recordings with wrong notes in them, but this isn't one of them, and the tape should have been allowed to rest quietly in an archivists somewhere. The sound is decent except for some mild, recurrent burbles.

No texts or translations, just a fact-filled note by Richard Freed: one presumes that most purchasers of this record will be supplementing another, more modern one, and thus already own the words.

D.H.


Comparison—tuba concerto: Fletcher, Previn/London Sym.

Comparison—-oboe concerto: Williams, Berglund/Bournemouth Sym. RCA LSC 3281

It's hard to imagine any other major composer writing so good-hearted and gracious a concerto for so gruff and ungainly an instrument as the bass tuba. Not that the piece is easy for the soloist, and DG's close microphonic zeroes in mercilessly on soloist Arnold Jacobs' fingerwork and breathing; RCA recorded John Fletcher (with Andre Previn and the London Symphony) as part of a more blended ensemble. Fletcher and Previn make a more depressive effect in the central Romanza movement, taken more briskly by Jacobs and Barenboim. If the sharp contrast in approaches doesn't determine your choice, it may help to note that Previn's coupled performance of Vaughan Williams' Pastoral Symphony must yield in mastery to the version of Vaughan Williams' Pastoral Symphony, which specifically calls for a harpsichord. Another is the engineer's exploitation of a notably wide dynamic range to permit not only maximum impact of the fortissimos, but also an interpretatively and tonally a sheer joy to hear. For he, as well as Alice Harnoncourt and cellist/leader Nikolaus Harnoncourt, combines skill and vitality and further spices the mixture with a delectable leaning of wit and humor.

There are further attractions. One is the tonally bewitching use of a period replica Truhenorgel (chest or positive organ) in the continuo parts of all the concertos except No. 3 (Autumn), which specifically calls for a harpsichord. Another is the engineer's exploitation of a notably wide dynamic range to permit not only maximum impact of the fortissimos, but also an enchantingly sotto-voce pianissimos. Still others—but I should leave those for your own delighted discovery.

R.D.D.

WAGNER: Tannhäuser (abridged).


None of the three earlier complete Op. 8 sets currently in print (from Columbia, Musical Heritage Society, and Philips) is fully satisfactory, so any reasonably good new one would be welcome, especially one played briskly enough to fit, without crowding, on two rather than the usual three discs. This Telefunken recording can be even more warmly welcomed, for it is the first complete version using all period or replica instruments.

What one isn't likely to expect from the scholarly proper if not staid Vienna Concentus Musicus is something shockingly close to a sonic spectacular. Perhaps the Harnoncourt have come to resent the unfair accusation that, as executants, they lack élan. Perhaps they and their unaccredited producer and engineer were in exceptionally eager spirits for these Vivaldi recording sessions. At any rate, their performances, arresting exuberant and dramatically persuasive in themselves, are captured in high-level, electrifyingly scintillant sonics. And not least of the surprises here are the boldly graphic realizations of Vivaldi's fanciful depictive effects in the seven programmatic concertos, Nos. 1-4, 5, 6, and 10. In short, I have no qualms about claiming that I've never before heard as grippingly vivid recorded performances of either Op. 8 in its entirety or the familiar first four concertos—the new-hackneyed Four Seasons—separately.

One of the most unexpected delights here is Alice Harnoncourt's metamorphosis from a merely stylistically authentic baroque-era expert into a dazzlingly bravura virtuoso Vivaldi, one of the outstanding fiddlers of his own time, devising the solo parts of these concertos as personal display vehicles—and he well may be proud of Harnoncourt's emulation. In the two works published as suitable for violin or oboe solo but patently written with the reed instrument first in mind, Jurg Schaeflein, playing a c. 1720 Paulhahn oboe, also is both interpretatively and tonally a sheer joy to hear. For he, as well as Alice Harnoncourt and cellist/leader Nikolaus Harnoncourt, combines skill and vitality and further spices the mixture with a delectable leaning of wit and humor.

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R.D.D.

Kirsten Flagstad

Glorious singing in Strauss's last songs

Williams and Berglund are more tender and bucolic in the opening Rondo pastorale; Black and Barenboim deal more drivingly with the Minuet and Musette and reveal more ecstatically in the delectable folklike theme in the finale. EMI's sound is more velvety and more excitingly directional.

A.C.