



Ralph Kirkpatrick plays Bach in new set of disks.

KEYBOARD BACH

Complete 'Clavieruebung'
Released as a Unit

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

DURING Bach's lifetime he published, in 1731, 1735, 1739 and 1742, four volumes of keyboard works that were entitled *Clavieruebung* ("Keyboard Practice"). In those collections were such pieces as the six Partitas, the four Duets, the Italian Concerto, Overture in the French Style, Goldberg Variations (all for harpsichord) and a large number of Chorale Preludes (for organ).

The Haydn Society has just released the "Clavieruebung" complete, on seven disks. Five of them contain the harpsichord music, played by Ralph Kirkpatrick; the other two feature Paul Callaway at the organ.

At this date there is no point writing about the music. As well attempt to describe "Hamlet" or the Gruenewald triptych. All of these keyboard works represent Bach at the height of his style. The "Goldberg" Variations, indeed, are something that even Bach never came close to duplicating. Some of those variations, especially the twenty-fifth, contain the seed of all music before Bach and all that was to come.

As in all Haydn Society releases, these seven disks are well prepared and equally well annotated. The recording is first class, and the organ sound is especially lifelike, without the excessive reverberation that has distorted so many organ disks in the past.

Specialists

As for the interpretations, we are dealing, of course, with two specialists in the field. Callaway is a supple organist who has the technique to put his ideas across and the taste to keep them moving in good order. His registrations are well chosen; they provide interest without becoming technical.

Kirkpatrick plays in a clear, intelligent, musicianly manner. Here and there he becomes a bit pedantic. In the notes he himself mentions the undesirability of too many changes in registration. With that few will disagree; but there is a danger in the opposite course. In his effort to avoid sensationalism or anything that might be construed as an unstylistic romanticism, Kirkpatrick occasionally allows himself to fall into an unrelieved dynamic pattern that is almost metronomic in nature.

But the fact remains that he has done an honest, capable, scholarly job. There is nothing capricious about his work, which is a model of textual fidelity. His taste, too, is always excellent. Bach, like most baroque composers, left few indications about tempo, nuance and ornamentation. Present-day performers must therefore rely on their musical instinct as much as anything else. Kirkpatrick is one of the contemporary harpsichordists who has a thorough working knowledge of the baroque style, and his ideas about ornamentation will be studied with great interest. This is a series of disks that musicians will admire and that students will turn to for many years to come. May they never have a worse model!