

Antonin Dvorak: Symphony #9 (From the New World)

RCA 09026-62587-2 (BMG #D108097) CD

RCA number unk (shaded dog) LP

Fritz Reiner / Chicago Symphony Orchestra

London 400 047-2 CD

Kiril Kondrashin / Wiener Philharmoniker

Supraphon 1110 3140 ZA LP

Vaclav Neumann / Czeck Philharmonic Orchestra

This symphony is a masterpiece and a must-have if you like classical music at all. The Reiner / RCA CD brings us a superior performance and excellent sound to match. It is the one to have unless you can find the shaded dog LP – in good condition, of course. This goose bump rendition is smooth, smooth, smooth, and the largo movement flows like silk chiffon in a gentle breeze. (I wax poetic sometimes.) The Kondrashin / London CD is not too far, but is definitely, behind the RCA. I'll give it a not-too-distant second place. The Supraphon LP is on a par with the London CD both in sound and performance. It may be very hard to find though. I actually bought mine in Prague some twenty-five years ago. Prague is an absolutely gorgeous city, but I digress. Supraphon did export some LPs into this country, so you might find it in a used record bin. I recommend, though, spending your time getting the RCA CD, which I'm sure is available from BMG and other places. Best of all, if you find a good copy of the shaded dog LP at a reasonable price, by all means get it. By the way, if you run across a London Phase Four LP with Antal Dorati, keep right on going. It isn't worth having.

Ariel Ramirez: Misa Criolla

Philips 420 955-2 CD

Jose Carreras – Tenor

Don't think for a minute that this is a liturgical mass sung by the Monteverdi Choir. It isn't. Actually I am very fond of that sort of music, but again, I digress. This is a modern mass, c. 1964. However, Ramirez is not in the same vein as such modern composers as Elliot Carter, Pierre Boulez, or even Igor Stravinsky. This is wonderful music and is sung magnificently by Carreras. Tenors, by some screaming and screeching, can typically sing rather high notes when singing loudly – even with their natural voice. This piece of music, however, has many high notes that are to be sung softly. That presents a problem that can only be resolved by transitioning to falsetto (head voice). Most all tenors can do this, but very few can do it gracefully. Carreras is an absolute master at making this transition. One isn't even aware that he has made this transition until you hear these high, but soft, notes coming forth so effortlessly and so beautifully. I am reluctant to pronounce everything as a must-have, but this one goes over the line. Get it. As an audiophile, I am not a particular fan of the Philips label, but the sound is excellent on this one.

Gioachino Rossini: Rossini Overtures

Pentatone PTC 5186 106 SACD

Neville Marriner / Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

Franz von Suppe: Overtures

Mercury Living Presence 434 309-2 (BMG D100088) CD

Mercury Living Presence SP 90269 LP

Paul Paray / Detroit Symphony Orchestra

Decca SXL 2174 (ffss) LP

London number unk (ffss) blue back LP

George Solti / Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Like the Brahms / Dvorak dances discussed in issue one, these overtures are lumped together because they are similar type music that is lively, toe tapping, and thoroughly enjoyable. The Pentatone SACD has startling definition, at least on some tracks. There appears to be a slight difference among tracks – but all are very good. I did notice a trace of tape hiss (?) though. Decca's LP has superior definition as well – in fact, the choice between these two would depend on which overtures you like better. Get them both if you can. I don't have the Mercury LP, but the CD is a good one. Of course it is no match for the SACD nor the Decca LP. I'm sure there is a London blue back that is as good as the Decca. Of my twenty some odd years in the USAF, I spent eight of them in Europe. While there I purchased many LPs of both labels from a number of sources. For the most part, I preferred the New York pressings.

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade

RCA RCD1-7018 CD

RCA LSC-2446 (Classic reissue) LP

Fritz Reiner / Chicago Symphony Orchestra

The illustrious career of Fritz Reiner has many highlights. This recording is one of them. I have heard several recordings of this popular work over the years, but none has moved me to abandon this one. I responded to an advertisement in Stereophile magazine and spoke to some clown who told me it would cost me \$500 to purchase a mint original shaded dog recording of this piece – assuming he could find one for me. I won't go into where I told him he could stuff his shaded dog. If you are into vinyl, buy Classic's reissues for \$30 or so. It is wonderful and has very quiet surfaces. I can assure you the original did not. That doesn't mean you shouldn't check the thrift stores and antique stores in hopes of finding a good copy for a buck or two. It happens every day. If you don't do vinyl, the CD listed above is excellent. My copy said it was made in Japan. I don't know what that means – if anything. Do they do something differently??

Tchaikovsky: Concerto No. 1

RCA LSC-2252 LP

RCA 82876-61392-2 SACD

RCA 07863-55912-2 (BMG D100859) CD

Kiril Kondrashin / RCA Symphony Orchestra

Van Cliburn – piano

In 1958, at the pinnacle of the cold war, a 23 year-old, 6'4" tall, 160 pound Texan went to Moscow to compete in the Tchaikovsky competition. He not only won that competition, but won the hearts of the Russian people as well. Now what in the world does this have to do with 21st century audiophiles? Well, his story made headlines in virtually every newspaper in the US, and this publicity spawned a plethora of record sales of this piece that had won him that coveted prize. To me that means there are a plethora of

records in the used record bins. Most are not worth ten cents, but many are worth far more than the dollar or less, that they are asking. If you don't find a good one, then get the SACD. It is not far behind the LP. Even the CD is a must-have if that is all you can find. There is a respectable CD on DGG with Martha Argerich at the piano and one on Chesky with Earl Wild at the piano, but these are not serious competitors. THERE IS NO COMPETITION for this piece of music.

That was to be it for this edition, but check below for a bonus:

Tchaikovsky: 1812 Overture

Decca SXL 2001 reissue by ALTO

Kenneth Alwyn / London Symphony Orchestra

No self-respecting audiophile, even one who doesn't care for classical music, should be without a copy of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture. It is fun music, and the more beer you serve your friends, the louder they want you to "turn-it-up". Well, if you indulge in that sort of stuff – I do – then give them the best. There are copies of the 1812 from virtually every recording company known, but most are not worth the effort it takes to put them on the player. There is one exception, and only one, the recording listed above. There is a real problem here, since Alto has said -- and I have no reason to question them -- that there will be only 2500 copies of this LP. I'm sure there were many copies sold by Decca and London (Yew York), but I owned the London blue back a half century ago and it sounded good except for the last dozen bars, or so, which were so distorted that it was hard to tell the bells from the cannons (a slight exaggeration, to make a point). I thought maybe it was inner groove distortion from my modest record playing equipment, so I bought a reel to reel tape recording only to find the same distortion at the end. If that isn't sad enough, in all my hours spent thumbing through used records, I rarely found any copies of this 1812 on either London or Decca. If I did, they were trashed beyond salvaging. Maybe someone on the net will sell you their copy of the Alto reissue – hopefully for less than \$500 though. The London or Decca is worth having in spite of the bad ending, and the flip side is the best rendering of Tchaikovsky's Capriccio Italien I have ever heard. Of the "other" recordings, I own a half dozen and have heard a half dozen more. They simply suck. The vaunted Mercury recording, which I have on CD, is near the bottom of the stack. Their cannons sound like toy cap guns. The wonderful sound of the cannons with their sharp recoil on the Alto reissue is really ironic. They weren't cannons at all. They were muskets recorded at high speed, and then slowed down to normal speed. That was probably an "empirical miracle", but it sure worked. Speaking of miracles, it's amazing how Alto cleaned up the distorted ending of that recording.

Good listening,

Max