

New direct to disc recordings provide an audiophile's delight



Harry James

By EVAN LEIBOVITCH

To look at them would reveal nothing: their jackets are outwardly similar to many other record covers. One, called *The King James Version*, features Harry James' Big Band. The other is a solo piano recital, including works by Handel, Brahms, and Chopin. Together with older releases, they grace a prominent wall at Sam's downtown, screaming at the customer in black felt pen, "Do not take this copy". The jackets are empty, because the records are worth too much to get stolen: they cost \$20 each, a fairly steep price for single albums.

It's because they are special process records, better known among stereophiles as the Sheffield line of direct-to-disc recordings. Sheffield has probably had a greater sales record at stereo shops than at record stores, simply because their prices and nature of the recordings are beyond most of the general record buying public.

NO MASTER TAPE

The direct-to-disc system means that there is no master tape made of the studio recordings; the output from the microphones are channeled directly through mixers, into the machine which cuts the grooves into a lacquer master disc.

In a regular recording, the inputs are fed into a 16 track tape recorder, which can be altered, mixed, remixed, and can have various instruments and effects added long after the original recording was made. Exactly how these changes are made are determined by the producer of the record, who plays an important part in the overall "sound" of the music within.

Two examples of producers who have never recorded in earnest include Richard Perry (Ringo, Garfunkel) and James Guercio (Chicago). Many others have been more successful at producing records than performing (John Cale, Todd Rundgren).

On the Sheffield recordings, the role of the producer is made more difficult, because on a direct recording, all mixing must be done correctly the first time, and the entire side of the disc must be played non-stop by the performers. Thus, often more than one take is recorded, and the producer must judge which of the takes is the best combination of mixing and performance. Often the best of both are not on the same side.

MANY TAKES

Sometimes, many different takes of the same album may be sold. This means that the purchaser of a Sheffield album might be best advised to listen to the album in mind, to determine if that specific take is acceptable. Since most Sheffield albums are sold at stereo shops, a preview on their better equipment will not affect the records. Also, one shouldn't automatically refuse an opened album: it may simply have been previewed once or twice, but the record should be checked before purchase.

The first few direct to disc albums were blends of pop and classical themes and instruments. The albums centred around Lincoln Mayorga's superb keyboard work. To preserve the quality of the recordings only a limited number were pressed.

One such album, titled *The Missing Linc*, has been out of print for only a few months, but its present value is triple the original retail value. It featured acoustic instruments on one side (with a string quartet thrown in for extra effect) and electric instruments on the other. The lack of a tape intermediate allows the recording to sound crisp, with no loss of treble or bass at the extreme ends of the frequency range. The dynamic range (difference between the loudest recorded sound and the softest) is increased, because the noise level of the discs is drastically reduced.

PEACE TRAIN

The standout cut on *Missing Linc* was a version of Cat Stevens' "Peace Train" featuring Mayorga on lead harpsichord (Don't knock it 'till you've heard it).

The newest releases have been called the Sheffield Lab Series. The first (Lab 2) was released some time ago. Mayorga took a back seat to Thelma Houston on a jazz-rock album called *I've Got the Music in Me*, which featured a superb title cut, an exceptional brass section and sound quality equal to *The Missing Linc*. Released over two years ago, it is quickly running out of stock for the last time.

Both of the recent releases, the Henry James jazz album and the Mayorga classical solo piano album, present the listener with superb performances of the respective genres of music. Both are "live" recordings, performed



Lincoln Mayorga

before small audiences in a church not far from the mixing studio, with the sound transmitted through a special cable to the mix board (and the record cutting machine). All Sheffield albums have been produced in whole or in part by Doug Sax, who has mastered the difficult art of doing the final mix the first time around.

The albums have been packaged with the care that befits the music inside. The liner notes for all Sheffield albums have been thorough, and try to simplify the complex techniques that went into the creation of each specific record. The Mayorga solo album also contains an eight page booklet on Brahms and his Handel variations (one of which takes up the majority of the album): The back page is devoted to the Chopin piece.

The Sheffield albums have all been made with one aim; to provide exact reproduction of superior musical performances, through advanced technology and outstanding performers. To that end they have been consistently faithful.

Dance contemporarily with Rachel Browne

By MARION KERR

When I first met Rachel Browne she was on her way out to a local studio for a workout. When I met with her a second time and asked how the class went (assuming a workout is a class) she answered "Oh, I didn't take a class, I just do my own thing". Rachel Browne's 'own thing' is the Contemporary Dancers of Winnipeg.

It all began when Ms. Browne was 6 years old and just beginning to study ballet in Philadelphia. "It was my dream to be a classical ballet dancer." To pursue her dream she went to the "Big Apple" to study with such greats as Robert Joffery, Edward Caton, Antony Tudor and Benjamin Harkarvy.

Her first introduction to modern dance was with Emily Frankel and the New York Dance Drama Co. Then, glad to leave the fast pace and intense competition in the N.Y. dance world, she accepted an invitation from Mr. Harkarvy to dance with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

Ms. Browne relaxed as she sipped her tea and spoke of Winnipeg. "It's a quiet, uncluttered place where I can devote myself to the thing I love doing." After five seasons with the Royal Winnipeg she stopped dancing to raise a family. However, her obsession to dance made her go back in to it after two months. She asked some friends if they would like to get involved as she experimented with some choreography. The small group had their first concert at the University of Manitoba and were well received. "I was suddenly dancing again, not only dancing but choreographing too", she told me excitedly.

Then there was more: As the group became busier with performance engagements it wasn't just Rachel Browne dancer and choreographer, but Rachel Browne business manager, maker of costumes, publicity manager, fund raiser, in charge of not only all the dancers but also in charge of raising a family.

By 1970 she had to seek professional help for administration, hence the birth of the professional company "Contemporary Dancers of Winnipeg". Today the company of 12 dancers thrives as one of Canada's few established modern dance companies. In addition to the company, there is an associated school with over 300 students, and an apprentice system that may one day soon grow into a second company.

Being in a city where a prominent ballet company is already established, Browne explains: "We were forced to tour from the beginning. Our purpose is to bring modern dance to as many communities as we can reach and to bring a wide spectrum of the dance to Canadian audiences. We represent the vast variety in approaches and styles to modern dance".

With pleasure she says, "More and more in the past three or four years we were able to look right here to our very own Canadian choreographers". Many of these works will be presented in the Toronto season that will be featured at the Toronto Workshop Productions Theatre from February 22 to February 26. Works by Rodney Griffin, Canadian Linda Rabin, Norbert Vesak, Cliff Keuter and Browne herself will be shown in 2 different programs.

Thurffs

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 - March 24 **LA FEMME INFIDEL** France/Italy (1968)
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