

SCORES AND RECORDS

By ARTHUR BERGER

ARON COPLAND'S *Lincoln Portrait*, recorded by Columbia, has its eloquence, vividness and beauty. But much of it is atmospheric background, and the spoken words are not enough of an esthetic experience to provide a thoroughly absorbing foreground. Those who feel that recitation is incompatible with the best musical expression will, I suppose, be reassured by the fact that a composer of Copland's dimensions has faltered in the attempt to ally the two media. I believe, however, that the fault lies in the choice of text. It is no slight to Lincoln's rhetoric to point out that his statements are more oratorical than poetic. Ordinary prose does not lend itself to that complete abandon of attention in the surface of the words. When sung, speech of this sort is an even greater problem, as becomes apparent in Randall Thompson's choral setting of Jefferson's comparable epigrams: *The Testament of Freedom* (Victor).

Both Thompson and Copland were further handicapped by the aura of good-boy sentiment that has come to surround such words. Thompson actually allows this to determine the musical content, which stays so close to that of the conventional high-school anthem, you can almost anticipate what is coming next. Copland makes this type of sentiment felt by his interpolations of "This is what he said. This is what Abe Lincoln said," which over-impress us with

the importance of the message. Kenneth Spencer recites the Copland text less unctuously than others I have heard in this work, and Rodzinski and the Philharmonic-Symphony provide the accompaniment. Thompson has the benefits of the Boston Symphony and the Harvard Glee Club under Koussevitzky.

Prokofieff's *Sonata in D major* for violin and piano, Opus 94 (Columbia), is one of his most satisfying works of the past decade. Nothing in it is so astonishing as the finale of the *Seventh Piano Sonata*. But even if its general plan and some of its materials are without surprises, its musicality is persuasive, pleasant and smooth-flowing. Completed as recently as 1944, it is an alternate version of his *Flute Sonata* of the previous year, and this may be why certain stretches fail to exploit the violin as much as one should like them to. An impression of thinness is further conveyed by too great a reliance in the first movement upon themes that easily give up their secret. But the scherzo is an inspired movement almost throughout, and in the work as a whole there are several ingenious bits of expeditious accompaniment. Szigeti's superb playing is no small asset to the album, and Leonid Hambro gives expert support.

Artur Rubinstein has recorded *Four Mazurkas* for Victor from the twenty that make up Szymanowsky's Opus 50. Through this authentic per-

formance we may at last estimate the excellence of some of the more difficult passages. But however compelling the brilliant patterns are when so magnificently executed, it is the quiet subtlety of Number 3 that I value most. Another eminently worthwhile single disc is the Columbia pressing of Stravinsky's *Four Norwegian Moods*, with the composer conducting the Philharmonic-Symphony. There is a special fascination in the Trio of the *Intrada* and the middle section of the *Cortège*, where small woodwind groups hold forth. For a work of such unassuming proportions and, I venture; somewhat popular appeal, it is abundant in charming incidents and sophistications of scoring, timing and counterpoint, and it is also fortunate in its choice of tunes.

SCORES

Now that Stravinsky has completed a new large-scale symphonic piece, his recent preoccupation with works of such lesser magnitude as the *Four Norwegian Moods* is entirely comprehensible. He was storing up the energies that are so powerfully released in the *Symphony in Three Movements*, thus filling out the list of easily accessible scores that every composer inevitably submits to his public. Though the *Symphony* has been well received, its towering position among the creative achievements of our time is not yet appreciated. But this we obviously cannot expect until the work is better known. The publication of the score by Associated should help. It will also be welcomed, incidentally, by those who have tried to follow Ingold Dahl's analysis in the

last issue of *MODERN MUSIC*.

An effort of perception is required to grasp the extraordinary large form. As the work becomes more familiar, there is a sense of satisfaction to be derived from the way in which the fugue of the finale, introduced by the teasing clashes of trombone and piano, serves as a counterpoise for the contrapuntal section that occupies a similar position in the first movement — that is to say, both sections replace the usual development. And there are other correlations of this kind that may be made *in magnitudinem*. The thematic content, which is exceptionally expansive and varied, also offers a challenge, and this not only to listeners, but to performers as well. Stravinsky exacts a new kind of attention that must sustain a line through its cesuras or the shifts from one instrument to another. The interruptions are not unqualified stops, but rather moments of suspended activity, requiring that the suspense or tension be carried through the pause. This is only one of many elements conspiring to invest this solid masterwork with a freshness and a uniqueness that make it utterly ridiculous to speak of Stravinsky's "museum-like neo-classicism" or his mere reproduction of dead styles.

Among the small handful of our major American composers Walter Piston is perhaps least given to a simple schematization of his formal devices and to the peculiar localization of emotions that sometimes approaches caricature. This may be one reason why people are so slow to recognize his sound position as creative artist. They cannot easily discover the verbal equivalents for his musical per-

sonality; thus it is difficult to place him in his proper niche. But though I might be doubtful as to the terms with which to describe his personality, I have no difficulty sensing it in the charming *Quintet* for flute and string quartet (Arrow Press). It is unmistakably there in the gentle syncopations of the first theme, the easy continuity of the whole, the restrained confidence of the *Andantino*, the controlled vitality and whimsy of the fugue. The stubborn way in which a flute can stand apart from a string background makes its timbre sometimes grow tiresome even in chamber works of the great Viennese classicists. Piston is thus clever to interlace it so thoroughly with its fellow instruments. An effort of balance is, of course, required in performance to prevent the flute from being eclipsed.

It is good to be able to report that the major houses at last begin to give David Diamond proper recognition. I do not as yet have the *Rounds* for string orchestra which is on Elkan-Vogel's current list, but I have seen the seven songs that are also among the new issues of the same publisher. With the three just brought out by Associated, they give a substantial picture of Diamond's special flair for enhancing a poem by his setting and for finding serviceable texts in such unexpected sources as Melville and McCullers. I find the economy and purity of *Epitaph* most affecting, and the admirable Lovelace poem, *To Lucasta*, seems particularly well set from the point of view of prosody and melodic curve. (Both of these are from the Associated group.) Among the Elkan-Vogel songs, *The Twisted*

Trinity, intense and concentrated in its feeling, and *Sister Jane*, so well-balanced in its humor, stand somewhat apart for their polish and profile. *The Lover as Mirror* is also pleasant, and *Billy in the Darbies* is very effective, if a bit long for its contents.

Of the newer names that have recently broken into print, that of Arthur Kreutz is the most worthy of remembrance, so far, at least, as present accomplishment is concerned. His settings of Burns (Associated) seem clearer in the piano-vocal version than in the instrumental form in which they were heard two seasons ago at a League of Composers concert. Of the other newcomers, Peter Mennin is the young man of promise. His *Folk Overture* (Hargail) has the earmarks of native composers slightly Mennin's senior who have been fairly successful with their audiences: the motoriness, the athleticism. Coming after them, Mennin is at a disadvantage. The penultimate descending third of native folksong, for example, has been quite overdone by now, and the raciness without direction becomes more and more evident as an audience device. There is, too, a rather trite Slavic figure that recurs in Mennin's overture. But the talent and vitality are such that we should be interested to see what he does next.

A *Sonatina* for violin and piano (Oxford University Press) is my introduction to Robin Orr, an Englishman, I assume. It would almost seem as if the world of dissonance and the patterns built on fourths are new to him, since he applies them in such an unintegrated, unselective fashion. In the last movement, we meet with those deliberate spasmodic shifts that

were once considered so inseparable from "modern" style. The work is, however, notably robust and poses intriguing, though sometimes awkward, rhythmic problems to its performers.

Quite in a class by himself is Alan Hovhaness, the last of the new names that I shall bring up. Though he has been hailed as an experimentalist, he seems quite mild and unstartling in his innovations. Like his other works, *Mihr* for two pianos (New Music) adroitly reflects the florid, sinuous oriental improvisations which are irresistible in small doses as folk art, but which require some further substance to hold the attention in serious, larger forms. The writing is mainly unisonal (often doubled in octaves) and there is a constant rapid alternation of the hands, somewhat in the naive manner of xylophone playing. For long stretches at a time, while

the left hand changes its notes, the right hand may return to one note, often repeating it in tremolo fashion. This, added to the unvarying modality, results in monotony. The strong rhythmic impulse occasionally makes up for this, but not enough, since even rhythmic patterns become stylized.

Three smaller items that remain to be mentioned are Copland's *Hoe Down* from *Rodeo*, arranged for violin and piano (Boosey & Hawkes), and Virgil Thomson's *Five Inventions* for piano and *Piano Sonata Number 4 (Guggenheim Jeune)* (both Elkan-Vogel). The *Inventions* are more intricate than the *Sonata*, which accomplishes its modest ends with simple and disarming means and is easy enough for a teaching piece. The intentional archness and insouciance of the canons that do not always quite fit are rather on the cute side.

WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

AFTER raiding the *Moonlight Sonata* Massine has taken over the *Archduke Trio*. This is an operation less violent but quite as fatal. He calls the new work *Les Arabesques* and with it Ballet for America made a bow to Bridgeport in September. The small company of eleven dancers is in the first stages of a concert tour and travels, reasonably enough, with minimum musical support. Unreasonable however is Mas-

sine's decision to arrange the *Trio* for two pianos. He says the choreography is "inspired by the music; the characters and their relation by the mood of it." But the mood of the *Trio* is developed by the colloquy of its particular instruments. When their color is rubbed out the lines fade too. At the premiere the whole structure seemed to collapse in a rubble of shapeless sound.

The ballet is without a story, almost