

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

John Steane



Keith Hardwick, seated, with from the left Michael Clemow, EMI Central Research Laboratories; Michael Gray, EMI Studios, Abbey Road; James G. Fifield, President and Chief Executive Officer, EMI Music [photo: EMI]

DISCUSSING idly the years, the deras and decades, my record collecting friend and I turned to the present. "And what about the eighties?" I asked. "How are we going to remember them?" "Oh, that's easy," he said, "the 1980s have been the CD and Keith Hardwick". I thought it a good answer: decisive and well-answered. The Compact Disc looks to the future; Keith Hardwick to the past. Happily, the reverse is true also.

Now at retiring age, though one would hardly think it, Hardwick is the man who has been primarily responsible for a large proportion of those historical reissues that have so notably and regularly enriched the EMI lists over the last ten years. As everybody who knows about these matters is aware, they are not just any reissues. A correspondent suggested not so long ago that the day would come when we would be collecting 'Hardwicks' as book-collectors seek out a famous or particularly desirable edition of the classic authors. They are made with special care, and the finished product combines scholarship and technology in a remarkable way.

The decade of achievement involved many more years of preparation. It was, for one thing, Hardwick's second stint at EMI. The first began shortly after the end of the war when he was demobbed from the Navy. While stationed in Sydney he had discovered that a good many desirable records were available over there and not in the UK. With his mind full of names and labels he had come upon a book which showed

how the all-absorbing hobby could become a profession. This was Fred Gaisberg's *Music on record* (Robert Hale: 1946), and a letter was duly dispatched to the management at EMI applying for a post with a view to becoming their new Gaisberg. Installed as a trainee at Abbey Road he found that it was not quite as simple as that, and eventually, after what seemed an eternity of smoothing out bumps resulting from bad tape-joins, he decided that life must have more to it than this, and left. He had at least learnt the trade and seen some of his schoolday heroes, such as Artur Schnabel and Beniamino Gigli, recording; and from time to time a charming little man would look in from next door to see how things were going, and thus he met Fred Gaisberg in person. Back in the Navy, Commander Hardwick spent nearly 20 years in which records, never out of his mind for long, had to take second place. The link back into EMI was a human one, for Anthony Griffith, a colleague in the early days, wrote to say that on his retirement he was looking for someone to continue his work of transferring the great recordings of the 78rpm catalogues to LP. And so the right man fell into the right job at the right time.

Since then he has had the satisfaction of making available to a new generation the recordings which had meant so much to his own. In all this work a sense of standards has been uppermost. If clicks and other surface flaws have been left in a transfer where they could have been removed, that in his view is simply poor work-

manship. When I saw him first at Abbey Road the floor of his studio was covered with a flurry of what looked like innumerable black snowflakes—each of which represented a click that the listener was now to be spared. Each had been removed by hand. Now a computer will do the job: it, for instance, has already made possible the miraculous repair of Eva Turner's broken *Tamhåuser* record (included in her EMI recital on CDH7 69791-2, 9/89). Even so, at least as important as the technology is the ear, and the Hardwick transfers are also the product of listening. If a distortion on the material he is working with can be corrected, he will correct it; if a boost to the top of the limited acoustic frequency range will rediscover Battistini's lost sibilants he will give it. Finally it is the hearing and judgement of the individual that make the decision.

When he retires in November he will retain a consultative position:

which is good, for yet to be found is the expert who knows the old catalogues, the records themselves and where to locate them, as he does. There are still jobs to complete: the Beecham *Tristan und Isolde*, for instance (16 sides done, 44 to come), an album celebrating opera at La Scala, and more immediately a collection of songs for the Gigli centenary. This will open with *Santa Lucia*, for that was the first record Hardwick bought some 50 years ago with his shilling-a-week schoolboy's pocket-money. I asked which of his albums he would choose for his desert island—"The Record Of Singing", the Schubert Lieder set, the great Battistini issue? Answer: the Pro Arte String Quartet in Haydn. Everything had been a pleasure in preparing that album, and, though he says it himself, they are damn good transfers. But principally it is Haydn: he's a tonic, cheers you up, even makes you laugh, the very man in fact to take with you into a long and happy retirement.

(see also page 625)

HORN OF PLENTY



The Expert Horn gramophone (c. 1935) with the Nimbus-Halliday Ambisonic recording system [photo: Nimbus/Evans]

PRIMA VOCE is the name given to a new mid-price series of historic opera CDs from Nimbus, engineered using an acoustic system called Natural Ambisonic Transfer. The technique, which couples the original principles of the horn gramophone with an extension of Nimbus's Ambisonic recording system, eliminates the need to filter the sound in the conventional manner used for transfers and is said to combine the immediacy of the original 78s with better overall tone-quality than has hitherto been possible.

Nimbus have collaborated with Norman White, an acknowledged craftsman in his field, whose own huge collection of 78s has provided the basis of the series. In choosing the

material for each disc, the company are aiming to feature the greatest work of a particular artist—in favourite arias as well as a selection of lesser-known pieces.

Five discs appear initially: "Caruso In Opera", "Giovanni Martinelli", "Rosa Ponselle", "Divas 1906-1935" and "Great Singers on Record 1902-1983". Future transfers, set to appear at the rate of two a month for the next two years, will include recordings by Tetrizzini, Galli-Curci, Schipa and Gigli. The company hope that the improvements in sound-quality will broaden the traditionally specialist appeal of the material.

John Steane assesses the merits of the new technique and reviews the first releases on page 773.