

Classics from the Vaults

ArkivMusic's CDs-on-Demand

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Despite the introduction of SACD and high-res downloads—not to mention the resurgence of interest in vinyl—most classical music recordings are still sold today as conventional compact discs. And though you may have heard otherwise, the CD format isn't going away anytime soon, especially for classical music, where collectors value the physical object on their shelves, complete with cover art and liner notes. But individual CD releases are another story: they often go in and then out of print quickly. Many become hard to find, or expensive—or both—at used-disc sources. What's a classical music lover (who, like most, has made the conversion to digital) to do when he just has to have Bruno Walter's magisterial account of Schubert's Ninth Symphony, or Leonard Bernstein's epic reading of Carl Nielsen's Third, or Leinsdorf and the Boston Symphony playing Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra and Kodaly's *Peacock Variations* (from RCA's "High Performance" CDs which by the way sound considerably better, with more clarity, air, and dynamic impact, than the original release as "Dynagroove" LPs did), or Horowitz's coruscating performance of Barber's Piano Sonata, and he discovers, to his frustration, that the compact disc is now "deleted"?

Enter ArkivMusic. Though this aptly-named on-line enterprise will be happy to sell you any in-print classical compact disc (and its Web site, arkivmusic.com, has one of the most complete catalogues and easy-to-use search functions you'll ever find), what makes Arkiv especially valuable is the company's "ArkivCD" releases: out-of-print recordings reissued under license from the original record labels and made "on demand" for each order, complete with original disc label, cover art, liner notes, and even (as with multi-disc sets and operas) elaborate, multiple-page booklets, all of these components identical to the original-label release in every way.

And Arkiv is making its on-demand out-of-print reissues available at an impressive rate, adding dozens of new titles every week. By now the total is upwards of 10,000, most from major labels like Sony, RCA, EMI, Deutsche Grammophon, Harmonia Mundi, Vanguard, Vox, Erato, and Teldec. There are even a modest number of especially significant recordings on ArkivCD that have *never* appeared before on compact disc: These were last available only as LPs. (A few notable examples: Ormandy conducting Sibelius' Fourth and Seventh Symphonies and *The Oceanides*; the Guarneri Quartet playing Mozart's last three string

quartets (see review Issue 194); the Juilliard Quartet's famous 1963 recording of the six Bartok string quartets (see review page 192); Leon Fleisher and the Juilliard playing the Brahms Piano Quintet. Samples of these discs revealed that they were excellent sonic transfers and amazingly accurate physical copies, even to the point of reproducing the original LP cover, liner notes, and labels, neatly miniaturized to CD scale.)

Adding to its base of classical reissues, Arkiv is also now making available on-demand CDs of Broadway musicals, orchestral film scores, and jazz recordings. Any music lover who goes to Arkiv's site and searches the "ArkivCD" listings, or simply checks out the most recent additions to them, is sure to find long-lost treasures that cry out to fill empty spots in his collection. The variety and quality are outstanding.

Arkiv is making out-of-print reissues available on-demand

Arkiv's business model is a paragon of both practicality and invention. One of the main ways the company decides on which CDs to add to its on-demand catalogue is to monitor the playlists of classical radio stations. These stations have been assembling their record libraries over decades and typically play many recordings that are now out-of-print. Listeners who then decide they'd like to buy those recordings are stymied—until Arkiv adds them to its ArkivCD catalogue. And the company actively solicits suggestions from customers: tell Arkiv something you'd like to see made available again, and the company (says president Eric Feidner) will listen and, if possible act on it. (Hey Eric: how about an ArkivCD of Tashi playing Ingolf Dahl's gorgeous *Concerto a Tre* on RCA? Please??)

Arkiv can be this responsive to a comparatively small number of customer requests because there's no investment in stocking physical inventory. Instead individual releases are stored digitally and aren't actually produced until there's an order for them. This allows Arkiv to maintain a deep catalogue of available classical repertoire for which the demand is limited but durable. The so-called "long tail"—selling a small number of individual titles from a large catalogue that nevertheless continues to generate sales over an extended period of time—makes the economics workable. And we music lovers everywhere are the beneficiaries. **tas**