

adjectives. Then, starting with some recordings called "Exclusively For My Friends" made in the late sixties, he seemed to rehabilitate himself; critics recognized a jazzman of depth and Peterson was on his way to the top. Were we right in the earlier years? These tracks, all from concerts between 1950 and 1955 suggest to me that we were not unjust. The accent is undoubtedly on technical brilliance, and the breakneck tempi of some numbers, such as *Sweet Georgia Brown* or *C-jam blues*, are stupefying; *Seven come eleven*, potentially a fine vehicle for guitarist Barney Kessel, is spoiled for a similar reason. The relative relaxation of *Nuages*, a feature for the guitar of Herb Ellis, or the blues *Easy does it*, is a positive relief in this context. Side 2 of the second record, from a Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ontario, has some performances of rather more subtlety (for example *Noreen's nocturne*), but again I hear very little of the magnificent jazzman who supported those trumpeters on the five Pablo

records I reviewed in July (page 229). Perhaps concert recordings are not the best material for re-assessing the young Peterson. J.P.

#### Zoot Sims

"Zoot Sims and the Gershwin brothers"  
**The man I love: How long has this been going on?: Oh Lady be good: I've got a crush on you: I got rhythm/Embraceable you: 'S wonderful: Someone to watch over me: Isn't it a pity: Summertime.** Polydor Pablo 2310 744 (£2.95).

Take the ever-reliable Zoot Sims on the tenor saxophone, add Oscar Peterson, Joe Pass on guitar, George Mraz on bass and Grady Tate on drums; choose a programme of Gershwin themes, and you can hardly go wrong. Yet some risk is involved: the very familiarity of the themes and musicians might make everything so predictable that the jazz lover would take it all for granted and turn elsewhere. It has happened before but, I am happy to report, not here. This record is indeed

predictable, yet in no way ordinary: the musicians are so good they even turn a worn-out theme such as *I got rhythm* into a *tour de force*. This could, indeed, be the high spot of the disc—hear the interplay of Pass and Peterson followed by a superb piano solo into which Sims breaks without batos as only a great jazzman could. He stretches out magnificently on this track, yet elsewhere, as on the succinct *How long has this been going on?*, he shows another quality of the great musician: that of knowing when to stop. Sims is sometimes accused of lack of involvement, yet his tone has become fuller with the passing years and few could deny the passion of *Embraceable you* or that (to me) rather uninteresting song, *Someone to watch over me*. And all the musicians can work over a minor sequence without running out of ideas, as on the swinging version of *Summertime* (notice Mraz's bowed solo—as if you could miss it). Uncomplicated mainstream of the highest quality. J.P.

## New Cassettes and Cartridges



### Wagner's "Ring"

It was only a matter of time before Decca transferred their *Ring* cycle to cassettes. Now that it has been done, I have nothing but praise for the technical achievement. In the first place *Walküre* and *Siegfried* take only three cassettes apiece so that each act has been fitted on to one tape, a considerable gain over the disc equivalents. *Rheingold* goes nicely on to two, *Götterdämmerung* on to four, so that the compactness of the whole project hardly needs further emphasis from me. Then, I would challenge any but the fussiest hi-fi addict to detect any loss in range or depth of sound, while once again I was delighted to hear a work without a single crackle or pop. Decca include full texts and translations, of course, and the booklets are further adorned by John Culshaw's essays taken from the equivalents on disc, but many of the illustrations have had to be sacrificed for space reasons. The boxes are of the standard Decca type, with their rather ungainly and utilitarian plastic moulds inside.

So many words have been spilled over Decca's and Culshaw's attainment of the first *Ring* on record or tape, and the vicissitudes that attended its almost abortive birth, that I hardly need to recapitulate here. As recorded, the performances wear their years lightly, unless you feel, as I have sometimes done, that an orchestral sound, so much more refulgent and spacious than anything you could possibly hear in the theatre, is not quite natural, but again as I moved further and further into the cycle I was caught up in Culshaw's 'production' and all its studio imagination.

As for the interpretation, Solti naturally gained in experience as a Wagner conductor from 1958 to 1965, and so this *Ring* can be, and has been, criticized for not being a genuine cycle, heard over a few days. It has also been, in different ways, challenged on disc by Karajan's, Furtwängler's and Böhm's readings, the last two having the (for me and apparently Deryck Cooke) priceless advantage of the spontaneity of a live recording; but as none of these is as yet available on cassette, the Solti—as it did for long on record—can hold its head high as representative of the grandest concept in operatic history. And I am not certain for anyone coming to the *Ring* for the first time that the Solti is not the best introduction, for his primarily dramatic, energetic (sometimes frenetic) and detailed account of the score has an immediate excitement that one enjoys anew after some more, shall we say, deeper, slower, more spiritual readings.

All *Ring* casts have strengths and weaknesses. This one boasts Nilsson's rock-steady, untiring

and perceptive Brunnhilde, not as gloriously warm as Flagstad's or as overwhelmingly involved as Mödl's or Varnay's. Hotter, though no longer vocally quite what he was, is for me still easily the most authoritative, imposing and eloquent Wotan, every phrase of the long Narration, every answer to Stolze's cringing Mime sung with supreme intelligence. Thank goodness John Culshaw had faith in him. Apart from these three key roles, there are many other performances that bespeak wise casting.

So, by and large, I can promise anyone hesitating as to whether to invest such a large sum (even at the special price until March) an absorbing experience, one from which later on they will be able to take as a yardstick by which to judge any future cassette issues of the *Ring*. A.B.

*Das Rheingold* K2W29—£8.00 (£9.50)  
*Die Walküre* K3W30—£12.00 (£14.25)  
*Siegfried* K3W31—£12.00 (£14.25)  
*Götterdämmerung* K4W32—£16.00 (£19.00)

Prices in brackets apply after February 28th, 1977.

### Philips and CBS

Philips introduced the music cassette as a recording medium just over a decade ago. The earliest pre-recorded tapes marketed by this company, however, did not suggest much confidence in the medium as a source of high fidelity reproduction. But the technology of tape copying has come a long way since those days and so have our expectations. They are not disappointed by a recent batch of budget-priced tapes of reissued material in the Philips "Sonic Series" which show a high standard of technical quality. An enterprising tape of suites from Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* and Prokofiev's *Love of Three Oranges* includes also the same composer's *Scythian Suite*. Antal Dorati conducts throughout and the performances are vivid while the transfers have a wide dynamic range and plenty of detail (7321 021).

An even better bargain is offered by the coupling of Szell's dynamic performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (the orchestra is the Concertgebouw) with the splendid account of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor by Colin Davis and the LSO. The *Così fan tutte* Overture is thrown in as a bonus. The Mozart transfer offers demonstration quality and the Beethoven is nearly as good, although the level is slightly lower (7317 133). Two of Ingrid Haebler's Mozart piano concerto issues can also be recommended for their warm orchestral sound and natural piano tone. The coupling of No. 17 in G major K453 with the *Coronation Concerto*, K537 shows Miss Haebler's elegance of manner and meticulous sense of style at its

most appealing. One can have reservations about the slow movement of K537 being too precise, but taken as a whole, and remembering the sympathetic accompaniments provided by Rowicki and the LSO, this is very enjoyable (7317 137). No less impressive is the freshness of the transfer of the "Elvira Madigan" Concerto (No. 21 in C major) played by the same team. Here the pianist's approach sometimes gives the feeling of being too straitlaced, but such clean, well mannered playing (and there is no lack of sparkle) has its own appeal, even if the famous slow movement is less expansive here than in some versions. The coupling is the enchanting Double Piano Concerto in E flat major, K365, where the second piano part is played by Ludwig Hoffman; the conductor is Galliera (7317 112). This is a well balanced performance, which has genuine spontaneity. It is not perhaps as fine as the version by Brendel and Klien on Turnabout (KTV34064) but the Philips recording is more natural. I Musici provides my other Mozart cassette and this offers string quality of quite remarkable realism (especially considering the early date of the original). The playing, however, is very relaxed: the *Adagio and Fugue* in C minor is lacking in tension and the *Serenata Notturna* (here the recording is slightly more opaque) is somewhat unimaginative. But the Divertimento for strings in D major K136 and *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* are both successful, played in this expressive way (7317 123).

Szeryng's coupling of Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor with the Sibelius Violin Concerto is less attractive. The performances are undoubtedly distinguished but the transfers are made at a low level and the sound lacks presence. The musical notes provided with each of these Philips cassettes are a model. They are informative, and very clearly printed in type of a sensible size (7317 132).

It is a general lack of vividness and a curiously amorphous quality in the recorded sound that makes a recent batch of CBS cassettes difficult to take seriously as an alternative to their LP equivalents. There are two honourable exceptions. Most fortunately, Frederica von Stade's marvellous recital of French operatic arias can be recommended on all counts. Reviewing the disc (7/76) JBS found that his only problem was "how to convey her excellence in temperate language". As with the disc, nothing clouds the success of this fabulous collection on tape. The transfer is kind to the voice, and the level is high with Side 2 marginally higher than Side 1 (40-76522). An excellent Verdi recital by Renata Scottò, including arias from *Otello*, *La Traviata*, *I Lombardi*, *La Battaglia di Legnano*, *Nabucco* and *I Vespri Siciliani* is also transferred