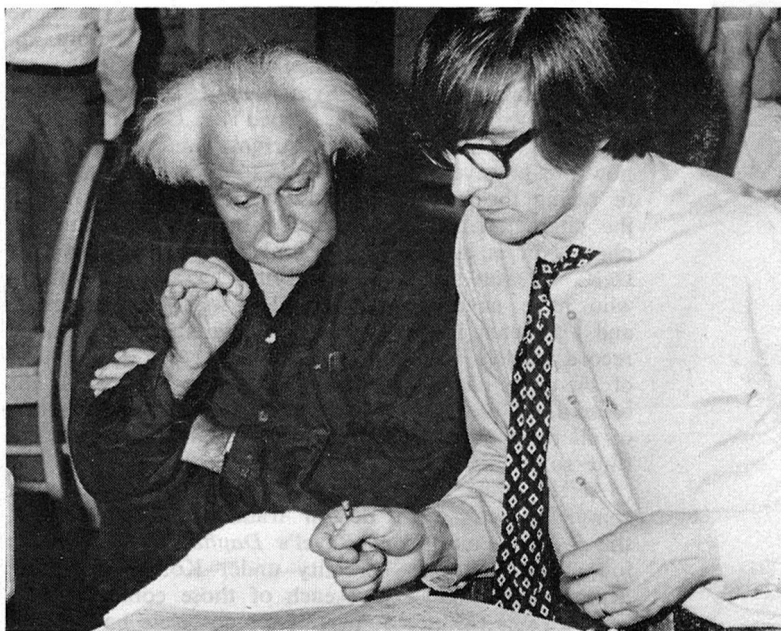


The producer stars in
DGG's first Boston Pops recording.

by R. D. Darrell

THE THRILLING GONG crash that opens this disc and a symphonic epiphany of *Hair* signalizes a momentous Changing of the Guard as Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops debut on DGG's Polydor label. Since his first session on July 1, 1935, for what was then the RCA Victor Company, Fiedler's recordings with the Boston Pops Orchestra have written phonographic history, both commercially and influentially as they molded the musical experience of two or three generations of the mass public. Their enormous repertoire has ranged from standard and light classics to current pop and rock favorites; and some of the most widely relished works have been the big Strauss/Ravel-like symphonic apotheoses of Broadway and Hollywood musical successes. Indeed this genre has become so well known that there's nothing really new to say about the ingeniously idiomatic scorings or authentically idiomatic performances of the three latest examples, all arranged by Richard Hayman, and a re-recording of Jack Mason's *Fiddler on the Roof* medley, first offered in the 1965 "Evening at the Pops" program for RCA. Nothing, that is, except to note that the playing is more expertly controlled than ever and that while Fiedler himself has lost none of his distinctive ebullience and irresistibly infectious rhythmic lilt, he has unmistakably mellowed in his treatment of the more romantic lyrical moments. Compare, for example, this reading of the *Fiddler* medley with the earlier one and you can't miss the enhanced expressive warmth of the new version.

But Fiedler fans will take both program materials and performances for granted. What audiophiles will want to know is just how a European company competes with the often superlatively brilliant technical achievements that RCA engineers have chalked up over the past thirty-five years. Well, while the present audio engineers, Günter Hermanns and Joachim Niss, are indeed as German as their names would indicate, the producer is the gifted young American, Thomas Mowrey. And there's nothing tentative about their first co-operative job. The kind of sound they have captured here is exactly what one might have expected both from the "natural," unsensational characteristics of the best Deutsche Grammophon symphonic recordings in recent years and from the honest, ungimmicked characteristics of Mowrey's Turnabout recordings of Donald Johanos and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra a few years ago.



Arthur Fiedler with producer Thomas Mowrey.

Since practically all "big" sessions nowadays are made with half an eye directed toward a quadriphonic future, I'm sure that these Boston sessions have involved multi-channel master tapes (Mowrey himself has pioneered in experimental quadriphonic technology) and, in all probability, a multiplicity of microphones. Yet the results have none of the unnaturally spotlighted woodwind and percussion passages, none of the artificially boosted glass-shattering highs, and none of the grotesquely bigger-than-life-size "presence" heard so often in recent years. To find a happy medium between oppressive closeness and lonely remoteness is no longer any miracle perhaps, but what is miraculous here is the capturing of not only impressively "big" orchestral sound and auditorium ambience but what are unmistakably the sound and ambience of the Boston Pops Orchestra in Boston's Symphony Hall.

It's only fair that I confess to some bias, since I first heard a symphony orchestra in Symphony Hall and I'd still rather hear a concert there than in any other auditorium I know of (except, perhaps, Sanders Theater in Memorial Hall, Cambridge, which is undoubtedly far too live for recording use). And much as I have admired many subsequent recordings made in Symphony Hall, none has quite so successfully established the persuasive illusion that I am listening to Fiedler and the Bostonians on their home ground. I can hardly expect all other listeners to share that illusion. Quite possibly some will object to the amount of reverberation evident here and some may crave more spectacular italicizations and capitalizations of certain score details. But for me this disc immediately joins my most treasured examples of recorded symphonic sonics at their best.

ARTHUR FIEDLER: "Fabulous Broadway." Orchestral Medleys from "Hair"; "Company"; and "Man of La Mancha" (arr. Hayman); "Fiddler on the Roof" (arr. Mason). Boston Pops Orchestra, Arthur Fiedler, cond. Polydor 24-5003, \$5.98. Tape: ●● L 5003, 7½ ips, \$7.95.