

## Recordings

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"Many independent labels have established specialties in certain areas." (Allan Kozinn)

# Adventurousness Spurs The Independent Labels

By ALLAN KOZINN

**A**lthough most of the record buying public's attention is garnered by the major labels, with their high profile artist rosters and their penchant for proven repertory, it is clear to most concertgoers that these half dozen companies are documenting only a portion of today's thriving and variegated musical life. There is, however, a substratum of independent labels that helps take up the slack in areas the major labels rarely venture into — most notably (but not exclusively), contemporary American music, performed by young soloists and ensembles that have not yet found major label backing.

Some of these are vanity labels, which issue recordings of players and composers willing to help foot the production costs — a practice not unknown to the major labels these days, particularly where North American orchestral recordings are concerned. But the vanity aspect does not necessarily preclude artistic and qualitative judgment. Many labels have established specialties in certain reper-

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tory areas, and some have cultivated what seem to be lasting relationships with their artists. What they have in common, at any rate, is an adventurousness that listeners with an ear for the unusual find refreshing, and which occasionally yields recordings of exceptional works that will not be duplicated elsewhere.

The Musical Heritage Society's new

Musicmasters label has been releasing a combination of standard fare and uncommon works, and among the latter is what seems to be the first recording of piano music by the eccentric and hermetic British composer, Kaikbosru Shapurji Sorabji (Musicmasters MM20015). Mr. Sorabji banned all performances of his music in 1940, but lifted the restriction in 1975, when he heard the pianist on this recording, Michael Habermann. The music — five short works and a 13 minute excerpt from the three hour "Opus Clavicembalisticum," all composed between 1918 and 1930 — is broad-boned, densely textured, and often symphonic in scope, yet covers a variety of postures.

"In the Hothouse," for instance, shows the cloudy sonorities of the French Impressionists, but somehow more darkly, as if they were set down by Debussy in a perversely foul mood. The "fantasie Espagnole" and the fantasy on the habanera from "Carmen" are, likewise, filled with Spanish modalities and Iberic melodic conventions, but thickly embellished, extended and filtered through Mr. Sorabji's unique musical viewpoint. This is difficult music, as much for the listener as for the performer, but Michael Habermann clearly has its grand textures under his fingers, and at his best, he conveys a sense of both the intellectual workings and the purely visceral appeal of Mr. Sorab-