

# THE STEREO REEL THE STEREO REEL THE STEREO REEL

Reviewed By BERT WHYTE

**FRANCK:** *Symphony in D Minor.*

Boston Symphony Orchestra. Charles Munch cond. RCA Victor ECS 58 \$14.95 (available on RCA Victor monaural disc LM 2131).

This has long been one of the most popular of all symphonies. Attesting to its favor with the public are the sixteen disc versions listed in the Schwann long-playing record catalog. Admirers of this work are in for a treat when they hear it in this first stereophonically recorded version. The best of the disc recordings are but pale shadows in comparison to the sonic grandeur of this stereo version.

The first impression you get as you listen to this stereo tape, is that this is a huge concert hall sound, with a naturalness far beyond the compass of any disc recording. The score is somewhat thick-textured, and this has been the bane of the monaural disc recordings, since it was quite difficult to achieve sufficient instrumental separation. Through the magic of stereo, these textural problems have been overcome and the result is that the orchestration still sounds massive, yet the dark, rich sonorities have a clarity and luminosity typical of a live concert performance. This tape clearly shows the virtues of the stereo medium, in duplicating the listening experiences of the concert hall. For instance there was excellent directionality, with the *celli* easily apparent on the right channel, the violins on the left. *Contrabassi* were strung along behind from the middle to the right. This tape was originally recorded via three microphones on to a single three-channel tape a half-inch in width and then subsequently reduced for home playback through duplication to two channels, the third channel going through a process known as "ghosting", whereby the content of the third channel is divided between the left and right channels.

Thus when you play back this two-channel tape, a third or "ghost" channel appears to be between the left and right channel. It made itself evident on this tape with the brass section of the orchestra. The bright blare of the trumpets and the deeper voice of the trombone were heard to emanate from the middle, along with the mellow richness of the French horns. The microphone placement for this tape was close-up, giving a very forward sound with good projection. This type of pickup at its best highlights the ability of stereo to delineate orchestral detail. Every instrument is articulate, well defined in the sonic body and pinpointed as to location.

**FEBRUARY 1958**

Stereo also allows for a great sense of aural discrimination, in that it is easy to concentrate your listening attention on a particular instrument or group of instruments without interference from the rest of the orchestra. Another contributing factor to the overall stereo effect is in the use of hall reverberation. This acoustic quality is vitally important in maintaining the illusion of concert hall sound. It is the balance between this reverberation and the closeness of the mike pickup that generally determines the illusion of depth or three-dimensional space. In this recording, the reverberation was not very great . . . just barely enough to lend depth and liveness to the sound.

Very noticeable here was the degree of antiphonal effect or interplay between the various instrumental choirs of the orchestra. One of the more startling examples of directionality in this tape is at the beginning of the 2nd movement where a lovely harp is heard very distinctly from the right channel and strings played *pizzicato* are heard in the left channel. And as the work draws to a close, we can hear the sharp, weighty punctuation of the tympani. Percussion gains much by stereo reproduction, always appearing very distinctive and lifelike. Frequency range on this tape was wide and even to the ear; while dynamic range, that great spread between the quietest pianissimo and the most thundering forte, was impressively ample.

Stereophonic sound thereby affords a degree of naturalness and concert hall realism not possible with any other recording medium. In this tape the magnificent Boston Symphony brings an illusion of actuality to this great work that can be transcended only by a live concert. Conductor Charles Munch offers a reading somewhat on the fast side, but in every other respect, a most estimable job. For music lovers in general and Franck devotees in particular, a hearing of this stereo tape will open new horizons of musical enjoyment.