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THE AMEN CORNER

Spring Showings

IT IS A far cry from the old days of jazz, when the cornetist often played with one foot on a cuspidor, but I must say that, unlike certain elegiac friends of mine, I find very little difficulty in moving with the times. Consider, for instance, "Shelly Manne and His Men, Vol. 5" (Contemporary C3519). Here, surely, is one of the strongest and subtlest rhythm sections we have had, with Mr. Manne at the drums; Russ Freeman, piano; and the remarkable Leroy Vinegar, walking bass. It often seems to me that the development of the rhythm section, in pliancy, in variety, in dynamic shading, is the most striking feature of modern jazz. Time and again, in playing old and cherished records, I am forced to concede that the boys in the back row have come to sound rather stodgy and heavy-handed. This is no reflection on such classic drummers as, for example, Baby Dodds, but it is rare for any of the older sections to provide anything like the impulse of the newer groups. In front of the rhythm, on this date, we have Stu Williamson, trumpet and Charlie Mariano, alto sax. The latter has obviously listened hard to the late Charlie Parker, and the absolutely stunning item on this program seems to me to be Parker's "Moose the Mooch," with Vinegar sending all before him. But the bill is rewarding all around.

Another delight from the West Coast is the "Chico Hamilton Quintet" (Pacific Jazz PJ-1225), with the sensitive Hamilton drumming, and Paul Horn, saxes, clarinet and flute; John Pisano, guitar; Fred Katz, cello (a welcome refugee from the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C.); and Carson Smith, bass. Here there is some lovely, fragrant business, and I call special attention to Jim Hall's tropical "Siete-Cuatro." I think the full thirteen numbers constitute Hamilton's finest disc to date, and he has previously set his own high marks to shoot at.

The current Count Basie band is elegantly represented on "Basie's Best" (ARS G422) which includes such latter day specialties as Neal Hefti's "Lollipop" and such standards as "One O'Clock Jump." What is there left to say about this organization? Once it is remarked that some of the earlier editions, such as that including the tenor saxophonist Lester Young, may have had a cut more quality,



Dizzy Gillespie—"plenty to please."

once it is observed that the band is often much better than its material, the would-be critic is left sitting. I daresay the outfit has had its bad evenings. So, I presume, did Margaret Matzenauer and John Philip Sousa and the Hurtado Brothers' Royal Marimba Band. I have enjoyed this Basie disc more than "Dizzy Gillespie's Big Band Jazz" (ARS G423). On the basis of the evidence here, Gillespie has not been able to build a large combination with the wonderful blend of ease and force which characterizes the Basie ensemble. But devotees of Dizzy's rococo trumpet, as I am, will hear plenty to please them.

A most attractive record is "Jazz Pianists Galore" (Jazz West Coast-506) with performances, largely of standards, by Carl Perkins, Jimmy Rowles, Russ Freeman, Richard Twardzik, Hampton Hawes, Bobby Timmons, John Lewis, Pete Jolly and Al Haig. In most of this playing there is a refreshing lack of exhibitionism, of cascading or noodling for its own sake; the left hands of the players do not, as in so much modern piano jazz, seem partially paralyzed; and in one selection, Jimmy Rowles's "Sonny Speaks" (with Mel Lewis, drums, and Ben Tucker, bass), we have an outstanding delicacy.

While browsing through "The Guinness Book of Superlatives" in search of sentiments to suit the springtime weather, I came upon the following:

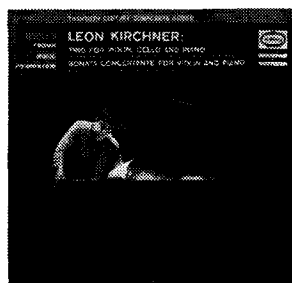
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CURIOSLY enough, the Eastern school of modern jazz, stemming out of the nervous rigors and tensions of New York, seems to be more relaxed and loose-jointed than many members of the balmy California persuasion. This statement doubtless has the weakness of most generalities, but I will invite a comparison, for instance, between The East in "All Night Long" (Prestige LP 7073) and The West in "Howard Rumsey's Lighthouse All-Stars, Vol. 8" (Contemporary C 3528). It is a case, in many passages, of the songful and lazy (with some lovely flute playing by Jerome Richardson) as against taut brilliance (Frank Rosolino's fantastic trombone technique is symbolic here). I suppose it would be perfectly possible to make the opposite argument, based on other albums, but I do have the sense that at the present time the old barrel house spirit is stronger in Gotham than in the Pacific studios.

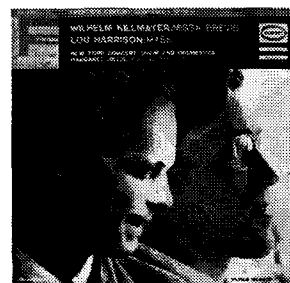
—WILDER HOBSON.

EPIC

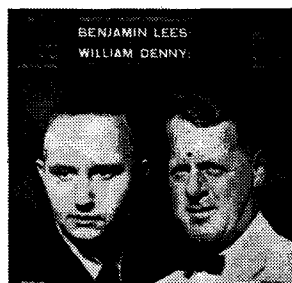
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—Drawings of Margot Fonteyn and Alexander Grant by Cosman.

Margot Fonteyn in "Petrushka"

By FERNAN HALL

BY A ROYAL CHARTER signed by the Queen, the Sadlers Wells Ballet, the Sadlers Wells Theatre Ballet, and the Sadlers Wells School are to be known as the Royal Ballet. This change of name was overdue, for the Sadlers Wells organization has been in effect the British state ballet for some time.

Another long-overdue event took place at Covent Garden on March 26—the premiere of "Petrushka," staged by the Royal Ballet for the first time. No doubt the production of this ballet was inspired by the great success of "The Firebird," already one of the pillars of the repertoire. The company has been greatly strengthened by taking these two Fokine masterpieces into its repertoire, and it is to be hoped that this sensible policy will continue; for such productions show the company at its best, doing what only a great state ballet can do, i.e. provide the choreographic equivalent of art galleries and museums.

There were seventeen curtain calls after the premiere of "Petrushka": nothing like it had been heard at the Garden since the first night of the Bolshoi season. This enthusiasm was fully justified. Though the performance was not ideal in all respects, it represented a triumph for the producers, Serge Grigoriev and Lyubov Tchernicheva—who had worked with the utmost patience and authority to revive all the beauties of the original Diaghilev production of 1911. Very properly, they were given an ovation to themselves.

Throughout the performance it was a delight to watch hundreds of half-forgotten details of choreography and staging spring to life amid the vivid colours of the decor and costumes. Petrushka soundlessly working his mouth at his first appearance in his cell, in a pathetic attempt at human speech, was unforgettable; so was the Ballerina, seated on the Blackamoor's knee, indicating by means of jerky doll-mime her fright and bewilderment at the strange sounds heralding Petrushka's irruption on to the scene. Margot Fonteyn was indeed outstanding as the Ballerina, showing her new-found mastery of Fokine's style, her impeccable musicality, and a delightful fey sense of humor (which she rarely gets a chance to reveal in the familiar repertoire).

Peter Clegg, as the Blackamoor, was one of a number of relatively obscure dancers to show admirable promise in this richly-endowed ballet. The role of the Blackamoor is by no means as rewarding as the other two principal roles, but he gave it an interesting and individual interpretation, emphasizing the stupidity and vanity of the puppet by a crisp violence, with powerful stamps on the ground.

The only serious mistake in the whole production was the casting of Alexander Grant as Petrushka. If one regards Petrushka as a character role, then Grant is the obvious choice, for he is the chief character dancer in the company. But Petrushka was created for and by Nijinsky, who was very much more than a character dancer. The role in fact demands qualities which Grant does not possess—a sense