

Eine Kleine Mozartmusik

The legend of the four-year-old Wolfgang sitting at the piano, atop a mound of pillows, and boggling the assembled aristocracy with his incredible musicianship has become a part of western European folklore.

Indeed, the image is so pervasive that all child prodigies since have been measured against little "Wolfgang's" imagined accomplishments. To their detriment — for with the possible exception of Steve Wonder (remember when he was billed as "Little Stevie"?), it is doubtful if any infant has been born with such raw musical genius as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

In little more than 30 years, Mozart produced 626 catalogued compositions, small and large, including no less than 41 symphonies, 25 concertos for piano and orchestra, 17 operas and operettas, 23 string quartets, and something like ten masses.

Half of this output, even a quarter, would have been enough to rank Mozart among the enduring titans of "classical" music. Yet one after the other, the compositions poured out, mostly written on commission at knock-down prices (50 Viennese ducats for the made-to-order Requiem, his last work).

The music came so spontaneously Mozart habitually kept two manuscripts going simultaneously, one darkly serious, the other light and sunny. He would alternate between the two as the mood or practical exigencies demanded.

No one can own records of the complete Mozart; there is just too much. Moreover, a couple hundred are, well, immature, and of interest only to pedants.

With that in mind, this selected list of the prime cuts. As with the Bach recommendations two months ago, there are numbing omissions, but on the theory that too few are better than too much — at least for the pocketbook — we suggest this "top ten."

Number one with a bullet is necessarily *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, otherwise known as the Serenade in G, Mozart's most famous composition. Any of a dozen recordings will do, though a personal favorite remains the old Columbia-Odyssey version by Bruno Walter.

Next in accessibility is the light-hearted Serenade No. 10 for thirteen wind instruments. Mozart's serenades were meant to be entertaining background music for the parties of Vienna's upper-crust. The record of choice is clearly that of the Netherlands Wind Ensemble on Philips.

Logically, the four horn concertos should follow. Three are engaging works, written literally to tease a horn-playing friend to virtuosic heights; the fourth is shaded with darker strokes, hinting of the profundities which were to emerge in later years. The favored recording here would be that of horn soloist Barry Tuckwell on Angel though Denis Brain's out-of-print reading on Angel is one of the truly great recordings of our time.

Almost any of the piano concertos would belong in a good record collection, but a handful of readings would seem to

be especially worthy: Peter Serkin's recordings of Numbers 14 and 17 on RCA; Alfred Brendel's versions of Numbers 19 and 23 on Philips; Robert Casadesu's pairing of Numbers 26 and 27 on Columbia. Beyond these, of course, is the now famous theme from *Elektra Madigan*, actually the second movement of Number 20. Gyza Anda couples that with Number 21 on RCA, but the Rudolph Serkin reading on Columbia is equally commendable.

A piano virtuoso himself, Mozart wrote a considerable amount of music for that instrument including 17 piano sonatas. Most are short, intended as entertaining parlor music. The Wilhelm Backhaus recording of Numbers 4, 5, 10 and 12 on London would be the record of choice unless the budget will stretch to accommodate the three-record set by the well-matched Lili Kraus on Columbia's bargain-basement Odyssey label.

Mozart's symphonies tended to alternate between stylish amusement and somber philosophies. The problem is that most conductors cannot gracefully accommodate both aspects of Mozart's personality, the riotously profane and the sublime. George Szell's readings with the Cleveland and Bruno Walter's with a variety of orchestras are especially noteworthy. The older Klemperer recordings of Numbers 38 and 39 on Angel are exceptional as well.

There is a huge library of chamber music for groups of all sizes, but the unchallenged accomplishment among all of it are the six quartets dedicated to Franz Joseph Haydn, a composer of no mean accomplishment himself. The Quarneri Quartet versions on RCA are first rate, though the older Juilliard set on Odyssey has a large price advantage and quite acceptable sound.

The three towering masterworks — if that overworked word has any meaning left — fill out this top ten.

Strictly speaking, *The Magic Flute* is an operetta since it has spoken lines in it, but this Masonic mystery tour flashes from giddy humor to religious solemnity to philosophic musing. The version led by Karl Bohm on Deutsche Grammophon is excellent, with the Georg Solti set on London also worthy.

Don Giovanni is quintessential Mozart, sophisticated in style, its melodies immediately attractive, its message endlessly provocative. The Barenboim set on Angel, the Colin Davis on Philips, and the Bohm on Deutsche Grammophon are all excellent, with perhaps a slight edge to Davis.

Finally, the Requiem, Mozart's last composition, left unfinished at his death in 1791, a work of sublime beauty which he recognized would be his funeral ode. The Barenboim version on Angel has the best soloists, but the Davis reading on Philips the grander, more moving overall conception.

Necessarily, so much is not here — the clarinet concerto, the violin sonatas, the quintets — but this sampling will serve by way of introduction. And beyond these, there are some 600 other works to discover for yourself.

Ed Cray



Heavy Metal Mayhem

Wailin' Van Halen

Van Halen
(Warner Bros.)

If I could have written the script to *A Star Is Born*, it would've read something like this: high-school garage band forms deep in the heart of Hollywood with Aerosmith illusions, allusions, and delusions of grandeur. Group spends a year playing everything you wanted to know about Kiss (but valued your sanity more in comparison), moves to original material, clubs, and a few opening slots at local UFO concerts, gets big recording deal, cuts an album that makes Montrose look like the Mouseketeers, sells a zillion copies, inherits the earth, destroys the evil Empire, and rules the universe. Barbra can play Rhinestone (a groping groupie) and I would cast Kris as Rar Scabies in this Horation Alger abortion. But the real stars of this show are Van Halen, an Old Wave reincarnation of all those things you really like in a rock 'n' roll band, such as blazing guitar telepaths, Robert Plant eunuch screams, and bass runs that crack the foundation, plus real songs instead of glorified two-chord razor-blade rampages. Their story may be a bit typical, but their sound is somewhere between Cheap Trick and the Apocalypse in terms of original heavy-metal mayhem. It's been a long, lonely, lonely time since such riffs have blown through my Advents, but there isn't one wasted groove on *Van Halen*, a power-packed debut disc that should send pacemakers pumping in Ted Nugentland for months to come.

Ed Van Halen's distortion drama and greased fret-board frenzy will surely appease the Mahogany Rush guitar-garbanos in the audience; he plays like a one-man Blue Oyster Cult on every cut, while microphone-extension David Roth redefines Jim Dandy and grafts Sammy Hagar onto his own distinctive vocal hi-jinks. Couple this to a rhythm section that'll alert the National Guard after two bars, and you've got some-

thing that may bury the Led Zeppelin myth for good.

No turkeys on this Derringer death-wish, even though Van Halen's been influenced by everything since Steppenwolf was hatched. "Runnin' with the Devil," "Little Dreamer," and "Feel Your Love Tonight" come from the Bad Co.-Foreigner book of laser-licks, while "Jamie's Crying" and "I'm the One" make Rick Nielsen sound like Rod McKuen, and "Atomic Punk" and "Eruption" should knock the rocks out of Queen's pretty little heads for a while.

But "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love," "On Fire," and a Waring-blender version of "You Really Got Me" are the clinchers on this real rocket to Russia, to hell with the bollocks. Rock isn't dead, just backdated, and Van Halen may just be the band to redirect us from the blank generation to the days when it was considered an asset to be exceptional songwriters and talented musicians (it has been a long time, hasn't it?). Am I nuts over this or just plain nuts? Only your psycho-analyst knows for sure, but don't blame me if he starts puking blood on your carpet.

Chris Clark

Little Feat:
Waiting for Columbus (Warner Bros.)

Little Feat enjoy the reputation among many of their fans as the finest band in America. Personally, I'm a little nervous about making commitments like that, but if some crazed hipster were to hold a gun to my head and demand to know who's best, I probably wouldn't hesitate too long before answering Little Feat.

And if this crazed hipster demanded proof, I'd immediately offer to play him the new live Little Feat album, *Waiting for Columbus*.

Like most live albums, *Waiting for Columbus* is pretty much a greatest hits package. And, like most live albums these days, it's a two-record set. Unlike most live albums, the versions of the songs included here are almost without exception superior to the original studio tracks.

Except for the very nice touch of adding a