Performance: Very good
Recording: Very good

Time is precious and endurance has its limits: in short, I am not planning to see H.-J. Syberberg's much-touted film Parsifal. But I am delighted to welcome another admirable achievement, strong enough to stand comparison with earlier, more stellar versions. Perhaps it is the proverbial Swiss sobriety and common sense that keeps conductor Armin Jordan from veering off into excess. He gives us a relatively low-key Parsifal, devoid of great passions and religious ecstasies. He moves the music sensibly along, controlling its complexities with a sure hand, and, without calling attention to virtuosity, he makes the Monto-Carlo Philharmonic sound like a first-class ensemble.

Reiner Goldberg! What an interesting name for a Parsifal! Wagner envisioned the hero as a "reiner Tor," a pure and guileless fool, though he would have regarded the name Goldberg with suspicion. In any case, this rising tenor acquits himself very well. His tone lacks truly heroic body, but it is agreeable, with a bright and youthful ring, and it is his strength to make the great moments ("Amfortas, die Wunde," for instance) convincing and even effective. He faces an excellent Kundry in Yvonne Minton, who manages to convey the sharply contrasting elements of the character: harsh aggressiveness in Act I, sultry languor in Act II, abject penitence in Act III. Her voice is too fine, effortlessly taking in the higher reaches of the part.

The grueling but effective role of the long-suffering Amfortas has had some impressive interpretations in previous recordings, led by the nobly sung and extremely moving portrayal of José van Dam (DG/Karajan), but Wolfgang Schöne holds his own with a committed and vocally solid performance. Robert Lloyd's gruff, but thoughtful and compassionate Gurnemanz is on a high artistic level despite the singer's tendency to spread his tones around the center. The fierce Klingor of Aage Haugland and the firmly resonant Titulre of Hans Tschammer are also creditable characterizations, and the cast is ably bolstered by the usual complement of Flower Maidens, Knights, and Squires, all performing above reproach.

G.J.

COLLECTIONS

RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT


Performance: Magical
Recording: Very good

Since this collection is headed "1979/1980," I assume its contents come from both years, but the quality of the recording is gratifyingly consistent and splendidly reproduces the sound of Horowitz's piano. It's a bit warmer and less clangy, in fact, than what we've become resigned to accepting in his tour packages. There are some passages in the Barcarolle that suggest the piano was in need of tuning, but overall (and with the most exemplary co-operation on the part of the audience) this album is a powerful argument in favor of live recordings. The sound itself is far more alive than in Horowitz's 1971 studio recording of Chopin's Black Key Etude; the new performance excudes more vitality as well, and the levels of poetry attained in the Barcarolle, the Rachmaninoff prelude, and the surprisingly Chopinesque slow movement of the big Clementi sonata are breath-taking.

Throughout this program one senses not only the intensity and brilliance that are the hallmarks of Horowitz's style, but also a warmth and unwavish kindness that are perhaps the more striking for their unexpecedness. No one could begrudge the fortunate audience its sighs or resent its applause. Perhaps Horowitz has made more important records than this one, but none, I think, more endearing. R.F.


Performance: Good vibes
Recording: Gorgeous

Steve Reich's Vermont Counterpoint was written for Ransom Wilson and premiered by him last September at an all-Reich concert at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It is a tour de force, an avalanche—no, a gushing torrent of flutes: three alto flutes, three of the regular kind, and three piccolos accompanying two solo parts, both using all three kinds of flutes. Wilson plays them all. In concert, ten of the parts are prerecorded, the eleventh he plays live. The result is a charming, gay, summertime piece.

The theme of this record is not really minimalism, it seems, but meditation and spiritual feeling in flute music. Philip Glass's Facades—the original version for soprano saxophones and string—is on "Glassworks" (CBS FM 37265)—has that murmurering, mysterious quality that is one of the most appealing qualities of Glass's music. The Debussy and Jolivet are even more mysterious and exotic. Frank Becker is an American composer who has lived and worked extensively in Japan, performing a great deal with synthesizers in a colorful, Oriental pop version of meditative minimalism. This is that joyful, celebratory Eastern kind of spiritual music that lifts you up and carries you along. It's also gorgeously played and recorded. E.S.