

RECENT BOOKS

WHY NOT WRITE A BOOK?

A SIMPLE formula for compiling an eight-hundred page tome to impress many people is suggested by Elie Siegmeister's *The Music Lover's Handbook* (William Morrow and Company). Draw up a list of about fifty well known writers on music. (Avoid foreigners to eliminate translation problems.) Make a table of contents covering elementary phases of music from folksong to symphony and composers' lives. Assign each name a topic – no matter which. Go to the books of the selected authors and rip from context some already published material and reprint this, with due acknowledgment, of course. Don't worry if Deems Taylor comes out of the shuffle to introduce the section "The Music of Our Time." His indifference to many significant contemporary trends, as you are well aware, scarcely qualifies him for converting anyone else to them. But his is a "good name." Your section on form might have more meaning and unity if taken entirely from a single book by Douglas Moore, Percy Scholes, or Aaron Copland, but don't hesitate to take a sampling of each, to give "your" treatment a mosaic quality that is indeed original.

Then to inject some conscious expression of yourself, interlard this haphazard concoction liberally with your own writings, picking your favorite subjects. After all, this is *your* book and so you may allow yourself the luxury of musical illustrations. By avoiding them in all other articles on composers

you will have restricted your choice to vague, general discussions, which strategically places your own essays in relief. In your own contributions, moreover, you will have an excellent chance to allow your despotic pet notions to saturate the public consciousness. The amateur reader, deluded by the outward appearance of what presents itself as a manual of objective data, will take everything as gospel. And if you have the convictions of Siegmeister, your reader will come away equating jazz, folksong, and symphony, and will perceive the artist not as the one who formulates and explores normal experience to eliminate dispersion, but as one who merely reflects "plain and homespun" attitudes, and our inchoate and often tedious daily sensations.

On this thesis and with considerable presumption Siegmeister has chosen gingerly to ignore Arnold Schönberg and Walter Piston even though these men obviously tower above the wholly inconsequential Herbert Haufrecht and George Kleinsinger whom he does mention. He has had, of course, no difficulty in finding an article to reinforce his basic creed with the vicious myth of Igor Stravinsky's decline. Roy Harris rates a paragraph, while two glowing pages are dedicated to a Mr. Alex North, and a page each to the popularists, Earl Robinson, Morton Gould, and Paul Creston. And he has involved himself in contradiction and distortion to prove that what is clearly Mozart's normal maturity was really a

product of the approaching French Revolution.

More care in editing, to be sure, would correct the blunder in thematic illustration for the program-note on the *Tristan* Prelude and bring the articles on living musicians up to date, so that Bela Bartok would not be left dangling in 1923. With more discretion and humility, one could also avoid so many embarrassing personal allusions. Or, finally, one might employ still another alternative – and frankly write a book of memoirs in the manner of Alice Berezowsky's *Duet with Nicky* (J. B. Lippincott). After all, why not warn a reader in advance that he is plunging into reminiscences, instead of letting them creep up on him, gradually and deceptively, from between the covers of a manual he opens for information?

There is, of course, a certain naïveté

in Mrs. Berezowsky's account, and I could do without so many feminine digressions and her "awe at the metaphysic marvel" of the "little round dots" her husband puts on paper. But while the book is better for browsing than for applied reading, the musical anecdotes are often keen, especially those bearing on the practical problems of a musician and composer: the interview with Petrillo, the role of dowager patronesses of string quartets, the telephone call to Iturbi in Rochester to discuss details of a symphony performance for which the royalty about equalled the phone bill, the American composer's trials with adamant publishers.

But if you are not concerned much about frankness and honesty, you will want to write an ostentatious potboiler like Siegmeister's rather than a merely chatty and often straightforward book like Mrs. Berezowsky's.

Arthur Berger