

# The New Criterion

Notes & Comments September 2001

## Introducing Andante.com

It is a pleasure, in this issue inaugurating a series on “The Survival of Culture,” to be able to recommend a new venture committed to the survival of the culture of classical music. It is called Andante.com, and as the name suggests it is (in part) an internet venture. Having begun last spring, its stated purpose is “to document and preserve the world’s recorded classical music heritage, and to become the definitive online resource for information about classical music and opera.” Andante is the brainchild of Alain Coblence, a French lawyer and the head of the European Mozart Foundation. He is joined by Pierre Bergé, the former head of the Paris Opera, and Jean Francis Bretelle, a French venture capitalist. On the advisory board of Andante are several distinguished musicologists (Henry-Louis de La Grange, Jean-Jacques Nattiez), as well as eminent musical artists such as Pierre Boulez and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

When Coblence first envisioned Andante, his aim was to help preserve the history of classical music performance by issuing high-quality CDs of historic performances. Remastered with the most advanced audio technology, these recordings delve back as far as the late 1920s. Eventually, Andante will issue over a thousand CDs, handsomely packaged in a way meant to recall the format and (Coblence’s word) romance of vintage LPs and featuring extensive scholarly liner notes. The series will have four parts: great composers, great operas, great interpreters, and great orchestras. One of their first offerings is a four CD set of performances by the Vienna Philharmonic. It consists of a 1957 version of Bruckner’s Symphony No. 8 conducted by Herbert von Karajan, a 1960 recording of Mahler’s Symphony No. 9 conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos, and a 1963 recording of Richard Strauss’s *Tod und Verklärung* and *Ein Heldenleben* conducted by Karl Böhm. If these CDs are representative of what Andante will produce, music lovers should rejoice.

The CDs that Andante produces will apparently be available in some retail outlets. But they will be marketed primarily on the Andante website, [www.andante.com](http://www.andante.com). This website is far more than an online catalogue, however. It is one of the most culturally impressive internet sites we have encountered. The website, which has been up since April and is still under construction, provides a window on the whole world of classical music. It features a continuously updated

calendar and news wire stories from around the world about musical events and personalities. It also offers a searchable reference database that includes listings of music in print, discographies, the *Concise Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and concert notes from Michael Steinberg's *Listener's Guides*. It offers a listing of classical music websites and radio stations, and also includes numerous online music reviews from a wide range of sources. In its "Musicroom," "Andante Radio" offers streaming audio of classical music—as we write, a selection from Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia* is playing. Suppose you were thinking of acquiring a recording of Handel's *Athalia*. Eventually, you will be able to search for all available recordings and listen to a sample from each before you purchase.

**A**ndante is also in the process of signing agreements with major orchestras around the world—Berlin, Vienna, Philadelphia, New York, among others—for the rights to broadcast their performances. Many performances will be broadcast with video as well as audio. They will be available shortly after the performance and, eventually, will be downloadable from Andante's library of music. Andante depends on some pretty fancy technology. But it is all in the service of a venerable ideal: preserving and disseminating the best that the classical music tradition has to offer. For now, all of Andante is free. Eventually, certain parts of it— some of the musical offerings and some of the research libraries—will be available only to subscribers. We have all heard a lot about the promise and peril of the internet. Andante is a welcome illustration that, deployed with intelligence and sensitivity, this daunting technology can be the handmaiden, not the enemy, of high culture.

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This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 20 Number 1 , on page 4

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