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THE AMEN CORNER

Trombonology

THERE can be little doubt that the instrumental technique most elaborately developed by jazz has been that of the slide trombone. Jazz players have discovered a wide variety of characters in the horn. Big Green used it to make muted satirical comments behind the blues singing of Bessie Smith. Tricky Sam Nanton sprayed an incomparably rhythmic steam through the Duke Ellington orchestra. Tommy Dorsey sang high and purely on the horn. Miff Mole used it for the flexible projection of his intricately lovely melodic lines.

The jazz players have been able to do this through a host of technical experiments. Simply because they wanted to, they raised the slide action to high velocities, thus greatly increasing the fast staccato possibilities of the horn. They soared into the upper registers of the instrument by persistent development of embouchure (the relationship between lips, tongue and mouthpiece). They exploited lip-slurring to the point where the best of them can toss up jets of tones with the utmost liquid facility. They tried ranges of tone from the bodilessly pure to the snide and impudent, and in doing so used several kinds of mute. As with other jazz instrumentalists, they often *vocalized* their horns, playing with personal inflections and vibrato, singing, so to speak, a personal instrumental song.

It will be apparent from all this that modern jazz procedure for the slide trombone is often far from so-called "legitimate" teaching, which calls for pure, even tone production and frowns on vibrato. The result is that we have in the hands of the better jazz men a virtually new slide trombone which, however, can still be called upon for its classic duties.

A company of modern virtuosi are to be heard on three recent LPs dedicated to trombonology. All three feature slide trombone solo and section work against rhythm sections.

"Trombone Panorama" by the Kai Winding Septet (Columbia CL 999) has trombonists Winding, Carl Fontana, Wayne Andre, and bass trombonist Dick Lieb.

"Trombones" (Savoy MG-12086) has Bennie Powell, Henry Coker, Jimmy Cleveland, Bill Hughes, and the remarkable jazz flutist Frank Wess (the contrast between his gaily

syncopated piping and the brass is delightful).

"Trombone Scene" (Vik LX-1087) offers Jimmy Cleveland, Urbie Green, Eddie Bert, Frank Rehack, Sonny Russo, Willie Dennis, Jimmy Knepper, and Tommy Mitchell.

Space does not encourage any detailed comment on this galaxy. There is elegant playing on all three records, with the palms going perhaps to Kai Winding, Bennie Powell, and Urbie Green. But I think something might be said about modern trombone tendencies as revealed here. By the very nature of its design, one of the glories of the slide trombone is the slide. It makes possible a whole subtle vocabulary of glissandi, of little slides and slurs and semi-tones, of musical innuendi, which have been a great part of the personalized music of jazz. Every great jazz trombonist from Miff Mole to Jay Jay Johnson has used the slide with a mastery of its nuances. Now when, as is so often the case today, players devote themselves to rapid staccato inventions, they inevitably turn their backs to a degree on the slippery spirit of their horn. They are getting around so fast that they must jump rather than slide. In terms of expressiveness they must shout rather than hint. A great deal of delicate discourse is going out of modern jazz trombone playing (indeed, many players, for the sake of fast execution, have switched to the valve trombone, which eliminates the slide altogether).

And this is only the negative side of the criticism I wish to make of the modern school. The fact is that even if the slide is betrayed, the slide remains there. The player may be bent on minimizing slide effects with his staccato brilliance, but he must work with the slide, and the slide trombone is simply not, in essence, as fast an instrument as the keyed horns. The result is that a great many of the more ambitious modern solos, brilliant as their execution may be, have a taint of the awkward, the cumbersome, the rhythmically stiff. They lack the easy genius of great jazz. And so the modern trombone virtuoso often becomes such with a loss of both the fluency of slide expression and the proper fluency of jazz rhythm. The trombone itself can't complain, but devotees of what used to be called the sliphorn will.

—WILDER HOBSON.

THE OTHER SIDE

THE WAY THE ENGLISH WIND BLOWS



LONDON.

HOLIDAY time is upon us, music festivals and summer schools beckon on all sides, and several of our biggest record factories have closed their doors for two weeks so that their hard-worked staffs may take a well-earned rest. Alone among the "big four," Philips has lifted the veil on future plans, and has made it clear that "value for money" will remain a principal plank in its platform. In furtherance of this aim, the company is to launch towards the end of this month a new label: the twelve-inch LP "Favorite Music Series," which is a natural sequel to the highly successful ten-inch series bearing the same name. These discs will cost about \$1 less than normal twelve-inch LPs, they will be glamorously packaged (with their covers graced by pin-up girls rather than less photogenic composers or performers), yet the initial release shows serious musical purpose since it contains mainly standard classics performed by celebrity artists. There exists, in this country, a time-honored tradition differentiating between "celebrity" and "popular price" labels but, whereas with EMI we used to have "red-label" and "plum-label" artists, Philips ignores such class-distinctions and is quite prepared to offer us the New York Philharmonic-Symphony under Mitropoulos and Szell or the Philadelphia under Ormandy at "plum-label" prices in the interests of competitive trading.

The 1957 Glyndebourne season, which is about to conclude with a television performance of "Le Comte Ory," has not perhaps proved as notable as some of its predecessors—partly, no doubt, because this was the first year without any of Mozart's Italian operas. Only "Die Zauberflöte" and "Die Entführung" were retained from last year's bicentenary festival, while "Der Schauspieldirektor" was produced by way of curtain-raiser for Strauss's "Ariadne." Rossini's delicious "L'Italiana in Algeri" was the only major addition to the repertoire—the fourth opera by this composer which Gui has brought to Sussex during the past few years—though the Gui/Ebert/Lancaster staging of Verdi's "Falstaff" had previously only been seen at the Edinburgh Festival. Among the singers of the current season, I should like to single out the impressive Hungarian basso Mi-

haly Szekely, whose Sarastro and Osmin both had rare authority; Elisabeth Söderström, whose ardent portrayal of the composer in "Ariadne" almost consoled one for the absence of Sena Jurinac (who, in seven years at Glyndebourne, had won all our hearts); Oralia Dominguez who, with her lovely mezzo voice and irrepressible personality, gave us enormous pleasure as "L'Italiana" and Mistress Quickly; and our own Geraint Evans, who has now grown into an operatic artist of the very front rank, and who crowned all his achievements (including Leporello, Papageno, and Beckmesser) with a superb Falstaff.

Glyndebourne is not taking part in this year's Edinburgh Festival, opening on August 18. Instead, operatic fare will be provided by the company of the "Piccola Scala" (Milan), and among the artists participating in performances of "La Sonnambula," "L'Elisir d'Amore," "Il Turco in Italia," and "Il Matrimonio Segreto" are Maria Callas, Rosanna Carteri, Eugenia Ratti, Graziella Sciutti, di Stefano, Monti, Alva, Bruscantini, Calabrese, Corena, and Zaccaria, while Votto, Gavazzeni, and Sanzogno share the musical direction.

Wagnerites have had a lean summer so far, but on September 25 Covent Garden embarks on the first of two "Ring" cycles, directed by Rudolf Kempe, in which Birgit Nilsson will make her London debut as Brünnhilde alongside such familiar favorites as Hotter, Vinay, Windgassen, Witte, Kraus, and Sylvia Fisher.

Another new Verdi production scheduled for the coming season is "Don Carlos" and this is to be conducted by Carlo-Maria Giulini with, it is hoped, Christoff and Gobbi in the cast; operas to be revived include "Elektra," with Goltz in the title-rôle and Aase Nordmo-Löfberg making her Covent Garden debut as Chrysothemis, and "Peter Grimes" (with Pears and Fisher), which will also be recorded in its entirety at the same time. In addition, there is also a distinct possibility that we shall see the new Poulenc opera, "Les Dialogues des Carmélites," before the year is out, and last, but by no means least, I ought to mention that, for next spring, we are promised a tenor new to London who has, I am told, made quite a name for himself in the United States: Richard Tucker.

—THOMAS HEINITZ.



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