

# Recordings Reports: Jazz LPs

PERFORMER, CONTENTS, DATA	REPORT
The Birth of the Cool: Miles Davis. Capitol T762, \$3.98.	Finally collected for reissue, these are the records which announced cool jazz. Whatever they owe to the scorings of Claude Thornhill's dance band, we can see a heritage going to such Tadd Dameron pieces as "Lady Bird," to Freddy Webster's trumpet, to L. Young's attack and certain Basie performances, and behind them to Bud Freeman, Bix, Trumbauer, also moods of King Oliver and Bunk Johnson. Most celebrated are "Boplicity" and "Israel," but one wishes that the lively straightforwardness of "Move" could have a more careful hearing. Why wasn't "Darn That Dream" included, and why aren't the arrangers identified?
Hank Mobley with Donald Byrd, Lee Morgan, and Horace Silver. Blue Note 1540, \$4.98.	Reactions to cool were not long in coming. Silver, associated with Mobley in the original "Jazz Messengers," is a leader of the so-called "funky" branch which seeks to dig for roots in blues, to make modern playing as "low down" as possible—perhaps not a mere reaction. Mobley's playing has gained greatly in continuity and form. P. Chambers undertakes some interesting bowed bass solos.
Sonny Rollins. Blue Note 1542, \$4.98.	Ask a young musician about Rollins and you will get praise, "I hear all the past and present in him." Ask a listener and you may get puzzlement. He is a leader of what now seems another reaction to cool and seeks to include earthiness, drive, and "shout" in his playing. He sacrifices most of the lyricism even of his obvious influences, and his drive (and tone) seems more forced than natural at times. However, "Decision" has some song, despite staccato mannerisms.
A Midnight Session with the Jazz Messengers. Electra 120, \$4.98.	The "new" Messengers are an entirely different group (except for leader-drummer Art Blakey) from the one which first announced the funky style. This record should never have been issued: it is badly engineered, and one musician is guilty of an appalling number of technical lapses.
Lee Konitz Inside Hi-Fi. Atlantic 1258, \$4.98.	Konitz on both alto and tenor saxophones accompanied mostly by other students of Lennie Tristano, past and recent. They know their techniques. Konitz's forte has been as a valuable contributor to ensemble styles and occasional soloist (as on the Davis set above or on the Tristano Capitols). On these extended solos we learn again that technique is no more than a means. His first two choruses on "Kary's Trance," for example, are excellent, but after them we are largely coasting through changes and phrases. His work on tenor seems well worth continuing.
The Jazz Workshop: Hal McKusick. RCA Victor LPM 1366, \$3.98.	An arranger's set and a provocative one: G. Russell, J. Giuffre, G. Evans, J. Mandel, M. Albam, and A. Cohn in an attempt to extend cool scoring. Most jazz arrangements have been good insofar as they provide inspiration and setting. The intention here was to integrate improvisation carefully into the scores. The instrumentalists were thus given difficult tasks. Except on the pieces by Albam, Cohn, and one of Giuffre's the improvisations seem inhibited or over-shadowed rather than aided or balanced. Russell's "John Brown" tries "contrasting emotional levels . . . from the deeply spiritual to the satirical"—a difficult task for <i>any</i> music. Thus the scores invite judgment on their own. They would make fine film music—something one would hardly say of "Honky Tonk Train" or "Bluebird."
In the Upper Room: Mahalia Jackson. Apollo LP474, \$4.98.	For her best effort, Mahalia Jackson should be recorded with a proper audience. Meanwhile, few of her earlier Apollos have the overloaded accompaniments of most of her Columbias. These have improved sound (but with a bit too much echo) and several show her remarkable powers movingly. Two spirituals and nine "gospel songs"; "If You Just Keep Still," "City Called Heaven," and "Run All the Way" are outstanding among them.
Swing's the Thing: Illinois Jacquet and Roy Eldridge. Verve MG V 8023, \$4.98.	Jacquet is a highly capable swing saxophonist who combines a Hawkins-Berry attack with some Young metre and phrasing. (His honks and squeals are happily not here.) The contrast on "Have You Met Miss Jones" is a lesson: Jacquet plays melody plus an obbligato, Eldridge transforms the line. Jo Jones on drums shows again what a superb musician he is; he can even adopt his playing to the sound and style of the individual player.
Bass Hit: Ray Brown with arrangements by Marty Paich. Verve MG V 8022, \$4.98.	Brown is one of the best bassists currently playing—hear the Jacquet set above. Here he is heard in eight scores for twelve pieces (for some reason) with one solo track. His opening and closing choruses on "Will You Still Be Mine" are particularly good.
Brilliant Corners: Thelonious Monk with Sonny Rollins, Ernie Henry, and Clark Terry. Riverside RLP 12-226, \$4.98.	This set shows that Monk continues to develop a music soundly aware of its origins and willing to grow along the lines implicit in jazz itself. Monk even has the capacity to turn his limitations into virtues, and he can bring out the best in others—as with Rollins here. The fact that <i>Bemsha Swing</i> , in a sense the simplest piece, is probably the most successful in no way refutes the growth to be heard in the others. Monk is an artist in a field with its full share of craftsmen.
The Jimmy Giuffre 3. Atlantic 1254, \$4.98.	This group gets a remarkably dense and full texture, but Giuffre is still monotonously preoccupied with pianissimo. There is evidence of an unsuspected capacity for playing blues with an authenticity, but guitarist J. Hall's twangings at such times seem affected, as do some of the "lush" scorings.
Dixieland Jamboree: Santo Pecora and his Dixieland Band, Lu Watters and his Yerba Buena Jazz Band. Verve MG V 1008, \$4.98.	Reissues. The Watters group ambitiously modeled itself on King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. It had a very good time performing and communicated that fact, however monotonously and heavily. However, it missed the easy, swinging flow, the unsurpassed rhythmic variety, and the deep feeling of Oliver's records almost completely. Pecora's music is in the white dixieland tradition, slightly modified by swing—a less ambitious project.

—MARTIN WILLIAMS.

# OPERA WITHOUT ACTION

**GIAN-CARLO MENOTTI:** "The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore." A madrigal fable for chorus and instrumental ensemble recorded in cooperation with the New York City Ballet, conducted by Thomas Schippers. Angel Records, Angel 35437/L.

**WILLIAM BERGSMA:** Scenes from "The Wife of Martin Guerre." An Opera in Three Acts. Libretto by Janet Lewis. Soloists, chorus and orchestra conducted by Frederic Waldman. Composers Recordings, Inc. CRI-105X.

**AVERY CLAFLIN:** "La Grande Bretèche." Libretto by George R. Mills. F. Charles Adler conducting the Vienna Orchestra and Chorus. Soloists, Patricia Brinton, Richard Owens, and William Blankenship. Composers Recordings, Inc. CRI-108X.

**WHAT SOME OF OUR** earlier composers might have thought of operatic music absorbed via tape or discs is a matter of amusing, though perhaps pointless, speculation. Wagner, with his passion for integrating all the elements of motion, stage business, scenery, and words with music, would probably have been an arch enemy of the recording business. Curiously, some works may suffer mightily by being merely heard and not seen, while others seem to benefit by the same treatment. Three new operatic works currently enhance the record catalogues: Menotti's enchanting Madrigal Opera, "The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore"; William Bergsma's somber but trenchant "The Wife of Martin Guerre"; and Avery Clafin's unabashedly romantic and sensuous "La Grande Bretèche."

Of these, one seems decidedly improved for being heard and not seen; one suffers slightly; and one, since it has never been performed publicly, must be taken at disc value.

Even Wagner might concede that of all younger opera creators, Gian-Carlo Menotti has succeeded most remarkably in fusing all of the many elements that go into an operatic production. His latest, which is being referred to as the "U. G. and M.," is not only one of the most charming of his total output, but one of the enchanting works in the contemporary field. The staged version, which drew

almost unanimous paeans from the press, seems equally balanced in all of its parts, and the sum of them all is so fine that any one of them taken separately can only be regarded as a fragment.

Few listeners could ever conjure up the delightful spectacle that Menotti and choreographer John Butler together created on the stage. Such imaginations cannot be expected to tenant the average listener and hence if he is not familiar with the colorful stage presentation, the music alone may be something of a disappointment.

Many of the instrumental interludes have the characteristic Menotti charm, sometimes akin to his ballet "Sebastian" and his opera, "Amahl and the Night Visitors." The concluding madrigal, sung while the man in the castle lies dying in the company of his three faithful animals, is a beauty. Menotti has composed a text as poetic as his music. Thomas Schippers conducts with a true affinity for the score and a real appreciation for its texture. The Angel recording is fine indeed—a collector's item and beautifully packaged too.

Unlike the Menotti opus, Bergsma's opera looms as a work of tragic significance. On stage it may have seemed labored, but not in its recorded form. Despite being truncated, none of the important aspects of the story are missing. Not a pretty piece, this work is made of sterner stuff. The story concerns an impostor who claims to be the husband of a woman of Arzigues, France, whose husband had left her eight years earlier. When the real Martin Guerre returns, a trial ensues and the impostor is condemned to death. The story is a stark and dramatic one, and the force and vigor of Bergsma's score points up the intensity of it as it unfolds. The cast—a large one—is the same that presented the work at the Juilliard School, but each member seems more convincing here, untroubled by stage motion.

Bergsma is one of the newer American composers one must watch. Recordings will do much to acquaint listeners who have little opportunity of hearing him in live performances. A second Bergsma recording has just appeared, and like "The Wife of Martin Guerre," it is on a Composers Recordings, Inc. label (CRI-112). It is a beautifully recorded work for

strings called "The Fortunate Islands," conducted expertly by Alfredo Antonine with the Orchestra of the "Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia-Roma." (The reverse side, which contains music for tape recorder and orchestra, is something for separate discussion.)

The Avery Clafin opera leads off the battle of the *Bretèches*. No less than three operas based on the same short story of Balzac have been heard in New York during the past two seasons. The first, called "The Fatal Oath," by Boris Koutzen, was given at Hunter College a year ago. A second composer, Stanley Hollingsworth, was commissioned to do a TV opera on the same subject, and it was presented over NBC-TV on February 10 of this year. Not to be outdone, a week earlier CBS devoted its Sunday radio workshop to a third version of "La Grande Bretèche" by Avery Clafin.

This is a really romantic work. To the former bank president-composer who recently set the income tax forms to music, dodecaphonic dissonances are a different kettle of notes. This is an effusive piece, more concerned with the beauty of the music than with the bitter aspects of the jealousy-infested tale.

"La Grande Bretèche" is the name of an imaginary estate in the Loire valley which is the scene of a Balzac story. It concerns a jealous husband who returns home earlier than he is expected and discovers that his wife had hidden her lover in a closet. Although she swears that no one is there, her husband orders the gardener to wall up the closet door.

Each of the composers, Clafin included, who has set this story has taken liberties with the plot. Clafin has added a surprise ending of his own, by having the jealous husband kill his wife. It is curious how this story has fascinated numerous composers. Report has it that there are also several European versions of the same tale. Who will win the "battle of the Bretèches" is something only the future can decide.

Virgil Thomson's jacket notes, which explain Clafin's interrelated music and banking pursuits, mention that the composer hobnobbed with such men as Milhaud, Auric, Poulenc, and even studied with Satie. The music tells an additional story, for Clafin has a streak of romanticism that crossed the Rhine as well; an influence that did not get shot out of him when he was wounded at Verdun. The recording, made in the Vienna studios of Columbia Records by F. Charles Adler, is a luscious one. The singers are topnotch.

—OLIVER DANIEL.