In his capacity as Assistant Conductor, Michael Tilson Thomas was called upon to conduct a great many Boston Symphony concerts during William Steinberg's extended illness several years ago, and he was hailed at the time as a wonderkind, the new Leonard Bernstein. The Brooks has worn off the relationship between Mr. Thomas and the orchestra since then, and there is an unpleasant degree of tension in concerts and especially in rehearsals. Though he is uncharacteristically a brilliant musician, Steinberg seems to lack the gift for working with the players that Ozawa, for example, exemplifies so extraordinarily well. The Spectrum Concerts, which were established to attract a college age audience, have been incorporated into the regular Friday/Saturday concert series, and the explanation and discussion by Thomas works rather poorly with this more traditionally oriented group of concertgoers. The Spectrum Series survives more as a curiosity, has worn off the relationship between Mr. Thomas and the orchestra since then, and it can't much to begin with, and it can't be done, demonstrating again his mastery of orchestral effect, and doesn't survive the transformation as well. Schoenberg's transcription of the Brhmas Onye 25 Piano Quartet is rather more successful, since the original seems to be striving to burst out of its chamber-music form. Schoenberg, not generally thought of as an orchestrator, proves his mastery of this art in a brilliant underlining of Brahms's conception. The performance on Thursday night betrayed a lack of effective rehearsal, with many rough edges showing. The gypsy-dance opening was exciting, but the BSO should have been more precise at the same time. All of the pieces, in fact, were played rather clunkily, but the Brahms/Schoenberg suffered the most.

The final week brought Thomas and the orchestra together for a final. The Triennial Suite was played by a fairly large orchestra, but it was quite enjoyable. This music is best when performed with one or two players to a part, but the BSO kept the important dance-like feeling. The opening "overture" was probably double-dotted, and the "air" made famous in a transcription as the Air on the G String was played much faster than usual, gaining momentum instead of being underlined. The music was occasionally overmatched in the quartet. The piece simply isn't worth bothering with in any form.

Bach's Lamento d'Antonio was also more than adequate. The Strauss performance of the Strauss Blockbuster was not ready in the same class. Balance, though occasionally quite clear, was often muddy, and sloppy (and indeed incorrect) entrances indicated a lack of careful preparation. It is still a great piece to hear live. The recording has yet captured its full impact, and the BSO makes just the right kind of sound in the big moments.

Malcolm Fridge is one of those performers who never quite make it to the top, and many have wondered why. On the strength of his Brahms Second Piano Concerto, he is a fine technician, though his tone is somewhat chunky, and a careful interpreter, but the musical spark that illuminates the Scherzo/Clas recording, for example, was missing. The rapport between soloist and conductor was exemplified, and it was a successful performance in its own rather dry fashion.

The MIT Schola Cantorum made its debut at Kresge Auditorium on December 9 under John Oliver, and it is a fine group with a great deal of potential. Unfortunately, Kresge is a most difficult place for a small vocal ensemble, without orchestral support, to perform in, since its acoustical anomalies make it difficult for individual singers to hear the sound of the group. The opening Mass for Four Voices of Monteverdi suffered from serious pitch problems, undoubtedly exacerbated by the Kresge acoustic. The two madrigals which followed in the first half of the program were much better in this regard. The chorus returned to the stage in a revised 12th, in which prophecies helped the pitch of the much more chromatic Mhylle Prophete of Orlando di Lasso. There were occasional discrepancies between the chorus and the continuo organ, but the chorus was consistent within itself. Members of the ensemble stepped forward to read each "prophecy," which helped the audience's understanding of the striking differences between sections, though some of the reading was less than ideal. The book tempo in Monteverdi's madrigal Chi vuol far luce made things difficult for soprano soloist Mary Lee Circelli, but she coped well; the other soloists (Derene Page, Richard Burke, and Thomas Tomasz) were also more than adequate. The Schola deserves a more sympathetic venue for its future concerts, but this was an auspicious debut.

Since John Oliver became its director, the MIT Choral Society has changed a great deal. It had been primarily composed of non-student members of the MIT community, and had a mature, though not particularly polished, sound. Students now form a far greater proportion of its membership, and the sound of the group is now that of an excellent college chorus, distinctly brighter and younger than before. The tone, as such, is the change is more than compensated for by the improved technique and sheer excitement generated in its December 9th concert. From the first entry of the chorus in Haydn's Te Deum, it was obvious that the singers were wholeheartedly into the spirit of the music; and the tone was the most solid and strong that I have ever heard in Kresge. Schoenberg's Mass is a product of his neo-classical period, and it is a sort of "commentary" on a modern idiom on works such as the preceding Haydn. It was thus a most effective piece of program planning. The singing of the chorus was again secure. Mozart's unfinished C Minor Mass stands at the same level as Bach's B Minor Mass and Beethoven's Missa Solemnis, and the Choral Society's performance was extremely committed and convincing. This virtuosity and versatility required of the soprano solist (the part was originally planned for Mozart's new hide, Constanze, in the Mozart oratorio of an earlier date) are incredible, and Mary Lee Circelli was an excellent showing, though her low range was not strong enough for the demands of the "Laudamus Te" movement (but this was not strong enough for the demands of the "Laudamus Te" movement, where the stretto and dissonances are reminiscent of the "Crucifixus" in the Bach & Hauer. Richard Burke and Robert Woods handled their solo assignments well, though I found Woods to be occasionally mismatched in the quartet.)