

SCORES AND RECORDS

By ARTHUR BERGER

SEVERAL competent new piano scores which have come all at once from the publishers show that an instrument recently in danger of being converted into xylophone and drum can adjust to contemporary style without sacrificing the keyboard's nature. Perhaps the resources of the piano are still not fully realized, but at least the instrument is once more being manipulated as originally intended. The manner allows for independent and subtle movement of the fingers since they take on contrasting functions simultaneously. Of course composers should further explore ways in which their present linear methods may be adapted to the piano's grander proportions.

In the meantime, there is much to admire in a clean, spontaneous work like Camargo Guarnieri's *Sonatina Number 3* (Associated Music Publishers), which employs the keyboard in a most elementary eighteenth century fashion. There are only a few added sophistications, in the adroitly tied, syncopated notes, to relieve the essentially two-part writing. The restriction to treble clef, with D below middle C as the lowest pitch, is a naive, pointless trick. It is ill-suited to so long a movement as the opening allegro, especially when the texture is otherwise so thoroughly trimmed down. Yet there is a surprising variety of ideas connected by sturdy tissue. These are disarmingly colloquial. The second subject, with its Latin-American lilt, resembles *The Isle of*

Capri, popular some years back. But its use in the unusual context of a rigorous, classic development saves it, and in the transaction the development comes out wholly contemporary and Brazilian. The closing two-voiced fugue has real drive.

Samuel Barber's *Excursions* (G. Schirmer) also deal with the colloquial, but a North American brand. Barber has set down separately in his four pieces a few familiar banjo or guitar devices, the blues, something resembling antimacassar pianism with a theme that might also be Calypso, and finally, some very slick harmonica playing. Like the Russian accordion style caught in action by Stravinsky, these localisms, especially in the harmonica piece, are adaptable to a piano writing eminently attractive to virtuosos with resilient wrists. One may gather this from the fact that Horowitz, who has always disdained new American music, violated precedent to play three of the *Excursions*. One source of Barber's inspiration was evidently the Lomax recording collection of the Library of Congress. Except for the blues the derived material is of a fairly high order. Though Barber has integrated the elements of each style, they have undergone too little transformation. There is no dissection; the primitive, static harmony is uncritically preserved, and there is nothing comparable to Guarnieri's development section.

It is easy to see how Stanley Bate turns out sonatinas almost by the dozen. His eighth (Associated) is, like its mu-

sicianly antecedents, in a pleasant enough vein, but he seems to have put down the first ideas which came into his head. The piano idiom resembles that which Milhaud occasionally uses in his simpler moments. It is brilliant and bravura in effect, but actually falls automatically under the fingers. The *Valentine*, in its unassuming way, is the most genuine of the three movements.

We enter a relatively chromatic sphere with *Three Fantasies* of one of our gifted young composers, William Bergsma (Hargail). Broken-chord contours, somewhat Brahmsian in effect, are still present, but tonal barriers are so let down that the sense of climax, in the first and last pieces, comes at the beginning. The middle fantasy, though its theme is only mildly striking, at least has a normal shape. Its sustained character stands in welcome relief against the short-breathed phrases of the other movements. All three have attractive elements.

Alexander Tansman's *Intermezzi, Series IV* (Associated) are surprisingly cohesive for the number of diverse languages employed. The slow pieces suggest a peripheral atonalist who admits, however, the dominant sevenths and ninths so closely approached but so studiously avoided by musicians of this chromatic persuasion. Just as often the Stravinsky folk manner is approximated, or, as in the *Short Suite* for orchestra and instrumental groups (Delkas), also by Tansman, Stravinsky of the neo-Brandenburg. Tolerance allows bad languages along with the good ones. If the unitary character of some of the piano works discussed previously, and of the Robert Palmer *Three Preludes* discussed below, tends to exhaust a lis-

tener's patience fairly soon, Tansman's multiple currents at least have the advantage of making one want a rehearing. Part of this concern with variety is reflected in the scoring of the suite. Only the outer movements are for full orchestra, while the three inner ones are confined in turn to brass, woodwinds and strings.

The Palmer preludes, by now fairly familiar through performance, seem the most interesting of the back issues of Valley Music Press recently submitted for review. The first piece is the most concise and best exposes the intriguing, gently syncopated manner, which is pushed for more than it is worth throughout the whole group. Other music sent by this press is by John Duke, Ross Lee Finney, Hunter Johnson and John Verrall. More songs arrive from Associated, including two by John Klein, one by Paul Nordoff and the final two of Hindemith's agreeable *English Songs*.

Burrill Phillips, under the title of *Declaratives*, has set some assorted verse for women's voices and chamber orchestra (piano-chorus reduction published by Elkan-Vogel). The dissonant harmonies, even when not crude, are out of character with the white vocal lines. The repetitive iambs, dactyls and like simplifications have become the tiresome stock in trade of American choral composing. Phillips is not technically strong, but in the Cummings setting, which has the best words, he shows an affecting sentiment. The Milhaud inflections exceed the point of mere influence here, and there are other distorted and poorly digested derivations in the first and third choruses as well.

Also for chorus is William Schuman's

Te Deum, designed with the song, *Orpheus with his Lute*, (Schirmer) as incidental music for Shakespeare's *Henry the Eighth*. Least appealing are the aspects in which these pieces deviate from their obviously Elizabethan models. Again we have the banal approach to the six-four and the garish false-relations (at "te aeternam"), particularly out of context here.

A pleasant though unimportant *Gavotte*, Opus 77 Number 4, by Prokofiev came with some inconsequential piano music by Kabalevsky and Khachaturian (Leeds). Also among current issues are three works for string orchestra: Alexander Semmler's *Serenade* (Associated), Wesley La Violette's *Largo Lyrico* (Delkas) and Miklos Rozsa's *Concerto* (Delkas). The last is least offensive. It handles the instruments solidly, but conforms to a usual Hungarian routine. A more chromatic version of Moussorgsky's rhetorical picture of the two Jews alternates with a rugged, ostinato folk-dance. Reverting to medieval practice, Hargail has published, rather pointlessly, only the instrumental parts of Norman Dello Joio's *Chamber Work* for flute, oboe, clarinet, (or three recorders) and string trio. More normally a score, available in this case only in rented photostat copies, is printed first so that people may judge a work's merit before deciding to perform it. But perhaps with this type of sewing-machine *Gebrauchsmusik*, the principle is followed that merit does not matter so long as a given composition can be played informally in the home or school by amateur musicians for whom ensemble literature is not normally available.

RECORDS

Columbia's release of Stravinsky's

Scènes de Ballet is occasion for rejoicing, though one deplors the lack of other music on domestic records to represent fifteen years of this composer's activity. The score's textures are of the utmost refinement; its accompanying figures varied and exemplary. It reaffirms Stravinsky as the direct heir of Tchaikovsky, the ballet composer. Though it far exceeds anything one should expect to find mixed up with a Billy Rose show it is still to *Jeu de Cartes* only what an average Mozart cassation is to a great Mozart symphony. *Jeu de Cartes'* exciting agitated are there and the same miraculous gift for musical and Chaplinesque allusion is displayed. But the transporting developments and organic control of the earlier work were not called for. *Scènes de Ballet*, as the title implies, is a panorama of "forms of classical dance," according to Stravinsky.

The effect is actually almost stereoscopic. Commonly accepted musical values pass in review with fascinating perspective and new beauty to deepen them. Here are some of the most familiar objects of Stravinsky's world: colors of *Rossignol* (ballerina's first variation); homage to Bellini (moderato); the circus; the gypsy fiddler (allegretto of pas de deux). Others surprising in this atmosphere are the motive suggesting Beethoven's *Ninth*, ironically assertive for the dancer's variation; the enveloping, super *Apothéose*; the cornet's Italianate street-song and especially its hypersymphonic reprise with tremolo strings (pas de deux) which, if satirically intended, is a little too real for comfort. A phonograph is the ideal medium for these stereoscopic close-ups, unless this medium is the theatre with Balanchine as choreographer. Thus the

recording, with Stravinsky admirably conducting the Philharmonic Symphony, has special appeal, for it amplifies the exquisite elements and allows us to linger over details which are somehow more persuasive than the whole.

WITH THE DANCERS

—By MINNA LEDERMAN—

FANTASTS who deal in images of the monstrous and the sublime lend their talents to the ballet at great risk, for the hazard of choreography is beyond reckoning. Having learned early about devil-dancers at the opera, audiences are generally immune to terror and surprise at balletic orgies. Their resistance has not been worn thin by Massine who continues to snare major assignments of this category from all the companies. His fiascos with Dali's magnificent props before Dali's easel paintings are gargantuan; to the religious symbols of Tchelichev he adds a note of child's play (the huge "handie" tableau in *St. Francis*); his nervous agitation even diminishes the intense rapture of Chagall.

Aleko, two years old in Ballet Theatre repertory, was new to me this season. Night after night I sat entranced before Chagall's apocalyptic birds and beasts, watching his great white pony fly over the spire, the monkey and bear fall out of the tree. But, just as I had been warned, the dancing was a matter for laughter and tears. It had, as usual with Massine, distracting "counterpoint" — his way of detaching the left side of the stage from the right and both ends from the middle —, a multitude of dubious arabesques and back bends, and finally a pyramid with everyone boiling all over

the stage like lava. How much simpler if the cast had simply knelt to bob for apples.

SEASON OF ANTHONY TUDOR

Tudor of course is no visionary. His hectic dead-end romanticism has a solid grip on all the details of character, class and temperament, of time and place, for which his passion is as vast as Balzac's and as fussy as Belasco's. But in their narrative form and overtones Tudor's ballets suggest the British stream-of-consciousness novel and by much the same prose method they create a sense of interior life, of reverie.

Undertow, Ballet Theatre's big new number, gives off an aura of hallucination not easy to define. Breinin's décor of clouds and winged architectural forms is on the tepid side and except for his trick at the end of making the sky reel, without novelty. Neither is the key to this mystery in William Schuman's score, the first to be specially written for Tudor.

The music does create a dimension new to Tudor's ballets — a cosmic grandeur that enhances the minutely elaborated effects of his symbols. The Wagnerian chord of doom on which the Hero's Birth takes place is prolonged an incredibly long moment by dark