

ject is clearly evident, and the album is well produced.

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At last, in *Philip McCracken*, we find an artist of distinction who declines to mount a soapbox in behalf of political—or any other—causes. In the very brief biographical sketch that opens this vol-

ume, album really, of selections from his work, he is conveyed as a warmly human man, quite in tune with his surroundings, who happens to have a talent for transforming the materials of his native Pacific Northwest into creations of beauty. The photographs of his work are often accompanied by the articulate commentary of the sculptor himself. (RW) □

## MUSIC

### Smashing the Spheres

by Robert R. Reilly

A good deal of 20th-century "music" is experimental sound that has escaped from the laboratory. Some of it is viral, seemingly incurable. Some of it has served the homeopathic purpose of immunizing audiences from further contact with modern music. Much of this musical experimentation is due to the supposed "exhaustion" of available musical resources in the Western tradition—as if we have run out of music much as we might run out of fossil fuels. In response, some composers have rushed madly to construct the musical equivalents of solar panels, windmills, and atomic reactors.

The problem, of course, is quite different. As Stravinsky pointed out in *The Poetics of Music*, the composer's dilemma is not due to a paucity of materials but rather to their profusion, to the bewildering question of where to begin with the almost infinite possibilities available. The real problem is one of limits and a basis for them. The latter half of this question is the modern one. Before modernity, the limits of music were seen to be the limits of Nature. These were not perceived as "limits" per se but as natural laws. Music was gov-



erned by mathematical relationships and laws inherent in the structure of the universe: the ancient composer had as his goal some approximation of what he was sure was the music of the spheres. Through modern philosophy and science, however, Nature lost her authority, and everything was subjected to method, which was simply a mental construction applied to reality. If it worked, fine; if not, on to another mental construction or hypothesis which would serve until

something was discovered which it could not explain. Dethroning Nature, though, left the arts in a predicament. All the arts are based upon an apprehension of form, another name for Nature, or essence. Their highest goal was to make the transcendent perceptible. But if form inheres in the mind and not in reality, it must be arbitrary and what we thought was Nature can be essentially changed. Thus the destruction of form and the elevation of method. John Cage quotes C.G. Jung: "we now know that what we term natural laws are merely statistical truths." Systems of sounds—not music—are the logical developments of this perspective. But in the arts one man's method is another man's madness: when objective criteria are eliminated, who can say what painting or music "works" and what does not? If there is no "music of the spheres" for us to approximate, art degenerates into an obsession with techniques.

American composers have, to varying degrees, been affected by the modern crisis in art and the tyranny of technique, according, of course, to their own views of reality. Janet Peyser has remarked that one fundamental view of reality is reflected in the works of two American composers: "Babbitt's highly structured form and Cage's negation of form—a form in itself—have a common base: both are restatements that there is no *a priori* order, no God-given frame of reference, no 'natural' synthesis with melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre playing their 'appropriate roles.' " Such denatured music necessarily degenerates into depersonalized sounds unrelated to anything. Lucio Fontana once put a knife through his canvas and entitled it *The End of God*; aural equivalents of this gesture of nihilism abound from composers embracing the *contra naturum* mentality. That is, they gain what force they have from the form against which they work. They have nothing in and of themselves, and therefore no sustaining power. John Cage composes music to express the very idea that music cannot communicate anything. As E.H. Gom-

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## LIBERAL CULTURE

### Postmortem Psychiatry

When Mr. John Belushi, the liberal culture's darling comedian, died of a drug overdose, most observers saw it simply as the natural though pathetic end of a particularly glamorized life. Ms. Bette Midler, a noted psychoanalyst, explained in a recent interview that matters were more complex:

I believe John was basically playing a character. . . . He wasn't that kind of man at all, yet he forced himself to live that lifestyle because he felt it was expected of him. And then he died of it.



His character killed him.

We assume Dr. Midler had Mr. Belushi on the couch long enough to come up with such a brilliant diagnosis.

brich said of Dadaism, its meaninglessness unavoidably takes on meaning "from its reference to the idea of art it derides." We might call this phenomenon the rejection of meaning.

One experimenter, a genuine one in the sense that he attempts to explore a means to greater musical expression, is Lou Harrison. He is an American original in the tradition of Henry Cowell, with whom he studied. He also studied with Arnold Schoenberg but avoided being dominated by his 12-tone method. Harrison has used a wide variety of techniques, including non-Western ones, but not because he has mistaken means for ends. He is a man in search of a language because he desires to communicate. He does not lose himself in a search for pure originality—although he has achieved novel effects—nor does he indulge in "conceptual" art. His personal motto is "Cherish, Conserve, Consider, Create," hardly the manifesto of a revolutionary, although he is known as an avant-gardist. He can also write melodies of disarming simplicity and beauty. Even at its wildest, Harrison's work seems to spring from an acceptance of and a reflection on an a priori God-given

order. This is explicit in his *Mass to Saint Anthony* and other religious works.

The results of Harrison's most recent efforts are available on Composers Recordings (CRI SD455): *Three Pieces for Gamelan with Soloists* (1978) and *String Quartet Set* (1979), both of which evince the non-Western influences on his music. The *Quartet*, accessible and melodious, sounds Middle Eastern and is based in part on medieval materials. It is an intriguing and gentle work, if devoid

of some of the drama of Western music. Its fourth movement, the only one fully harmonic in the European style, favorably resembles Robert Simpson's *First String Quartet*. The gamelan, an Indonesian folk orchestra, is used with French horn, flute, and viola in *Three Pieces*. The Oriental sounds are beguiling, but the simple melodies employed by the soloists are a little too sweet. Harrison avoids the monotony of Oriental music, but *longeurs* occasionally creep in.

Harrison also contributed to a fascinating digital Nonesuch recording (D-79011) called *The Waltz Project*. Here we have displayed in miniature the full range of modern compositional techniques turned to the waltz form by 17 composers including Sessions, Cage, Babbitt, and Glass, as well as relative unknowns. Nothing could seem further from the spirit of our age than the waltz, so it must have been with a sense of irony as well as humor that these short compositions were commissioned. Harrison emerges best with his beautiful waltz-lullaby that offers no apologies. Zygmunt Krauze gives us a gentle dreamlike memory of the waltz; Milton Babbitt's piece is full of blurps and blips; Sessions's is clangorous; Cage's work, the longest on the record, is merely nonsensical sounds that begin with subway noises and go downhill from there;

### In the Mail

*Vested Interests* by Ralph A. Raimi; published by Ralph A. Raimi; Rochester, NY. Essayistic peregrinations—factual and fictional—by a mathematician with a penchant for prose. For anyone who values subtle efforts.

*Agenda '83: A Mandate for Leadership Report* edited by Richard N. Holwill; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC. The first sentence in the Introduction states that "Ronald Reagan is a prisoner of his optimism." This department-by-department examination should burst his bubble.

*Center Journal*; Center for Christian Studies; South Bend, IN. On the morality of nuclear war and other teleological matters.

*Liberation Theology in Latin America* by James V. Schall, S.J.; Ignatius Press; San Francisco, CA. According to Fr. Schall, Heaven is not Earth; liberation comes from Christ, not Marx.



Philip Glass offers a minimalist, somewhat mechanical, but nonetheless pleasant waltz. This album is an engrossing and economical means by which to acquaint oneself with the various techniques of modern composers. The wild heterogeneity of styles devoted to the same form also tells us something about our ruptured culture.

Composers Recordings has included some of Elliot Carter's early works—*Suite from Pocahontas* (1939), *Symphony #1* (1939), and *Holiday Overture* (1944)—in its American Historic Series (CRI SD475). Anyone familiar with Carter's later, complex, nearly incomprehensible music will be delighted with the exuberant, neoclassical folk romp in *Symphony #1*. Aaron Copeland advised Carter on its composition, and his influence is apparent. Its "sound" is also as unmistakably American as that of Copeland, Harris, Porter, Schuman, Diamond, Shapiro, Kubik, Goeb, and a host of other neglected American composers. *Holiday Overture* also has exuberance, but it ends in a more Ivesian way. The 1939 *Suite* is highly energetic, a bit harsh in its big moments, but still lyrical and easily accessible and communicative. European influences are more apparent than is Copeland's. This may be the best record CRI has issued in this series since Harold Shapiro's *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* (CRI 424). It also provides an insight into Carter's experimentation as a composer; unfortunately he "matured" into an extremely complex, dissonant style.

Gail Kubik also writes in the Copelandesque, nationalist idiom, but his style is distinctive for its idiosyncratic rhythms and delightful instrumentation. He made his initial reputation with film music and does not apologize for using "short words" rather than "long words" to express his musical ideas. After all, he says, "it is the *idea* which is expressed that is important, and . . . I see no reason why it must be concluded that a simplified musical speech is *a priori* routine, banal, and uncreative." Do not

mistake simple for primitive, however, for Kubik's music is highly sophisticated. The second movement of his *Symphony #2 in F* is a moving piece of American music (Louisville Records, LOU 585). Orion Recordings (ORS 80372) has provided a two-piano version of Kubik's first *Symphony* (1949), which he reworked in 1979. In fact, Kubik first presented portions of this symphony in a two-piano reduction in Rome in 1951 but "with considerable misgivings, knowing that none of the work's orchestral coloration would be evident." It sounds a bit skimpy, episodic, bare-boned; there are textural lacunae. Perhaps some American orchestra will undertake a recording of this symphony in its full dress. The other work on this album—*Prayer and Toccata* for organ and two pianos (1969–1979)—shows Kubik working in the same general idiom. Unlike Carter, he seems to have felt no need to change his language radically or to experiment with the "big words" of modern music.

Irving Fine is another interesting example: an American composer who, though touched by the experimental currents of modern music, was never absorbed by them, nor did he lapse into any private revolutionary language. His carefully crafted works provide great satisfaction with their lyricism and formality. Composers Recordings has issued a recording of his music from the 1950's. The gem of the collection is *Notturmo for Strings and Harp* (1951), a lovely, ingratiating work with a sense of autumn ripeness in it. The other major piece is *Fantasia for String Trio* (1957), in which Fine employed serial technique subordinated to tonality. The appeal is less immediate than in the *Notturmo*; it is less lyrical, but its energy and drama do attract. The record is filled out with some pieces from Fine's *Childhood Fables for Grownups*. In short, *The Music of Irving Fine* (CRI 1460) is an excellent example of modern music with both form and substance which accepts the basic ground rules and turns them to good advantage. □

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### Impeccable Logic

California's feminist leader of the National Organization for Women—one Virginia Galluzzo, alias Ginny Foat—has been indicted for murder, robbery, and some other exploits in her past which qualify more for a lurid thriller than for the portrait of an idealistic social activist. Before being cleared of all those un-

prepossessing accusations, actually sins in the perceptions of other people, Ms. Galluzzo/Foat declared, with astonishing innocence or incredible chutzpah, both of which make us wonder whether the body of one feminist hero may actually shelter a double personality—an ideological knave and a criminal genius:

I believe with all my heart that a political climate of violence and degradation of women is in a test stage with me as its first victim.

What's most enlightening is that the legal action against Ms. Galluzzo/Foat is considered "harassment" by feminists all around the country. From a feminist point of view, they may be right. After all, allegations of the slaying of two men should hardly qualify for indictment and prosecution. Big deal, just two males. □



## THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

### *The Gravediggers of Reason*

Anyone who watches the interaction of life and history is bound to notice, sooner or later, that the most potent moving force in human affairs is plain stupidity. Class struggle, spiritual élan, all the forces of societal sacrifice are certainly powerful factors, but they do not match the power of simple asininity. Thus, nations or states that were successful in asserting a certain degree of reasonableness—through either democratic or authoritarian means—all based their periods of prosperity upon the peremptory suppression of foolishness by wisdom. Only in latter-day America do stupidity and wisdom have equal rights.

The rampant "antinuclear" movement in the current global situation, however much it is explicated by sages and moralists, is—at the bottom—an act of spectacular witlessness. What it actually offers are better and better schemes for paralyzing the U.S. government—which, of course, guarantees the movement's existence. Not one among its prophets and ideologists has come up with an idea for overpowering the Soviets, the implacable adversary of us, the U.S., and anyone else on earth who opposes them. An antinuclear crusader who can figure out what the Soviets would *do* after we were rendered powerless and still arrive at the notion that war, conquest, and subjugation would be eliminated has the mental capacity of a Shakespearean Bottom.

The Soviets *must* destroy us in order to survive as an embodiment of communist doctrine. If even Greenland remained as the only democracy on a planet otherwise conquered by communism, it still would be declared a threat by the Kremlin—and correctly so, for the last flicker of freedom will always be the ultimate menace to the Soviet ideological thugery. If the covenant with a better life is under the protection of America, a world power, the Kremlin cannot rest until America is annihilated—whether through subversion, attrition by a chain of small defeats like Vietnam, incendiary

activities around our perimeters, or, finally, all-out war. The antinuclear movement—having not the slightest impact on Soviet policies, intentions, designs, and acts—therefore makes war inevitable. The more it grows, the more the Soviets will be obliged to be *not*

stupid and to use such a serendipity as America incapacitated by internal moral warfare. In the end, any Soviet leader true to his calling will be tempted to announce the ultimate bingo—and that temptation will swell in direct proportion to the ascent of the "movement."

## JOURNALISM

### Wolfe's Complaint

A moving human-interest story based on a heartrending confession warmly illuminated a recent issue of *The Nation*—the cold-blooded organ of pro-communist dialecticians. The journal's contributor, one Alan Wolfe—a professor at Queens College in New York who once admitted that, according to his conscience, America's woes are the best pros-



pects for a better world—registers both his disenchantment with Soviet Russia and his disgust with the FBI. Mr. Wolfe was astonished at being approached by the KGB to serve the sacred cause of communism and its spiritual center—despite the fact that he once wrote a book that, in his own words:

was an effort to show that anti-Soviet

hysteria in the United States had more to do with American domestic politics than with Soviet foreign policy.

He is equally and painfully appalled by the FBI's subsequent attempt to know of anything that happens with or may happen to Prof. Wolfe, an American citizen, one who is deeply contemptuous of the intellectual finesse of the American counterintelligence functionaries. He claims that the FBI's visit is an example of "the effort. . . by the Reagan Administration to discredit the peace movement." As a frenetic freezenik, or anti-nukenik, all Mr. Wolfe cares about is that movement. He moans:

But so many people these days are concerned about charges of disinformation and Soviet attempts to penetrate the U.S. peace movement that a comment from one object of this attention seems in order.

His complaint culminates thus:

My visit from the F.B.I. agents, their denials to the contrary, was clearly inspired by Reagan's charge that the Soviet Union is pulling the strings of the U.S. peace movement. This, to anyone involved in these matters, is nonsense, and there has been a good deal of righteous denunciation of such blatant attempts to influence the domestic dialogue.

Nonsense or not, there's a clue in this altercation that needs clarification. Neither Mr. Wolfe nor the FBI, nor Presi-