

VSO finally on disc

After the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's highly successful tour of Japan last fall, the opinion was voiced that the orchestra would not receive real international recognition until recordings of it were readily available, both at home and abroad.

Wishful thinking perhaps, but given the near-suicidal demands of North American musicians' unions in relation to recording and the disinterest in Canadian non-popular music by Canadian (read: American-controlled) recording companies, it will be quite likely some time before any such interest in the VSO is sparked.

As a Vancouver Symphony Society president bluntly put it to me over cocktails a few years back: "Why should the recording companies be interested in Vancouver when they've got the big American orchestras?"

Despite this situation, there is a recording of the VSO available, though not through regular commercial channels.

It is offered to the public in the Canadian Collection of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a series of records originally produced by the CBC for broadcast on its networks in Canada and on stations overseas.

The album in question, SM-235, features the VSO under its much-acclaimed conductor Kazuyoshi Akiyama performing two works featured in the beginning of the orchestra's 1972-73 season, both by the Soviet composer Sergei Prokofieff (1891-1953).

The Violin Concerto No. 1 (1913) is notable not so much for the VSO's work, but that of the soloist, Canadian-born Steven Stryk, former concertmaster of the Royal Philharmonic, Amsterdam Concertgebouw and Chicago Symphony orchestras, and currently head of the String Department at Vancouver's Community Music School.

Stryk, who also has an album of the two Prokofieff violin sonatas to his credit, renders the solo part in an in-

By MICHAEL QUIGLEY

cisive, yet lyrical manner. The same cannot be said of the orchestra, though the fault here is not so much in the playing but in the recording.

Taped in the Hotel Vancouver Pacific Ballroom (in preference to the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, the acoustics of which rank with the worst on the North American continent), the orchestra in the violin concerto sounds distant much of the time, as if they were playing behind a screen. This lack of focus is noticeable in the woodwinds as well as the strings, the latter especially in the third movement.

The flip side of the record, containing excerpts from Prokofieff's well-known ballet Romeo and Juliet fares somewhat better sonically, even though the cutting level of the record is relatively low, and the sound varies from band to band.

Still, it is a faithful document of

conductor Akiyama's high-tension rendition of the five-section suite. There are, needless to say, a few instrumental details (the saxophone, the bass clarinet, the trombones) which would be more polished if the VSO were to re-record the work again today.

The best playing by the orchestra is in the shortest selection, Dance, which contains some exquisitely chatty playing by the woodwinds — especially the concise solo oboe — complemented by fluid string work.

Interpretively, the opening chords of The Montagues and the Capulets which are drawn out like taffy, as well as the slow tempo of the finale, Romeo at Juliet's Grave, are about all that give cause for complaint.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

This and other albums featuring Vancouver musicians (the Purcell String Quartet, Cassenti Players, the Baroque Strings, CBC Vancouver Chamber Orchestra, Vancouver Woodwind Quintet) as well as Vancouver composers (Murray Schafer, late of SFU, Barbara Pentland, Jean Coulthard Adams) are available from CBC Publications, Box 500, Station "A", Toronto, Ontario M5W 1E6, at a cost of \$4.00 plus 55c postage per album.

Catalogues describing the records and works obtainable and further information are available from the same address.