

Beethoven: Symphony No 6 (Pastorale)

Columbia (6 eyes) MS-6012 LP

CBS Masterworks MYK 36720 CD

Bruno Walter / Columbia Symphony Orchestra

There are many good performances of this, arguably Beethoven's most beautiful symphony, but none even come close to this legendary rendering by Bruno Walter. Try your local record/music store, the Internet, Kansas mail order stores, (such as Elusive Disc), Goodwill, BMG Music Club, whatever, but find this recording in any format that is in good condition. Don't get too hung up on looking for vinyl. The CD sounds very good, too. Also there were a few SACDs made by Sony. This is a must have for any classical music fan. Truly this is one of the glories of recorded literature.

Beethoven: The Five Piano Concerti

CBS Masterworks M3k 42445 3 CDs

EPIC numbers??? Original LPs

George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra

If one dismisses Artur Schnabel's late forties mono recordings with rather poor sound, then Fleisher stands alone with such moving and emotional playing that it gives one goose bumps. All the while Szell is maintaining perfect balance between soloist and orchestra. The whole scene is just a superb performance. While the sound on these CDs is good, it isn't great. There is some tape hiss at times, but the sound doesn't get in the way of the music. BMG Music Club has these fine concerti on two separate CDs that are a later issue. I haven't heard them, but they may have even better sound. If you aren't a member of BMG, give me a call at 719-685-6144, and I can give you more information.

If you should scan the field for more modern recordings of these concerti, I would caution you to try to listen to the women pianists before you purchase. I'm sure that sounds sexist, but to me, they appear much too accuracy driven rather than feeling and emotion driven. I don't know if Murray Perahia has recorded any of these concerti, but I can safely recommend most any of them with him at the piano.

Hector Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique

CHESKY CD 88 CD

Massimo Freccia / Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

LSO Live (BMG D144728) CD

Colin Davis / London Symphony Orchestra

RCA LCS-2608 (shaded dog) LP

Charles Munch / Boston Symphony

DGG SLP 138964 LP

Herbert von Karajan / Berliner Philharmoniker

MERCURY LIVING PRESENCE 475 6622 or (BMG D16255) SACD

Paul Paray / Detroit Symphony Orchestra

I can't imagine the Chesky CD not being available anywhere. If you find it, buy it and move on. It is superior in every way. If it has simply dropped off the face of the earth, then the Davis / LSO is the next

best choice. I think it is available on SACD, but I haven't heard it. My red book CD has very good sound, and the performance is very good too. The Paray / Mercury SACD has a satisfactory performance, and it has very good definition – though my copy has audible tape hiss. Neither the Munch nor Karajan LPs are as good as the CDs above. Munch's performance is better, but DGG's sound is better.

Brahms: Hungarian Dances

DGG 410615-2 CD

Claudio Abbado / Vienna Philharmonic

Philips D105780 (BMG number) CD

Kurt Masur / Gewandhausorchester Leipzig

Capitol SG 7209 LP

Rafael Kubelik / Royal Philharmonic

Mercury Living Presence SR 90437 LP

Antal Dorati / London Symphony Orchestra

London CS 6198 (ffss) "blue back" LP

Fritz Reiner / Vienna Philharmonic

Dvorak: Slavonic Dances

TELDEC D144736 (BMG number) CD

Nikolaus Harnoncourt / Chamber Orchestra of Europe

London D125490 (BMG number) CD

Christoph von Dohnanyi / Cleveland Orchestra

Columbia MS 7208 LP

George Szell / Cleveland Orchestra

These two composers are lumped together because their dances are both delightful, lively, foot stomping, entertaining music. While the music is different, they are both based on Eastern European folk dance music. All of the above listings should satisfy, but there are preferences. I will give you my recommendations by composer.

Brahms:

Kubelik has a way with these dances that is just mesmerizing, and the sound on my Capitol LP is excellent. (#1)

Dorati is not far behind Kubelik, and the sound on the Mercury LP is slightly better. (#2 but close)

The Reiner / London is not quite as good as the above two in either area. (#3 but again close)

Abbado / DGG is #4 by a centimeter and Masur / Philips is another centimeter down at #5.

Dvorak:

These aren't as close as the Brahms Dances. The Szell / Columbia LP stands alone and is excellent in every way. If you do vinyl and you can find this one, it is the one to have. It may be available on CD. I haven't looked.

If the LP isn't available, then the Teldec / Harnoncourt is a good choice on CD.

Aaron Copland: Rodeo and Bill the Kid Ballets
Appalachian Spring and El Salon Mexico

Sony SMK 63082 CD
Columbia Masterworks MG 30071 2-LPs
CBS (6 eyes) numbers unknown LPs
Leonard Bernstein / New York Philharmonic

I have only heard these fine works by Copland himself, Bernstein, Leonard Slatkin, and Gerard Schwarz. It's no contest. Bernstein towers above the others. The sound on the CD is excellent. I also have the 2 LP Columbia set and it is slightly, but yes, better than the CD. If one could find a mint Columbia 6 eyes LP, it would probably be the best of all, but don't pay a fortune. These others are not that far behind.

Gustav Mahler: Symphony No 1

London 411 731-2 CD
George Solti / Chicago Symphony
DGG 139331 LP
Rafael Kubelik / Symphonie Orchester des Bayerischen

This is, for my taste, the most beautiful symphony ever written, and the Solti / Chicago CD is perfect in every way. It shouldn't be too hard to find, so don't miss it. If you don't have a CD player, the DGG LP is also first rate -- assuming you can find it. It is, however, not on a par with the CD.

MOZART: Piano Concerti

London CS 6894 (ffrr) LP
Piano Concerti No 21 and 12 Radu Lupu – piano
Uri Segal / English Chamber Orchestra
Archiv 419 609-2 CD
Piano Concerti No 20 and 21 Malcolm Bilson -- piano
John Eliot Gardiner / English Baroque Soloists

Of Mozart's 27 piano concerti, the 20 th and 21 st are by far the most popular. Radu Lupu along with Murray Perahia are to Mozart as Arthur Rubinstein was to Chopin – superb interpreters of these respective composers' music. Lupu and the London LP are simply sensational. It may be difficult or impossible to find, but it is certainly worth looking for. My copy is imported with a small British flag on the corner of the record jacket. I don't know if there was a New York pressing. If you don't find the LP, the Bilson / Archiv CD is a somewhat worthy successor. It isn't in the league with the LP, but is the best available on CD. It also has the advantage of having both of these masterpieces on one CD. The real beauty here is Mozart's music, and it comes through with all its glory.

Though I have only scratched the surface, that's it for this episode. It may appear that I am taunting you with out of print records and CDs. That certainly is not my intent. I am a firm believer that music must be shared to reach its maximum benefit, and I want to share these wonderful recordings with everyone. They are simply the best. That is why they are listed. If you work at it, it is amazing how many of these great recordings you can find. With proper cleaning and care, they can sound very good as well.

Good listening

Max