

most of the important vocal and instrumental performers, a list of records with the personnel of each recording; a rather frightening list of collector's items with prices—often exaggerated, one hopes—that will scare away all but the true devotee (a good many of the records are quoted at \$25); and finally an amusing glossary of contemporary swing terms, wherein the reader may learn that a "spook" is a white performer, a "warden" the secretary of the union, and a "woodpile" a xylophone. Anyone who wants a Grove's Dictionary of Twentieth Century American Folk Music will find it fairly complete right here.

Paul Bowles

THE SOCIAL APPROACH

THE tendency to base the development of art on the economic foundation of society is, though comparatively new, no longer strange to modern science. Since the appearance of the historical materialists in the middle of the last century, many followers have extended their method to philosophy and art. But so far no one has given us a general survey of this complex subject and a really scientific book still remains an unfulfilled need. Franz Mehring's outstanding essays on German writers and his *Die Lessinglegende*, a few very brief essays by Lunatscharsky, and Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, in spite of new, interesting ideas, have not revealed the essential heart of the matter. This goes also for Russian authors like Pilnjak and Rjazanoff who always deal with the individual artist (Pushkin, Tolstoi), but have never even outlined a method of research. The only study showing an awareness of this problem, is the remarkable and almost unknown book of Lu Maerten, *Wesen und Veränderungen der Formen-Künste*. Here for the first time we have a survey of the content and progress of art according to the development of society.

Music, even more than the other arts has received little sociological consideration. Restricted to a few essays published in Europe and America (by Haba, Eisler, Tchemodanoff, Slonimsky, Seeger), such research needs further and profound study

to uncover the facts which shall serve as a point of departure for a future science of music.

The latest contribution to this type of literature is Elie Siegmeister's pamphlet *Music and Society* (The Critics' Group Press, 1938). It is, I regret to say, in an important sense disappointing. Not because the material is bad, or scant—which it is not. But now, if ever, is the moment for a more scientific, less journalistic, a more serious, less popular approach. In the superficial treatment of daily newspaper criticism, or in the very respectful but ephemeral discourse of the average musicologist, music appears as the Grail, remote for the unworthy. This aura of inaccessibility must be destroyed. Siegmeister's book makes an excellent beginning. He shows the corruption of modern society which, despite its need of music and musicians, is unable to provide for them and so create conditions that favor musical progress. The thesis is supported with instances taken from the newspapers and radio, a telling collection of those proofs of decadence which it is important for us to comprehend.

The "social analysis" however, of the history of music is severely restricted to a preliminary outline of rules for future study, a framework resting on eight basic hypotheses. Such outlines have already appeared in hundreds of essays, and not one has been developed to its logical fulfillment in detail and fact. Siegmeister's book is of course only a pamphlet. But then why allot fifty-six of its sixty pages to journalistic ramifications, even including a "survey of music history"—when only two are given over to the essence of the problem and two more to the causes of the origin of music. Even for an outline the treatment is superficial. Emphasis falls altogether on the relation between the economic base and the artistic superstructure, not at all on the development of the laws of artistic work. How the form and content of a work are determined by antagonisms of the social process is entirely overlooked. Outlines like this tend to strike a routine mechanical note; they are projected exclusively from orthodox Marxist doctrine and not from a comprehension of inner necessity in the work of art.

The brief survey of Occidental musical history is casual to a degree and also presents individual works as exclusively deter-

mined by their relation to the audience. No attempt is made to explain variety and manifold changes of form, material and content. Wagner, for instance, is the man "who was ready to carry the middle class doctrine of the free individual to the limit." But what of Wagner's extensive expansion of harmonic material? Does the problem of musical content itself play no role in such research?

Remarks such as "Moussorgsky reflects the social movement of the Narodniki" are dangerous indeed. They make politics rather than the economic base fundamental. Politics of course are only part of the superstructure and there is no reason to assume that the superstructure of art rests on the superstructure of politics. Both are part of a complex erected on the economic foundation.

From such premises it is inevitable to conclude that the future belongs to "proletarian composers" like Davidenko, Eisler, Blitzstein. Siegmeister neglects to state that the tremendous revolution in the music of this century took place not in the bosom of the working class but rather among the representatives of the "decadent" bourgeoisie—Schönberg, Bartok and Stravinsky. Membership in a workers' party has not yet given anyone a ticket to write the music of the future. The new forms have been discovered by the Schönbergs rather than the Shostakovitches who despite the content of their works (*Songs for Workers*, etc.) remain, in the use of form and material, very conventional and represent, in a strictly musical sense, no future at all.

All works on this subject,—the economic interpretation of music history—suffer from a common disadvantage. Since the dialectical, materialistic method of research is, for very well known reasons, pursued by and presented to the workers' class, most authors employing it fall quite easily into the popular approach. Now it is undoubtedly important to make these truths easy for everyone to understand. But first we must have basic research and then we can deal with the results as a "popular science." Unfortunately there are immense difficulties in the way of such studies—for one thing lack of financial support from official institutions. Let us hope therefore that in future even pamphlets will bring us at least new outlines, perhaps even new discoveries.

Kurt List