

Reviews

Record Review by Alan Zingale

BERLIOZ: Les Troyens (The Trojans). Opera in five acts and nine tableaux. Libretto: Hector Berlioz after Virgil. Vickers, Veasey, Lindholm, Davis, Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. 5-Phillips 6709002. (First Complete Recording).

For the past century, Berlioz's "The Trojans" has existed primarily as legend. Until recently, it was fashionable to view this work as a sprawling white elephant, fatally uneven, unplayable, and unstageable. But the modern Berlioz revival in Britain has proved these assertions to be false.

When Raphael Kubelik conducted a Covent Garden version in 1957, it seemed evident that "The Trojans" was "one of the most gigantic and convincing masterpieces of music-drama," to quote Sir Donald Tovey. As the musical public's attitude toward Berlioz gradually changed, the publishing firm of Barenreiter restored in 1969, the first full original score of "The Trojans" (a timely task for the centenary of Berlioz's death). Also, the year 1969 saw the first performance ever of the opera as the composer intended - complete and in the original language. The conductor was Colin Davis at Covent Garden, again.

Davis, with most of the original cast, began this recording a few days after the final performances. Featuring Jon Vickers, Josephine Veasey, and Berit Lindholm in the main roles, it is the first and only complete recording available of "The Trojans" (five discs). It should prove to be one of the most important of our time.

The libretto of "The Trojans" is from Books I, II, and IV of Virgil's epic poem the "Aeneid," with ideas or events drawn from other parts of the poem when necessary. Much of the Latin text was directly translated or paraphrased into French by Berlioz himself, which allowed him the freedom to select carefully material that would best serve his dramatic purposes. The opera's central idea concerns the destiny and fate of the Trojan nation. The personal tragedies of Cassandra (Acts I & II) and Dido (Acts III, IV, & V) develop and demonstrate this theme. Gradually, Aeneas emerges as the doomed hero and at the opera's close his legions are upon Italy, where they will found a new Troy.

Reviewing can become difficult and dangerous when a full score cannot be provided and when there are no other complete recordings available for com-

parison. Nevertheless, Colin Davis is considered among the finest of today's conductors, and has been respected as an eminent Berlioz specialist. He has recorded a complete cycle of Berlioz works, all of which have received rave reviews, praising their definitiveness. There is no reason to suspect that he would or could fall short now, in what is perhaps Berlioz's greatest and loftiest creation.

Moreover, the cast of this recording has had the inestimable experience of staging the work under live performing conditions, which naturally assures a more convincing and unified opera in the recording studio. In evaluating the vastly impressive performance given here by these dedicated Britons, there should be no doubt that this recording will hold its own for years to come.

Jon Vickers (tenor) is heroically powerful in the role of Aeneas; Berit Lindholm (soprano) portrays Cassandra with fitting intensity; and Josephine Veasey (mezzo) effectively explores the noble pathos of Dido. The supporting cast is equally convincing, showing as much involvement as the principals. Davis has the orchestra and choruses in top form, with the choruses showing an unusual degree of accuracy and precision. (The Wandsworth School Boys' Choir joins the Royal Opera House Chorus in certain sections).

Occasionally however, there are some slight brass cracks in the orchestra and there are a few places that cause one to question the precision of the percussion. But for the most part, the playing is of top caliber, especially outstanding for phrasing, intonation, and clarity.

Phillips' engineers have done a brilliant job with balance and depth. The off-stage brass bands are appropriately distant; the opera's many ghosts really sound like ghosts; and the actual stage positions have been preserved for the correct acoustical effect. Fortunately, the final combination remains spacious without losing power, the sound never being cramped.

In sum, all of these sincere efforts have produced what appears to be, in every sense of the word, a masterpiece. To say that "The Trojans" is one of the most interesting or unusual of musical resurrections is to understate the case. The product of a lifetime, it is emerging as an opera of visionary beauty and splendor, fascinating in its invention, and compelling in its epic sweep.

Editorial

Artisan Jungle

by Cortlandt Jones

The Reynolda Gardens has moved and will be renamed the Artisan Jungle. The location of the new site is on the once barren waste land of NCSA. With the addition of a few shrubs, trees, pines, and evergreens this swamp like terrain has become one of the most densely populated arboretums that ever hit North Carolina.

In ten years the campus of NCSA will no longer be in view of the average passer-by. The bustling trees will have grown, the tiny leafed shrubs will have spread (thorns and all), the wimpering pines will reach and tickle the feet of God as the strong statuesque evergreens protect our communal bird from the great white monster.

The hovering crystal balls illuminate the future. One can see

the fragile college student of tomorrow fighting his way to class killing off attacking snakes, big green poisonous atomic lizards, just to attend a piano lesson. "Did Tarzan start like this", a voice is heard swinging through trees. "No, he wouldn't have lived through all this", cries a dance student as he jetes across the muddy swamp to the pebbly steps of safety.

Next stop, Shangri-La the Utopia of NCSA. This is a place where the sun beats down on the perfectly placed trees and arranged flowers, as the murmuring brook trickles on.

The moral to this little fantasy is: just like an unattractive fat woman wearing too much gaudy colorful makeup and too much dangling jewelry, you can over do it!

Sunflower

by George Yarbrough

(George Yarbrough used to be a teacher. He now works in a brewery. He is a friend and a connoisseur of rock and roll music. He aspires to be a working class hero).

The Beach Boys is-are America's most misunderstood group. They've never been able to shake that early image of clean-cut surfers, glorifying the high school scene, and because of this the rock public has largely ignored them. Capitol Records has not helped much. Refusing to release much of their ambitious material (considered to be too freaky), Capitol has consistently tried to keep them in the mainstream of commercialized rock.

Sunflower, their first album on the Warner Brothers- Reprise label, is a milestone in their career. Besides being their finest album to date, it is also a technical achievement in sound reproduction. Responsible for all this is Brian Wilson, a musical genius (these days, who isn't) and leader of the Beach Boys. With brothers Carl and Dennis, cousin Mike Love, and friends Al Jardine and Bruce Johnston, Brian has produced twelve superb cuts.

Their sound is essentially the same as before, sort of a cross between Chuck Berry and the



BRIAN WILSON, BEACH BOY GENIUS: HE GETS AROUND.

Four Freshmen, but the music has gained subtleties which set it apart from most of their previous material. In fact, some of the music is so subtle that it can float past you without warning. All of it is pleasant; the Beach Boys refuse to sound heavy. Which is why they're so heavy.

Dennis Wilson shines on "Got To Know The Woman," a soul riff, and "Forever," a love song. His "It's About Time" is excellent. Bruce Johnston is featured on "Deidre" and "Tears In The Morning," two more outstanding cuts. "At My Window" comes close to cloying, but the song saves itself by preceding

"Cool, Cool Water," which has to be heard to be believed. There is a good feeling about this album, a joyous feeling which reflects the attitudes and ideas of the Beach Boys. In fact, "Add Some Music To Your Day" is the theme of the album, in which Brian sings of music as medicine and concludes:

The world could come together as one

If everybody under the sun

Would add some music to his day

Warm, wise and beautiful are the Beach Boys. We cannot doubt them any longer.

Editorial

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must be preserved and if we are to accomplish such a mighty task, we must not allow this separation, this inability to be rational, this striking out in absolute despair. As we do, we only get further from where we want to go and we play the game the Nixons have always wanted us to play.

New ways of 'fighting' must be invented, new methods of pressuring, new styles of harassment. If we want to save ourselves, we cannot believe that one form of madness will defeat another. We are not helpless, although we may appear to be now. We have let ourselves reach a point where we think we can alter things only by employing the same means we deplore. But it doesn't work that way, people; it never has and it never will.

We are not, like the Nixons and the Agnews, insensitive, irrational, blind human beings. We are not without compassion and understanding. We are not, like the John Mitchells and the rest of those mechanical tools, without poetry. We must use things to their fullest, not disband them because it seems they will not work. If our vision is to be realized, we must work all the harder to make them effective. We must seek a new direction, a new approach, but we must not give up and give in to the tactics of despair. We need a reinforcement of ourselves, a revitalization, a reason to believe that we have not blown ourselves out. People, we have to believe in ourselves again.

That is our task, our duty, it seems to me. Because in the end, we will win out over the stupidity, the banality, the corruption, the killing, the greed. But we have to believe that we are right. If we don't, then we should despair. And we haven't lately; we've even started to take our own press clippings seriously. And we cannot, because no man alive - no Richard Nixon, no Sprio Agnew, no James Daley - will be able to deny us if we believe we are right. Their days are numbered, that's a fact. We have to find ourselves though, if we are to matter. And until we do, we will continue to act in frustration and despair, losing our meaning and value, and no better than those whom we scorn.

The J. Geils Band

by Tony Angevine

Are you ready for J. Geils?

A band of six hard rocking rollers from Boston, the J. Geils band is one of the tightest groups to come forward in the recent deluge of good rock 'n roll people. They have been together for something like (Eight years) - What alternative to a life in the factory but rock 'n roll? - and it really shows in their music.

The band seems to have emerged suddenly out of the fifties, some of them sporting greased hair and pompadors, blasting out the rough rocking music of that "era" with songs like "HOMEWORK" and "CRUISIN' FOR A LOVE", tightened and smothered to a point of absolute artistry. Their music is no riff, though (this is not another Sha Na Na or Ruben and the Jets); it's their lifestyle: tough-talking songs like "HARD DRIVIN' MAN" ("I'm gonna leave you baby... Just twenty-seven more minutes before I say bye-bye- I'm a hard drivin' man...") with piano and bass working together sounding like a churning engine, and "FIRST I LOOK AT THE PURSE" ("I don't care if you got yourself a rash- All I want is your pretty green cash- I want me a suit- I want me a car- I want me to look like a Hollywood star..."). Even their slower songs, bluesy things like John Lee Hooker's "SERVES YOU RIGHT TO SUFFER" or their own "ON BORROWED TIME" push the listener to exhaustion through the energy of their presentation. The music combines the intensity of the Seventies with the musical integrity of the Fifties, the fierce flair and style of the Seventies with the relentless but unpretentious beat of the Fifties. Driving, squealing, it never lets up, never wears thin.

The best way to dig J. Geils & Co. is in a live performance. Their stage act is really something to behold. Not as greasy and leather-jacketed as you'd expect from their sound, they come bopping on stage smiling and feeling good. They rip right into a frantic instrumental, "SNO-CONE", perhaps, throwing out some outstanding organ, harp and drum solos and leads. It's immediately obvious that their

vitality is sincere; they don't condescend to their audience, they play for them, catching and recycling the energy, capturing the attention and admiration of their wild, milling outdoor audience :i.e. Jubilee).

Singer Peter Wolf commands the stage from the moment he touches it, his lithe, black-cald body rampaging, jumping, spinning, strutting with a grace and unselfconscious abandon not witnessed in a long time. His voice is that of a scowling, knife-toting street fighter, lazy but powerful, crooning, shrieking, muttering. Beautiful. One of the toughest most exciting vocalist-performers around.

J. Geils himself, heavy guitar man, stands unassumingly somewhere behind freaking Wolf. His hair is long and greased back, shades hide his eyes, but his good natured smile flashes as he tortures his axe into a sustained screech. J. Geils can get any sound you want out of that guitar, from simple, straightforward picking to the wildest fuzz-toned wail, working easily off Danny Klein's hard-drivin' bass. Then there's Magic Dick, quietly lurking under a bushy Afro, just waiting to jump out and tear your ears off with his shrieking ban-shee harp. In the opening of "CRUISIN' FOR A LOVE", that crazy harp sounds like a glass-shattering sax.

From where we were stationed, we couldn't see keyboard man Seth Justman or drummer Stephen Bladd - a shame, because there was certainly some kind of frenzy going on back there. Justman jumping from piano to organ and back, bringing the organ up to an ear-splitting pitch to match guitar and harp. And drummer Bladd flailing away with the naturally rhythmic abandon of a tribal witch doctor.

The most exciting part of J. Geils Band's performance is their contact with the audience, their cheerful confidence, their great enjoyment of what they are doing. They grab their audience, catch them up in the whirlwind pace and joyful frenzy, then finally ease off, everybody left exhausted and satisfied. Maybe that's why they were called back twice for encores.