

REPLAY

Munch in Boston, Herz in San Francisco

French collections from the east and west coasts

Another significant collection of live performances arrives from West Hill Radio Archives, who are continuing a valuable series of skilfully restored Boston Symphony broadcasts under **Charles Munch**. This particular French collection features, in addition to various "live" versions of Munch interpretations that we already know from his RCA records, works that he never recorded in Boston, for example Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (though he did tape a version with the Philadelphia Orchestra). This Boston option is relatively sombre and thoughtful, though typically sensitive in its voicing of detail. Another "first" is Debussy's *Jeux*, which is far more extrovert in manner, while Faure's Requiem again sounds introspective and weighty. It's good to hear Milhaud's substantial Sixth Symphony, and Roussel's absorbing Suite in F is very well played. Ravel's Introduction and Allegro is offered with full strings lusciously employed (a fact that the fair-to-middling sound quality merely hints at) and while Munch made a famous record of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* with William Primrose as the viola soloist, this earlier version with the less distinctive Joseph de Pasquale is more moody and exciting (just compare the two in the opening pages). Other works include Franck's D minor Symphony, another hugely flexible and excitable affair, Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* and Debussy's *La damoiselle élue*, both with Victoria de los Angeles, a thrilling *La mer*, the complete set of orchestral *Images*, a riotous *La valse* and *Rapsodie espagnole* and two works featuring Munch's niece, pianist Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer, both also available in less spontaneous-sounding commercial alternatives, Ravel's Concerto in G and d'Indy's *Symphony on a French Mountain Air*. Munch fans will expect high levels of visceral

excitement, though in my experience the subtler shades that are often in evidence here crop up less frequently in the studio, which is what makes the comparisons so interesting. The mono sound quality is mostly very good, with little evidence of intrusive noise-reduction.

The same goes for the exceptional third volume of Pristine's "**Alfred Hertz** and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra: The Complete Recordings" which is devoted to French music, the high-point being a 1928 recording of Massenet's *Le Cid* ballet music, buoyant, well drilled, richly sensual. Music from Delibes's *Coppélia* and *Sylvia* is also charmingly interpreted, as are Massenet and Auber overtures. I adored the pointedly pompous *Funeral March of a Marionette*. A really super collection. ●

THE RECORDINGS



Various Composers A Treasury of French Music
Boston SO / Munch

West Hill Radio Archives © © WHRA6027



Various Composers Cpte Recordings, Vol 3
San Francisco SO / Hertz

Pristine Audio © PASC216

Mostly strings

A Bloch anniversary reissue plus Bach and Mozart from the past

Born 130 years ago this year, **Ernest Bloch** remains a somewhat unfashionable figure. Although his music sometimes teeters on the brink of Bartokian acerbity, much of it relates a warmth and sincerity that few of Bloch's contemporaries could lay claim to. I was delighted to receive an EMI "Gemini" double-pack that features Maurice Abravanel's 1977 recording of the *Sacred Service* with baritone Douglas Lawrence, as fine a version of we now have, beautifully recorded. Rostropovich and Bernstein are highly flammable in *Schelomo* and it's good to welcome back Yehudi Menuhin in the Violin Concerto (1963) and the two solo Suites of 1958 (1974-75). The Academy of St Martin in the Fields playing the joyous First Concerto grosso is an added bonus, and so is David Gutman's concise but perceptive annotation. Menuhin's orchestral **Bach** has been featured on many a reissue and, while running counter to the customised cool of period performance, continues to delight with its full-bodied tone, musical phrasing and well chosen tempi. In a word, they sound beautiful, even though ensemble isn't always exactly "tight" (the Overture to the Third Suite, for example). The latest compilation couples all four Orchestral Suites with the A minor Violin Concerto, the Concerto for Violin and Oboe (with Leon Goossens) and for Flute, Violin and Harpsichord (with William Bennett and George Malcolm). The recording quality combines clarity with impressive warmth of texture and the transfers are excellent.

A series of recordings by the Pasquier Trio from 1951 falls rather less

comfortably on the ear even though the actual playing is often of the highest quality, especially in **Mozart's** great Divertimento for string trio, K563. The couplings are a minefield of scholarly controversy, namely "Four Preludes and Fugues from String Trio Arrangements K404a" with playing that sometimes errs on the side of caution, whereas the main work is lovingly performed. One hopes that Music & Arts will also be able to unearth the Beethoven quartet recordings by the Pascal Quartet. It would be wonderful to have those on CD, too. ●

THE RECORDINGS



Bloch Sacred Service, etc **Abravanel, Menuhin et al**
EMI © © 456319-2

Bach Concertos **Menuhin et al**
EMI © © 456314-2

Mozart String Trio, K563, etc **Pasquier Trio**
Music & Arts © CD1233