of brass instruments has strong dimensionality. The presence, especially of the cellos, is excellent (again, violins excepted).

Transients are soft-edged and this takes away from the impact; and though the ambience is resonant enough, there seems to be some sort of faint continuous mechanical background noise.

If you do not know the magic that Stokowski weaves with *Komm, Susser Tod* (which will show you what he can achieve with his transcriptions), then this record will serve as a fine introduction and may lead you to listen to the master himself (on RCA ARI-0880) and hear how he can weave an even more poignant experience in the music.

Richly colored transcriptions, lushly played in atmospheric sound—it certainly sounds like the description of a Super Disc, except for those anemic violins and the lack of a cutting edge.

British Capitol

Amongst the fabled spoils of earlier eras of recording, that time of legend between the middle 1950s and the middle 1960s, there have been glimpsed (amongst the talk of Mercury and Living Presence) a brief sighting here and there of—an uttered phrase, a fleeting reference to—Capitol Records.

Oh, my joy, then, to come across a clutch of mint pressings of British issues of these discs, to set the sparkling van den Hul/Grado Signature 7 down on the stuff of legends, to test the auditory memory with these EMI/Capitols.

Well, he said, it turned out to be not quite the legend that I expected but, on the other hand, it became clear that though these recordings will not bowl you over with super sonics, they will, I think excite an admiration for good, honest recording.

Respect. That is the word to describe my feelings at the end of these listening sessions: respect for what seems to have been a fairly straightforward microphone lay-out (it sounds as though a three-microphone set-up was used on all these discs) and also for the spaciousness of the soundstage.

Unfortunately, none of the sleeves provided the names of the engineers; for the most part, they deserve to be acknowledged.



BARTOK: *The Miraculous Mandarin*. SHOSTAKOVICH: *The Age of Gold*. Philharmonia Orchestra, Robert Irving (cond.). [Richard C. Jones (prod.)] Capitol SP 8576.

Not even the faint fuzziness around the edges of the images on this 1962 recording can hide the sense of the wide and vibrant soundstage and though the lower bass frequencies are missing, as are the extreme highs, there is no hiding the overall exciting quality of sound: slightly grainy, congested perhaps at high dynamic levels, but gutsy, full of life, filling real space with distinctive, characterful sound.

Even more. Listen, during the Shostakovich, to the saxophone solo followed by the solo violin in the "Adagio" where both instruments are so beautifully "placed". There can be no doubt that this is a caring and sophisticated recording.

And the two suites make a musically stunning coupling, though the overall performance is perhaps pleasant and attractive

rather than gripping or biting. Even so that *Age of Gold* "Adagio" is genial and lovely.

Overall, one gets the impression of an orchestra vibrating real air in a real space and, on occasion—such as the exposed bassoon near the end of the *Age of Gold* "Polka"—there is a palpable physical presence.

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Romantique. Capitol Symphony Orchestra, Carmen Dragon (cond.). [Ralph O'Connor (prod.)] Capitol SP 8542.

A potpourri of favorites played by a string orchestra with harp and light percussion. From *Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair* to Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, Dragon sculpts the music romantically and swoons all over the bar lines.

Smooth: like floating in the wide soundstage full of creamy strings—yet how natural it sounds. Hear the rich cellos and violas in "Salut d'Amour"—the basses discreetly behind them, the harp off to the far left and the solo violin actually set back, center left.

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ELGAR: *Enigma Variations*. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Fantasia on a Theme of Tomas Tallis*. Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, William Steinberg (cond.). Capitol SP 8383.

This is, I'm afraid, a lackadaisical performance of the Elgar, with little shape or bite to it. And I'm also afraid that this recording has the least impressive sound of these four discs. The imaging is good, but not the sharpest; and the reasonably wide soundstage becomes congested when filled with large quantities of sound.

The frequency range is—well, there is

reasonable bass, with fair highs, but a weakness in the upper bass region and, overall, there's a slight "boxy" quality. The brass finally manage to force themselves to some degree of brilliance in the final "Edu" Variation but the strings generally fail, throughout the work, to make an impact.

Sorry. This is one disc that should be allowed to rest undisturbed in those mists of time.

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Sabre Dance. Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra, Alfred Newman (cond.). Capital SP 8503.

From 1959 comes this Khachaturian medley: the *Gayane* ballet suite; *Masquerade* suite; and *The Comedians*. I cannot pretend that the performances are more than a good run-through—yet they definitely are not poor interpretations. There is much competent and even good individual playing, but it is never molded into an exceptional view of the music. These are deft, rather than spectacular, performances.

The rather dry acoustic robs the sound of the sense of full harmonic richness and the recording is mastered at a low level so that, even with the gain turned up, the sound lacks immediacy. On the other hand, there is an excellent sense of depth—the snare drum and xylophone are very much behind the rest of the orchestra and are not spotlighted.

The sonic glory of this recording is the spacious soundstage and the naturalness of the placement of the instrumental images within it. Had the hall (was this recorded on a studio soundstage?) been acoustically "live"; I feel that this would have been sonically a stunning record.

—IP

