



THE AMEN CORNER

Broad Grasp

THE custodian of this department, when asked about his musical taste, is apt to say that he is cursed with catholicity. Blessed might be the better word. In any event, this breadth of response, including a great fondness for the nineteenth century, is not calculated today to make one very popular in choosy circles. New York, for instance, is full of men and women who play recorders and shudder visibly if the musical conversation gets very far from Vivaldi. A good, resounding "Gounod!" in their midst would have them trembling like reeds in a monsoon.

Similarly, in the matter of enjoying jazz there is a general disposition to crawl into one's pigeonhole and view the rest of the world with a baleful, birdlike eye. Just try to convince that man with the beard over there that there is anything worth listening to in the piano mastery of André Previn, or tell that fellow in the bow tie that there is high merit in a number of cornetists whose middle names are not Bismarck. You'll see. Well, a great deal of jazz opinion and criticism has been a humorless, bigoted business, and much of that can be traced to the fact that, despite the increasing identification of jazz players and students with such institutions as the Juilliard, there is a great lack of general musical awareness, let alone immersion, among jazz enthusiasts. I would like to know, for one little indication, how much time jazz commentators spend with music *other than* jazz on their phonographs. It is difficult to imagine a writer waxing maudlin about jazz-musical qualities he is perfectly willing to describe as "soul" if he had ever become familiar with, say, Verdi's Requiem. And who could talk momentously of the "extended form" of Duke Ellington's admirable compositions if he had ever been aware of the structure of, for example, Beethoven's Quartet, Opus 59, No. 1?

But these are melancholy and perhaps unfruitful thoughts. Riverside has issued an excellent gathering of "Early and Rare" jazz collectors' items (Riverside 12-134). The twelve numbers run from Scott Joplin's presumably pre-1920 piano roll of his classic "Maple Leaf Rag" to Turner Parrish's ornate 1933 boogie, "Trenches." On the way, there are other pianistic delights from Cripple Clarence Lofton, Meade Lux Lewis, Jelly Roll Morton, and Fats Waller, and the voices of Ma Rainey,



Jimmy Giuffre — "one of the most original composers in jazz."

Big Bill Broonzy, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Trixie Smith. There is also stirring early bandsmanship by Fletcher Henderson, Tommy Ladnier, and friends.

Billy Taylor's clean and iridescent piano is heard in another program of originals and such worthy standards as Cole Porter's "At Long Last Love" and Benny Carter and Spencer Williams's "When Lights Are Low" (Atlantic 1329). Taylor is regarded in some sections of the jazz press as a slickster lacking in "funk" or "soul" but it is likely—if I may be permitted a bit of hyperbole—that these voices would entertain the same opinion of Mozart. I think I have made clear in this space before that I am myself ardently devoted to sound "funk" (we may as well work the word while it is still with us—it refers to good earthy feeling), and there is plenty of it in the plucked cello and bass of Sam Jones surrounded by Nat Adderley, cornet, or Blue Mitchell, trumpet; Jimmy Heath, tenor sax; Charles Davis, baritone sax; Bobby Timmons, piano; Keter Betts, bass; and Louis Hayes, drums ("The Soul Society," Riverside 12-324). The numbers are originals, mostly by the bandsmen, and represent the modern jazz combination of fine, trained musicianship with what might be called a Mississippian warmth and flow.

The California clarinetist and saxophonist Jimmy Giuffre is one of the most original composers in jazz, with a strong feeling for the pastoral. Back in 1958 he formed a trio with Bob Brookmeyer, valve trombone, and Jim Hall, guitar, which was conspicuous and fascinating for its lack of an orthodox rhythm sec-

tion; the function of that group was taken over by the polyphonic interplay of the three men themselves. They make fastidious music, charged with feeling withal, and I think their delicate elaboration of "Topsy," by Edward Durham and Edgar Battle, and of Thelonious Monk's "Blue Monk" is more effective than Giuffre's own "Western Suite," where the niceties of the writing and improvising do not prevent me from being disturbed by reminiscences of some of the cornier "Indian" atmospheres in American music. The shades of Edward McDowell, let alone Victor Herbert, will be distinctly uneasy. But I would not wish to be without the other side of the wax (Atlantic 1330).

I have saved until the last the best new record to cross my turntable this month. The pianist-composer Thelonious Monk returns with his quartet, including Charlie Rouse, tenor sax, John Orr, bass, and Billy Higgins, drums, and to them adds Joe Gordon, trumpet, and Harold Land, tenor sax. The numbers include new and old Monkery, played up to the vigorous, eccentric hilt. Thelonious, for the benefit of those who may never have heard him, has carried to remarkable and infectious heights the jazz possibilities of dialogue between piano and orchestra. He is a master (Riverside 12-323).

—WILDER HOBSON.

"Best Beethoven in stereo"

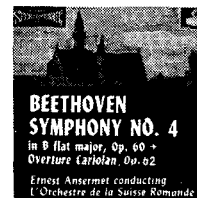
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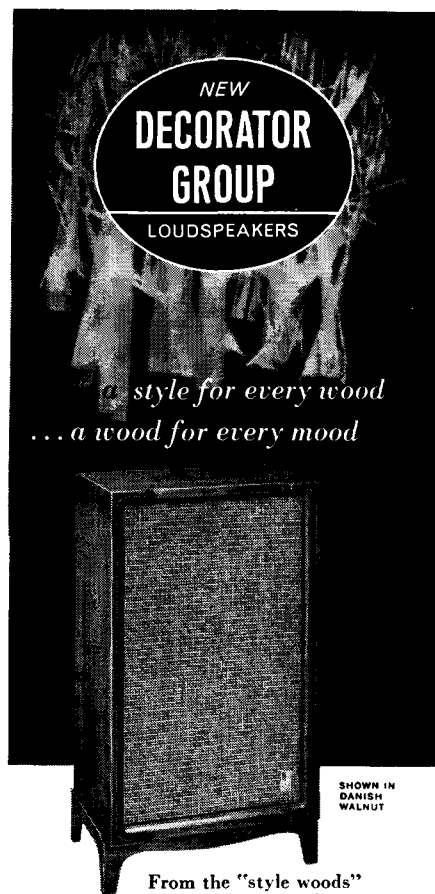
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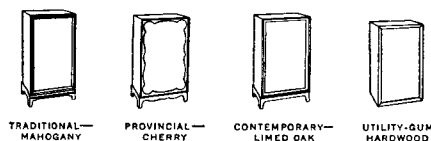
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Spoletto, 1960

By MARTIN BERNHEIMER

HANS WERNER HENZE's new opera, "The Prince of Hamburg," which was given its first performances outside Germany at this year's Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, is a difficult work. But Henze's stature as a composer is affirmed by the fact that the Spoleto performances were engrossing despite an uneven score, an imperfect production, and a cool public. In his third opera the composer flirts neither with conventionality nor with the easy dramatic effect, and for this reason he courts the musical intellectual rather than the masses. The Teatro Nuovo was half empty at the first repetition of "The Prince."

Henze's cause was not helped by his choice of libretto or by the physical production. The opera, based on Kleist's classic play of 1811, was perhaps doomed from the start by the non-operatic qualities of this Germanic, strictly philosophical drama. The plot deals with a prince, more dreamer than militarist, who eventually finds his salvation in recognition of the balance between law and freedom. The action is intentionally limited so that the listener may concentrate on the emotional conflicts within the hero. But the Hamburg Staatsoper's production (of the premiere in May) which was brought to Spoleto, leaves the Prince's plight an unconvincing one.

Alfred Siercke's sparse sets and costumes disclose many of the drawbacks of postwar German abstract décor, but few of the advantages. The scenery is visually ungainly, and the departure from realism only a compromise. The staging of film director Helmut Kaeutner is frequently awkward in its semi-stylization and is equally antidramatic. Only the battle scene, with scattered lightning flashes illuminating figures behind a cloudy screen, indicated unusual imagination.

The singers maintained adequacy where inspiration would have been in order. The leading roles call for artists capable of sustaining a frequently florid vocal line in a high tessitura. Vladimir Ruzdak's baritone was equal to the vocal requirements of the title role, but he lacked the necessary sensitivity of acting and inflection to make the Prince a sympathetic character. Liselotte Foelser was only slightly more effective in

the feminine lead, and Helmut Melchert as the Elector of Brandenburg produced more of the prescribed heldentenor sound than the appropriate noble bearing. With Henze himself as conductor the Trieste Philharmonic coped amazingly well with the unfamiliar work.

Upon first hearing, one is most impressed with the expansive lyricism of the love scene and the big ensembles. The complex formal designs, as in "Wozzeck," provide analytical interest but limited esthetic pleasure to one not intimately acquainted with the score. Harmonically there is much atonality and a little twelvetonality; but only seldom does one feel that the composer is following a system at the expense of expression.

Spoletto's other operatic offering was "La Bohème" as staged by the festival's director, Gian-Carlo Menotti. A beautifully prepared performance, conducted by Thomas Schippers, went far in bringing vitality to a work encumbered with sloppiness and convention. "La Bohème" makes sense in Menotti's version; Mimi is a really sick girl, not a coughing prima donna, and the four Bohemians are genuinely spirited and youthful. The period is set ahead to the time of Puccini's youth, and the atmosphere of the 1890s is appropriate to the music. The appearance of Spoleto natives as supers gives the crowd scenes a delightful touch of reality. There are still a few points that might be improved. Musetta, for instance, remains a stereotyped soubrette most of the time, and the onlookers at the Café Momus behave like almost any other operatic chorus. Outstanding in the generally competent cast was young Mietta Sighele as Mimi, a true lirico spinto. Lila de Nobili's spacious sets were traditional, and perhaps more successful than those for her overly elaborate production of "Carmen" in Paris.

The most surprising success of the Spoleto season has been a series of informal concerts presented daily at noon at the old Teatro Melisso. These events are supervised by pianist Charles Wadsworth, whose imaginative program one recent Sunday included Haydn played by the Kroll Quartet, a Respighi cantata, and a Mendelssohn trio with Schippers at the piano. It was a typically lively afternoon, appreciated by a large delegation of enthusiastic *Spoletini* as well as an unusually discerning tourist audience.