

SCISSORS AND TAPE

By HAROLD LAWRENCE

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New Developments Help Potentialities of Disks

By HAROLD LAWRENCE

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WITH a razor blade and plenty of scotch tape any ordinary mortal standing knee-high in a pile of magnetic ribbons can perform minor miracles in tonal reproduction. He can overcome time and space, increase the lung capacity of an oboist or a singer, discover new dimensions, make the difficult less difficult, and perfection more perfect.

In a dream sequence from the film "An American in Paris," Oscar Levant (in the role of a struggling composer) realizes a lifelong ambition. He finds himself conducting a symphony orchestra in a performance of his own concerto. In Hollywood fashion, a spotlight fingers through the orchestra revealing an astonishing sight: Levant is playing the harp, piccolo, bassoon . . . in fact, the whole orchestra is manned by Levants, all smiling affably at conductor Levant. Were one man capable of playing every instrument in a symphony orchestra, such a dream would not be beyond the realm of possibility—with enough patience and tape.

One-Man Duets

The era of magnetic tape has already spawned one-man duets, bands and singing groups of which the outstanding example is the team of Les Paul and Mary Ford. The technique is simple. Any number of recordings can be superimposed on the same magnetized strip. Thus, after one "take," the performer dons a pair of earphones, which enable him to listen in on the first "track" while adding another. This procedure may be repeated until the desired effect is obtained. Superimposition also transcends the limitations of space. Two musical components of a concerto (soloist and accompaniment), can and have been recorded thousands of miles apart.

In addition to its extradimensional qualities, tape has revolutionized the nature of the recording session. During pre-LP days, edit-

ing was impossible once a performance was engraved on the 78 r. p. m. disk. Any imperfection such as a wrong note, trumpet fluff or cough, necessitated starting all over again—a waste of time, money and records. Under Sir Thomas Beecham's direction, Georges Noré sang eight successive "Salut Demeures" for a 78 r. p. m. recording of "Faust." The tenor almost collapsed after the eighth take. Beecham approved the first.

An atmosphere of informality and lessening of tension has accompanied the use of tape in recording sessions. The "clinker," a sword of Damocles suspended over the heads of recording directors in the 78 r. p. m. era, has lost its terrifying aspect. Now when a performer errs tape comes to his rescue. The offending section is easily removed and the corrected note or phrase is grafted on in its place. Splicing permits a pianist, for instance, to rectify a single wrong note in a rapid scale passage of sixteenth notes.

With the help of tape, a performer can record a musical work which he would not dare to play in public for fear of not being able to negotiate its technical hurdles. A few months ago a recording was released of Rossini's Wind Quartets. In the sixth quartet there is a cadenza-like passage for French horn. The rapid tempo, frequent wide intervals, and infrequent rests make this a French horn player's nightmare. At the tape recording session, however, where nothing is impossible, an illusion of ease and perfection was created.

Also in this category is the oboe obbligato to Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." Even the best soloist omits notes in sections where the chorus is at its height in order to catch his breath. On tape he can have his Bach and breathe too.

The recording director, a passive element before the development of tape, has now assumed a very vital and active role due to the extraordinary flexibility of the materials at his disposal. Like a painter, his musical canvas is subject to constant revision. But much

depends upon a discerning ear and impeccable taste. Careless tape editing has resulted in the premature clipping of overtones, a rehearsal take included side by side with the approved performance, abrupt acoustical changes, pitch variations, and so on.

Many music lovers and some recording companies throw up their hands in horror at the mention of tape editing. With so much splicing and patching, starting and stopping, how can an interpretation be as spontaneous as a continuous performance? After all, if the artist is really competent, he has no need for the "retoucher's" services. They also question the propriety of making a well-nigh unplayable passage sound easeful and natural. Surely this is perfection without a soul. Let us hear the artist the way he really sounds, they say.

On the other side of the ledger are those who uphold any amount of tape sorcery provided the intentions of the composer are scrupulously observed. So long as the make-up doesn't come across the footlights, the means justify the end. As for perfection, a recording is a permanent musical document to be heard over and over again, and into which the performer puts his finest efforts. Why then perpetuate an inadvertent harmonic on the violin, a trombone's blooper, or a high C that never quite made it?

The pros and cons of tape editing have merely been touched upon here. Discussions will undoubtedly continue for a long time to come of the question, "What hath Tape wrought?"

By HAROLD LAWRENCE

THE man in charge of programming recorded music for a radio station like WQXR can hardly be in a better position to estimate public tastes. Each month hundreds of letters, post cards and phone calls bombard his office with comments, criticism, praise and requests. The reactions of this highly articulate audience represent a barometer of preferences in music and recordings.

A list of the most popular operatic and symphonic selections played on the air would not be unlike that of the best-selling items of large record companies. In handling these commodities, the recording executive, concert manager or program director is on equally safe ground as the publisher who prints another edition of Shakespeare or the Bible. In the constellation of standard repertoire, such musical works seem to hold their positions for decades, although occasionally a star or two may be obscured. Since World War II, for example, there has been an apparent lessening of interest in Wagner and Sibelius, while the comets of Khachaturian and Kabalevsky already have lost their tails.

Leaders

Leading the classical hit parade are the following familiar composers and titles:

- Beethoven: Symphonies 3, 5, 7, and 9; "Emperor" Concerto.
 Tchaikovsky: Symphonies 4, 5 and 6; Romeo and Juliet; Nutcracker Suite; Piano Concerto No. 1.
 Rimsky-Korsakoff: "Schéhérazade"; "Capriccio Espagnol."
 Franck: Symphony in D minor.
 Grieg: Piano Concerto; "Peer Gynt" Suite.
 Bach: "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 2.
 Bizet: "Carmen."
 Puccini: "La Bohème"; "Madama Butterfly."
 Verdi: "La Traviata"; "Aida"; "Rigoletto."

Brahms: Symphonies 1 and 4; Variations on a Theme by Haydn.

Chopin: Piano Concertos.

Dvorak: Symphony 5.

Haydn: Symphonies 94, 100, 101 and 104.

Mendelssohn: Symphony 4; Violin Concerto.

Mozart: Symphonies 35, 38, 39, 40 and 41; "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik"; "Don Giovanni"; "The Marriage of Figaro."

Prokofieff: "Classical Symphony."

Rachmaninoff: Piano Concerto No. 2; Symphony 2, "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini."

Schubert: Symphony No. 8.

Schumann: Piano Concerto; Symphonies 1 and 4.

Sibelius: Symphonies 1 and 2.
 Strauss, Richard: "Death and Transfiguration"; "Till Eulenspiegel"; "Ein Heldenleben"; "Der Rosenkavalier" Suite.

Wagner: "Tannhaeuser" Overture and "Venusberg" Music; Prelude and "Liebestod" from "Tristan und Isolde"; "Siegfried's Rhine Journey" and "Funeral" Music from "Goetterdaemmerung."

But what about the more seasoned listener who is not quite up to chamber music, lieder, or the twelve-tone composers, but who nevertheless is as familiar with the old chestnuts as he is with the ring of his alarm clock or the sound of his wife's voice? The announcement on the radio page that Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto will be played on Symphony Hall is not likely to kindle the same enthusiasm he experienced for the work some ten or fifteen years ago. His saturation point has been reached. The question now is: where does he go from here?

Discoveries

In his exploration of new musical territory, the more experienced auditor has made a number of discoveries. Here is a sampling of selections slightly off the beaten path which have consistently

evoked noticeable interest among WQXR's audience. The music runs the gamut from charming trifles to works of great power. In each case, there is something special, perhaps unique, about the recording.

Granados: "La Maja y el Ruiseñor."

Paganini: Violin Concerto 2 in B Minor.

Tchaikovsky: Variations on a Rococo Theme.

Prince Louis Ferdinand: Rondó for Piano and Orchestra.

Mozart: Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra.

Villa-Lobos: "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5."

Fauré: Nocturne from "Shylock."

Moussorgsky: "Boris Godunov."

Purcell: "Nymphs and Shepherds."

Riisager: Concertino for Trumpet and String Orchestra.

Litolff: Scherzo from Concerto Symphonique.

Turina: "Rapsódia Sinfónica."

Corelli: Oboe Concerto in E.

Berlioz: "Harold in Italy."

Berlioz: "The Childhood of Christ."

Berbers: "The Triumph of Neptune."

Weber: "Und ob die Wolke," from "Der Freischuetz."

Walton: Music from the film, "Hamlet."

Bizet: "The Pearl Fishers."

Now we approach that part of the ocean of musical tastes where likes and dislikes, like the warm and cold waters of the Gulf Stream and the Labrador Current, come into sharpest conflict. The subject of disagreement is modern music.

Throughout November of last

year Symphony Hall was devoted to recordings of music since 1900. These programs prompted many listeners to inform us of their feelings about contemporary music. One letter stated that "the farther we get from Mozart, the less deserving is the composition to be called music. The public will never listen to modern composers because their output is horrible, ugly, ghastly noise."

Unstrung Orchestra

Another undertook a private survey among forty of his friends and learned that eighteen agreed that we were "making the night hideous" with our modern music festival. One member of our audience, after hearing Bartók's Divertimento for String Orchestra, recommended that our announcer make a "fortunate slip" and introduce the work as the "Divertimento for Unstrung Orchestra."

Against those who protest the increase of modern music on radio programs are those who deplore its lack of representation. "Serious, exciting and avant-garde music is less and less broadcast and all we get are Strauss waltzes and Beethoven, Bach, etc.," wrote a man from Brooklyn. Another asked: "How many times can one hear the Tchaikovsky 'Pathétique' and the Beethoven Fifth?" He went on to advise us that "it's time for a change. By all means continue playing the old chestnuts. But please—let's have more music of our age!"

MAESTROS AND THEIR DISK TIMINGS

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MAESTROS AND THEIR DISK TIMINGS

By HAROLD LAWRENCE

ACCORDING to Hector Berlioz, the pace at which a symphonic work is taken seems to harmonize with the speed at which a conductor's blood flows. In spite of Maelzel and his metronome and a host of Italian indications, tempo remains a somewhat personal matter, subject among other things to pulse and the metabolic rate. An audition (or, to use hi-fi terminology, an A-B test) of some of the duplicated pieces in the recorded repertory will point up variations in pace from one interpretation to another. But to do the job more efficiently, the stopwatch is a necessary piece of equipment. Consulting the timing files of WQXR's extensive library of recordings, a number of interesting facts were brought to light. The time-clock supported many of our ideas—and demolished a few popular notions—about conductors' tempi.

For many years Arturo Toscanini has had a reputation for metronomic infallibility and accelerated tempi. Since the advent of LP the Maestro has re-recorded a number of works, some of which were originally waxed over twenty years ago. This provides an excellent opportunity for exact comparisons. Lining up the tape against the shellac timings, here are some of the results.

Little Change

Over the course of years, Toscanini has changed very little in his approach to the following works. His old version of Brahms' Variations on a Theme of Haydn lasts 15:51, the new one 16:14—a difference of only twenty-three seconds. Earlier performances of Brahms' Symphony No. 1 and Haydn's Clock Symphony time at 41:45 and 26:16 respectively, while the recently issued Brahms is 41:03 and the new Haydn is 26:58—again a disparity of mere seconds.

But for every instance in which old and new performances end in a photo-finish, there are as many deviations. In the later release, the second movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 is 2:27 less than the earlier version; and the Scherzo from the new Eroica is also taken at a faster clip, being more than a minute shorter than its shellac counterpart. On the other hand, the first two movements of the new Seventh Symphony are reined in to the extent of two minutes, and the opening movement of the new Pastoral is nearly three minutes longer than the old release with the B. B. C. Symphony.

The peppery temperament of the Maestro is said to be responsible for his invariable choice of the fastest tempi possible within the framework of the composer's indications. A random survey of comparative timings explodes this myth. On many an occasion, Toscanini has outdistanced other conductors with the "whoosh" of a jet-propelled interpretation. But the facts demonstrate that speed with him is not an end in itself. Toscanini's recordings of Debussy's *La Mer* and Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe Suite No. 2* are the slowest in the LP catalogue, and his performances of Straus' *Don Juan*, Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*, Beethoven's *First*, *Sixth* and *Eighth* are among the longest. (But in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, Beethoven's *Fifth* and Brahms' *Fourth*, for instance, Toscanini flashes down the stretch for a decisive timing victory over other performers.)

Refutation

Thus, the conception of Toscanini as an over-sized metronome whose mechanism is set a little faster than normal, is thoroughly refuted by the hands of a stopwatch.

In his delightful autobiography, "A Mingled Chime," Sir Thomas Beecham wrote: "Throughout the whole of my career I have been looked upon as the protagonist of rapid

tempi, in spite of the provable fact that in the majority of cases I have actually taken more time over performances than many of my contemporaries who have escaped entirely a similar charge."

In almost every case, the timings bear out Sir Thomas' statement. Some of the more obvious examples are the Rondo from

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik (Beecham—4:43; Koussevitzky—2:16), the Scherzo from the *Eroica* and the third movement from the Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony* (each at least a minute longer than any other version). His recording of Mozart's *Symphony No. 29* outlasts Koussevitzky and Maag by more than five minutes. Under Beecham's baton, Sibelius' first two symphonies are taken in a more measured stride than any other versions.

Lengthy Versions

Ernest Newman's description of Hans Knappertbusch as conducting "not time but eternity" applies equally well to Wilhelm Furtwaengler. The latter's recordings of Brahms' *Symphony No. 1* (46:38) and *No. 2* (40:33), and Beethoven's *Eroica* (51:04) and *Seventh* (37:42) are the longest in the LP catalogue.

From the sampling of a number of Koussevitzky timings, the conclusion is that this conductor's choice of tempi fits into no set pattern. His performance of Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* and Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* are the longest on record. But both his recordings of Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* are about a minute ahead of all other interpretations. In his early recording of Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony*, Koussevitzky took the first movement at a swifter tempo than any other conductor. Oddly enough, in re-recording the work after the war, Koussevitzky went to the other extreme, turn-

ing out the slowest first movement in the catalogue.

Although few discophiles would suspect it, Felix Weingartner moves into a comfortable lead in the timings handicap with the following works: Beethoven's *First* (20:44), *Third* (44:19), *Sixth* (33:41) and *Ninth* (61:25); and Brahms' *First* (39:08) and *Second* (35:11).

Now we come to the contemporary composer and his interpreter. Before his death Richard Strauss had recorded three of his own works: *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (34:29), *Don Quixote* (38:29) and *Ein Heldenleben* (39:18). "Strauss' conductor" (as Clemens Krauss is called) took "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" at 35:35 and "Ein Heldenleben" at 41:47. Reiner and Ormandy were very close to the composer's own timing of "Don Quixote" with 38:08 and 38:41 respectively.

Hindemith's twenty-year-old recording of "Mathias der Maler" (24:30) is almost matched second for second by Ormandy's new version (24:35).

The interpreters have done very well by Igor Stravinsky, according to the following comparative timings: *Symphony of Psalms*—Stravinsky (22:15), *Ansermet* (21:43); *Apollon Musagète*—Stravinsky (29:01), *Hollreiser* (28:53); *Circus Polka*—Stravinsky (3:27), *Ansermet* (3:27); *Concerto Grosso in D*—Stravinsky (11:49), *Barbirolli* (11:58); *Le Baiser de la Fée*—Stravinsky (23:06), *Ansermet* (23:22); *Feux d'Artifice*—Stravinsky (3:46), *Defauw* (3:45), *Kleiber* (3:36).

The above examples seem to refute what Saint-Saëns had to say about conductors: "There are two kinds; one takes the music too fast, and the other too slow. There is no third!"