



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE MODERNS

## Musical America's Several Generations

**T**HE SECOND group of releases in Columbia's Modern American Music series forcibly reminds us that only in the recording realm is the American composer—denied as he is official sponsorship and patronage—not at a crucial disadvantage in the international musical arena. In Europe musical nationalism—the taking care of one's own and letting posterity take care of the others—is sensibly understood to be a practical means to the end of securing contemporary recognition. Certainly, such recognition does not insure permanence, but it increases the possibility of permanence. If one of the sources of our musical strength is our intense interest in European musical activity, our weakness—on another level—lies in our seeming inability to create comparable interest in American music abroad. Our level of musical achievement is such that its position as something less than a prophet in its own country and nothing less than a pariah abroad must be attributed, at least partially, to insufficient and defective propaganda.

The process and nature of this achievement is at least suggested by the works of the twelve composers in the present collection. Edward Burlingame Hill's Sextet for Wind Instruments and Piano (ML 4846) recalls the problems and attitudes of that generation which, for the most part, resigned itself to the geographical fortuity of being "outsiders," and thus to the pursuit of literal identification with the traditional. The Sextet is a skilful synthesis of materials that evoke various aspects of early-twentieth-century French composition, contained within somewhat disparately rigid external forms.

Henry Cowell's "Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano" (ML 4841), in its by now familiar employment of hymnlike, fuguig tunelike, Ives-like materials, is a latter-day manifestation of a reaction indirectly induced by the European musical "revolution" that occurred while the men of Cowell's generation were coming of age. The assumed dissolution of the unitary tradition presumably suggested the retrospective construction of an "American tradition." The musical result, in the case of the Cowell sonata, is a rather bland, bucolic, conservative far cry from the earlier Cowell of the "new musical

resources," which—in their emphasis on the possible rather than on the necessary, on "why not" rather than on "why"—reflected still another effect of the "revolution."

Roy Harris, too, has been a child of his time with—on the one hand—his proclamations anent "American" rhythm and melos, and—on the other—his theories and use of modality and triadic interrelationships. The latter preoccupations reveal themselves in the Sonata for Violin and Piano (ML 4842), which shares with the Cowell a conservatism and also a certain diffuseness. The patness causes one to recall the less facile, more adventurous early Concerto with even greater affection. But if neither the Cowell nor Harris sonata looms as source works, it must never be forgotten that these men are of the strategic generation—that of Piston, Sessions, Thomson, and Copland—which has produced works of such singular achievement that they have provided the younger generation with independent directions and morale-building precedents.

There is in the products of the younger generation little of the easy originality of evasion, little concern with the labels of musical "Americanism," and—positively—there is the employment of languages whose vocabularies are current, general, and relatively permanent. Beyond this one dares not generalize. It is easy enough to discover bases of identification if relevance is disregarded. But our younger composers possess far more relevance as individuals than as factors in "trends" or "tendencies." Consider, for example, in the present collection, the music of Arthur Berger, Irving Fine, and Harold Shapero, who are generally categorized as Stravinsky-Copland disciples. They are, but this fact scarcely serves to define and delimit their individual gifts and accomplishments.

Berger's early Woodwind Quartet (ML 4846), though it conceals its subtleties beneath an ingratiating surface, is an easily recognizable forerunner of the more austere, fully realized Duo for Cello and Piano also recorded here. If, in its emphasis on registrational differentiation and intricacy of rhythmic ensemble, the Duo has been justifiably characterized as "diatonic Webern," the stress must be placed on the word "diatonic." On the other hand, Fine's recent String

Quartet (ML 4843), without abandoning the instrumental suavity or linear lucidity of his earlier music, incorporates certain twelve-tone procedures.

Shapero's Sonata for Piano for Four Hands (ML 4841), written when the composer was twenty-one, is—understandably—the most obviously "influenced" of these works. But if the Coplandesque thematic shapes, and extensional and rhythmic procedures, are clearly evident, the overall individuality and musicality of the work emphasize the remarkable degree to which the sources were comprehended and assimilated by so youthful a composer.

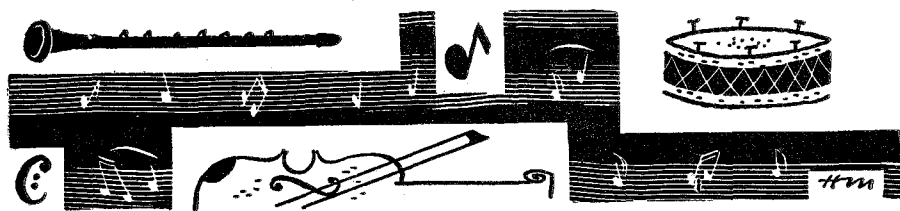
The Quartet in B flat (ML 4844) of Andrew Imbrie, also written at the age of twenty-one, if less poised and more eclectic than his later work, is remarkably talented and original. The second movement, particularly, in its concision and imaginative logic, is a genuinely personal achievement.

Leon Kirchner's String Quartet No. 1 (ML 4843) creates an extraordinary musical atmosphere in which almost anything can happen, and happen meaningfully. It synthesizes Bartókian thematic evocations with Schoenbergian motivic techniques; it effects "impacts" with recondite musical devices, while expertly exploiting the full coloristic range of the medium.

**T**HE extent and diversity of American compositional activity cannot be "represented" by any dozen composers or many times a dozen composers, as suggested by the remaining music in this collection, ranging from the entertaining "Music for a Farce" and "Scènes d'Anabase" by Paul Bowles (ML 4845) through Norman Dello Joio's "Variations and Capriccio for Violin and Piano" (ML 4845), described by the composer himself as "informal" and "intellectually unproblematical," through Peter Mennin's adroitly written and resourcefully organized String Quartet No. 2 (ML 4844), whose striving for the powerful seems occasionally to lead to sheer extrinsic muscularity, and finally to Robert Palmer's Quartet for Piano and Strings (ML 4842), in which the desire for harmonic and textural homogeneity seems to lead to bleakness.

With twelve groups of performers involved in these recordings, it is manifestly impossible even to list them all, and it would be unfair to single out any, for the performances are uniformly excellent. One can only hope that Columbia Records will see fit to continue and broaden this project.

—MILTON BABBITT.



## Festival Forecast: Europe 1954

**A**S FAR AS Europe is concerned, the beginning of April marks the opening of the festival season, this year being the tenth in summer since the war's end. A long time—and yet not so long a time for those who remember the Salzburg Festspielhaus as a G.I. movie theatre or the Prinz-regenten in Munich as a resort for visiting USO units to reconcile themselves easily to the intensive, regulated, and, indeed, recurrent patterns of activity in these old, and a score of other new, places.

Intensity, of course, depends on local character; the regulated dates are due in the main to the existence of an association of European festivals which sees to it that not too much of the same sort of thing happens at the same time; recurrence depends on the evolution of a valid program which attracts enough visitors to warrant another year's effort. Noticeably, too, new festivals emerge from year to year, but few are abandoned.

One of the new ones is also one of the first, in Rome, beginning on April 5\* and continuing for ten days. This, actually, is more in the nature of a competition for composers, in which Lou Harrison and Ben Weber represent the United States. They have written, on commission, works to be judged in competition with those of other countries. There will be further prizes, lots of music will be heard, and, it is hoped, lots of music-lovers will come. Italy in the spring has come to be synonymous with the Maggio Musicale in Florence, which opens this year on May 5 and continues through the first week in June. Puccini is to be a favored composer this year, with his "Girl of the Golden West" due for a revival in the outdoor amphitheatre. Early in May there will be music in Lausanne, Switzer-

land, by the Berlin Philharmonic, the "Nuits de Sceaux" will be initiated in that suburb of Paris, and Ireland extends an invitation to a Feis, in Dublin.

Opera lovers will find a variety of activity in Wiesbaden, Germany, May 1-29, with companies from Berlin, Vienna, and Covent Garden joining the local one in presentations of "Julius Caesar" (Handel), "Nozze di Figaro," "Magic Flute," and "Don Giovanni." Montreux in Switzerland has a festival beginning on May 2, there is opera in Dublin all the month long, and the famous Bath Assembly in England will convene on May 15 to continue through the month. The first French festival is traditionally at Bordeaux, where Benjamin Britten's "Peter Grimes" will be given beginning May 18. Artur Schnabel is down for a piano recital, and there will also be orchestral music and ballet performances. Bonn, on the Rhine, is offering a week of music by a local boy named Beethoven beginning on May 22, and the Royal Danish Ballet invites travelers without other destination to visit Copenhagen on May 25 for a week's special repertory. This is the company that was seen in London last year with much pleasure.

If the musicwise traveler can't get to Florence in May, he's likely to consider the Vienna Festwoche, or Festival Weeks, in June his next major objective. This year the opening falls on May 29, with the opera, the orchestra, the theatres, and the various choirs marshaled for a month's duty. Mozart's "Figaro" is being done in special style, also a revival of Lehar's "Count of Luxembourg." Travelers who favor the North at this time of year will find music prominent all over Scandinavia: Bergen, in Norway, is honoring Edward Grieg, who wrote some of his most famous music there, between June 1

and 15 (Eugene Ormandy, Nathan Milstein, Jussi Bjoerling, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf are among the celebrities engaged); Stockholm, in Sweden, has a festival from June 1 to 9 in which Handel's "Orlando Furioso" will be performed among other things; and Helsinki will pay tribute to Jan Sibelius in a series of concerts from June 10 to 18.

As it happens, June 10 is also the opening date for the Glyndebourne Festival, which is this year giving "Don Giovanni" with North Americans James Pease, Margeret Harshaw, and Leopold Simoneau in the cast, Strauss's "Ariadne auf Naxos" with Lucine Amara of the Met, and Busoni's "Arlecchino" with Elaine Malbin. Before the end of July, Stravinsky's "Rake's Progress" will be reprised, also Gluck's "Alceste." Two days later (June 12) Aldeburgh opens its festival, usually centering about the works of its native woodnote, Benjamin Britten, and the Swiss activity for the while will be in Geneva.

Although details are not firmly fixed, there is talk of another Casals Festival in Prades beginning on June 14 and continuing till July 4, and there is definitely going to be music near Paris between June 11 and 20 at Fontainebleau. However, the big festival of late June is in Holland, where the Scala Opera company will perform, also the BBC Symphony Orchestra, in addition, of course, to the famous local organizations and visiting soloists. Those who want to venture in another direction will find a festival in progress in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, beginning on June 15. Granada, Spain, will have its third international festival of music and dancing from June 21 to July 2.

As noted above, Glyndebourne and Holland move well into or through July with their activities, thus beginning to overlap such affairs as the festival at Aix-en-Provence, which begins this year on July 10 and will continue through the month with presentations of Menotti's "Telephone," Mozart's "Entführung" and "Don Giovanni," Gounod's "Mireille," and Henri Sauguet's "Caprices de Marianne" (also orchestral concerts and solo recitals), the British Contemporary Music Festival at Cheltenham (July 8-16), and the Bayreuth musicmaking, which opens this year on July 22.

As the senior among festivals still in existence, and the forerunner, really of the whole summer activity, Bayreuth deserves a paragraph to itself. This year's new production will be "Tannhäuser," but the "Ring" will be repeated several times, likewise "Tristan," "Lohengrin," and "Parsifal." August 9 may be noted as a spe-

\* Specific dates cannot be guaranteed, as of now. Check travel agents before booking.