
After years of neglect from the record companies, Arnold Schonberg's piano music finally has recordings to suit its justice, and not just one, but two. One look at a score will show you how fearfully difficult these pieces are. It's hard enough even to play all the right notes at approximately the right times, let alone get any feeling into the reading. This hour's worth of music has been the downfall of quite a few fine pianists. In fact, Paul Jacobs and Maurizio Pollini have given us the first recorded performances that play the right notes at the right times, and they have also given us warm, feeling renderings that should go a long way toward correcting the popular misconception of Schonberg as an icy "modernist" (whatever that means). It's important to understand that Schonberg was not so much pre-Webern as post-Debussy, and a bit less machine-like.

But both are excellent.

Gustav Mahler: Sixth Symphony. - The Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Jascha Horenstein (Nonesuch HW-73025).

Lately, Jascha Horenstein began to record the symphonies of Gustav Mahler only toward the end of his life (except for a few dashingly recorded and badly played old Vox discs). As a rule, we have definitive performances of the First (Nonesuch H-24015), Fourth (Nonesuch HW-73023) with the London Symphony Orchestra, but little else. Of course, Horenstein programmed the Mahler symphonies frequently in concert, and tapes of some have survived. The present recording, licensed to Nonesuch by Unicorn (the small British label that did the studio tapes of some of these performances) with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jascha Horenstein (Deutsche Grammophon 2707080).

Michael Praetorius: Dances from Terpsichore (1612) and Motets from Musica Sacra (1610-20) (Early Music Consort of London, conducted by David Munrow and the Consortium Musicum; the Cathedral and Abbot Church of St. Alban (Angel S-36926)).

David Munrow and his consort are perhaps best known for their performances of the Tudor-period sound-tradition. They did the piece's Henry VIII and His Six Wives and Elizabeth II, seen in this country on PBS. They are an exceptionally versatile group, with a repertoire that spans the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque modes, and what a delight this album is! Intricately woven, it is a coda to the present tape. It is a pity the album does not have more attention. I won't try to list all of the felicities among the scores, but expect some delightful moments. The book is a surprisingly (perhaps unintentionally) unflattering portrait of a work-obsessed man, unsure of his roots, bearing ten-year grudges over the most minor of slights, self-consciously liberal in the David Susskind sense. Name-dropping abounds, a condition endemic with talk-show hosts, persons, emcees, and others whose fame is not their own, but a reflection of those who come to talk to them.

Barry Gray: My Night People (10,001 Nights in Broadcasting) by Barry Gray, 191 pages, Simon and Schuster. First of all, the author of this autobiographical tome may not be a familiar name to people from out of the greater New York area. He is a late night radio talk show host, and if you've heard him anywhere else, it was on tape syndication, where his topicility was bound to suffer. He is a more than adequate radio performer, but leaves a lot to be desired as an author. There may, in fact, be an interesting story in his life. He didn't write it.

At one point, describing a feud with Walter Winchell, that began before most of us were born, he indicated that he and his editor argued over the inclusion of 16 pages of an apparently famous and controversial appearance by Ed Sullivan on his show.

The editor was right to force Barry to be content with a few paragraphs of summary, pushing the 16 pages to the back, with the three pages he devotes to be content with a few paragraphs of summary, pushing the 16 pages to the back, with the three pages he devotes to, and a few pages connecting Barry's biography to the books of Diana Ochman, and the book would be an interesting story in his life. He didn't write it.

But if you don't approach this book with some reason to detest Barry, you may find that the chances of capturing your attention is slight. Better books have been written by "talent" (in this case folks are known in the business, most recently Sally Quinn's We're Going to Make You a Star, which would make a more worthwhile afternoon of reading than Barry Gray: My Night People.