



## Two Reports for the Price of One

NEW ORLEANS.

AS A LABORATORY for the Rockefeller Foundation's first venture into orchestral assistance, the New Orleans Philharmonic has turned out to be more productive than could reasonably have been expected. To a degree this relates to the qualifications of conductor Werner Torkanowsky, which have proven to be well mated to the problem of preparing nine contemporary, previously unplayed scores in barely more than a dozen hours of rehearsal, for performance on the campus of Tulane University. But to an even larger degree it relates to the problems of maintaining an orchestra in this particular community, so that before the week was out, it was also a living example of the dilemmas surveyed in the same Rockefeller Foundation's recently published report on the future of the performing arts.

Thus the visitor who had been invited to observe one Rockefeller project in action found himself constantly referring—mentally at least—to the content of the other. Here, in a particularly graphic way, was spread out the struggle for survival that confronts such an organization in a rising-cost market when its sources of income are restricted. Merely to hold its ground takes unending ingenuity; to find replacements for the younger players who are constantly being lured away to larger centers with bigger budgets, or to increase the budget sufficiently to make them happy in New Orleans, is something like expecting the silt in the channels of the Mississippi to dissipate itself. It won't happen without a continuing, uphill struggle.

Whether the "cancellation" of the 1965-66 season that was announced at the beginning of April was an opening gambit or a closing move remains to be seen, but it shed a beam of light on the problems that confront Manager Tom Greene and his board in their efforts to keep a symphony orchestra alive in this city. Rich as it is, New Orleans lacks a suitable hall for an orchestra that now plays in a municipal auditorium; it is both blessed and cursed by a climate that draws people outdoors rather than indoors much of the year; and it is devoted to social customs in which more than a little of the city's wealth sustains the balls and parties that culminate in the annual Mardi Gras. Add to this a less than passionate interest in symphonic music on the part of some who should be sympathetic sources of sup-

port, and the picture has more than a share of clouds.

For all the shadows that darkened their future, there can be nothing but praise for the effort put forth by Torkanowsky and his players. More than a little of this could be credited to a sure grasp of what he wanted to achieve and a sound understanding of how to go about getting it. A violinist by training (in Israel), Torkanowsky has a liberal share of practical experience as an orchestral player, in addition to the benefit of studies with the late Pierre Monteux. He wasted little time with preliminaries or dissertations, concentrating instead on the trouble spots of each new work, which, in turn, clarified the problem of style, whether it was neo-Hindemith, post-Schoenberg, or second-generation Bartok.

All of these inclinations (and more) turned up in the works that were performed, a phenomenon that was by no means unexpected. It was also to be expected that the creative level in such a batch of unperformed works fluctuated widely, with the most of it in the mature scores of Santoro (Brazil) and Galindo (Mexico), previously mentioned. But it was unexpected, and more gratifying to this listening taste, to find that in William S. Fischer, whose *Statement* brought together a chanting chorus with the orchestra, Xavier University has a composer of excellent equipment and considerable enterprise, as the University of Texas has in Lothar Klein. The latter's inclinations take his feet in the different direction of the twin peaks of Berg and Schoenberg, but his eyes, too, are on the stars. Jack Gottlieb's *Pieces of Seven*, which blew the breeze of Broadway southward, completed the new works of Program II.

For what it was worth, the experience of attending rehearsals as well as concerts showed that even younger symphony musicians (and the New Orleans ensemble has more than its share of such conservatory products, who are technically adept but not yet thoroughly routinized) fare better with styles on the Hindemith-Bartok-Stravinsky side of the compositional Great Divide than they do with the closer-knit chromatic textures of the twentieth-century Viennese and their inheritors. In the more conventional texture of Dickerson's *Concert Overture* and even Santoro's *Symphony No. 7* the sound was decidedly better than it was, say, in Lees's *Concertante Breve* or Klein's *Trio Concertante*. However, it

was still another purpose of the Rockefeller program to promote the ability of the orchestra to perform such works, and this it assuredly did.

NEW YORK.

A LIVELY company, a varied repertory, and an attractive price scale combined to build attendance at the final weeks and days of the Ballet Theatre's engagement in Lincoln Center to gratifying totals of interest as well as income. Important as income is (and one week's \$93,000 was the best to date for a ballet in the New York State Theater), interest is even more, for it assures a return engagement under the same roof next January and thus provides an incentive for the company to go on from the achievements of its current (twenty-fifth anniversary) season.

These included the restoration to the active list of such worthy works as *Les Noces* and *La Sylphide*, the reproduction of such ballets of Agnes de Mille as *Fall River Legend* and *Tally-ho* (now called *The Frail Quarry*), as well as the introduction of her *Four Marys* and *The Wind in the Mountains*. Other matters, such as William Dollar's *The Combat*, are less consequential but add variety to the repertory, which is, for the most part, well dressed and attractively set.

For those who have seen Ballet Theatre over the full course (which is to say since its debut on a January night in 1940 at the Center Theater), it brings to mind the French proverb "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Though the names of its performers change—all except, of course, that of Lucia Chase, its founder-figure, who is still doing the Stepmother in *Fall River Legend*—certain characteristics remain the same. These include more diversity of matter than unity of style, a tendency to spread effort thin over a big repertory rather than to tighten, refine, and perfect ensemble in a more limited one. Perhaps that is a way to the affections of a big public, but it tends to put emphasis on entertainment rather than on higher artistic aspirations such as those of the big foreign companies and the New York City Ballet, too.

The biggest "name" in the company now is Lupe Serrano's, a reputé earned by a high degree of physical efficiency, especially in a role cut to her taut measure by Dollar in *The Combat* or the showy *Black Swan* Pas de Deux out of *Le Lac de Cygne*. (I did not see her *Giselle*, which was widely praised). For the most part, her focus tends to zero in on sharp attacks, strong leg thrusts, and other muscular virtuosity, with their bravo-rousing potential. But surely there has been some small elevation of standards hereabouts since Ballet Theatre was new, which remains invisible in its work.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



# Books

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## LITERARY HORIZONS

### A Liar in Search of the Truth

IN 1961 we had Mark Schorer's *Sinclair Lewis*, which ran to 967 pages, and in 1962 Arthur and Barbara Gelb's *O'Neill*, which reached 970. Now we are given W. A. Swanberg's *Dreiser* (Scribners, \$10), and that has 614 pages. In spite of their length, I found both the Lewis book and the O'Neill fascinating; and the Dreiser is no less so. Swanberg, who has written biographies of Jim Fisk, William Randolph Hearst, and others, makes no claim to be a critic; he is simply telling the story of a man's life in straightforward if undistinguished prose. In getting at the facts of that life, he has done a first-rate job of research.

Dreiser, perhaps more than most writers, deserves a detailed biography of this sort, for his life was so full of contradictions that any brief treatment is likely to be misleading. The biographer has to let the facts speak for themselves, just as Dreiser did in his novels. *The Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, edited in three volumes by Robert H. Elias in 1959, gave some idea of the man's complexity, but this is the first time that the whole record has been set down.

We learn at the outset that Dreiser told the truth, for once, about the hardships of his boyhood: the large family was desperately poor, the father as unreasonable as he was unlucky, the mother a miracle of courage and resourcefulness. Young Theodore's career began badly, and it is astonishing that, by the time he was twenty-one, he had made a promising beginning as a newspaperman. He always believed that his character had been shaped, or misshaped, by his early sufferings, and he was probably more nearly right about that than about most things.

Swanberg goes through the whole story. He gives an account, rather different from that circulated by Dreiser, of the "suppression" of *Sister Carrie*. He describes the extraordinary years 1907-1910, when Dreiser had a great commercial success as editor of the Butterick publications, devoted to Victorian morality and the sale of patterns. After that

came a period of remarkable productivity, in which Dreiser wrote *Jennie Gerhardt*, *The "Genius," The Financier*, and *The Titan*, as well as many short pieces. A less fruitful period followed, but in 1925 *An American Tragedy* brought Dreiser his first great popular success. Thereafter there was the twenty years' struggle to survive as a literary force.

It has been known that Dreiser, during his whole life, was much concerned with women, but his career as a philanthropist has never been so fully documented before. In 1898 he married Sara White, from whom he was soon separated because of his constant infidelities. For more than twenty years he lived, off and on, with Helen Richardson, whom he finally married shortly before his death. As for the others, there were scores of them, whom he pursued not at all with the cynicism of a practiced roué but with the inarticulate ardor of a pimply-faced adolescent. No college girl could write him a fan letter without his trying to get her into bed with him, and often enough he succeeded. Indeed, even before he had a reputation as a Great Man, he seems to have been uncommonly attractive to women.

HE was hard on his women, and on his friends of both sexes, and particularly on his publishers. He flitted from one publisher to another, almost always leaving a sizable debt behind him. The toughest men in what is generally regarded as a hard-boiled business became gullible lads when Dreiser tapped them for advances. If it has to be granted that he was often badly in need of money, it must also be pointed out that he was conspicuously lacking in anything that could be called a conscience.

Swanberg is no hero worshipper. In a summary passage he says that Dreiser was "on one plane a selfish, bullying, unreasonable, capricious, deceitful, evil old man." This is understatement. All his life Dreiser was an incorrigible and rather stupid liar, untrustworthy on

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every conceivable count. He was a cheat, given to plagiarism and quite willing to sign his name to the work of a hireling or a friend. He was bad-tempered, rude, ungrateful, often extravagant in a flashy way and yet fundamentally stingy. He was intensely suspicious of everyone, and quick to be jealous. In spite of his boasted devotion to science he was abjectly superstitious, and could easily be taken in by such quacks as Dr. Albert Abrams. Whatever his professed love of humanity, he managed to hurt most of the human beings whose lives he touched.

On the other hand, as Swanberg goes on to point out in the passage I have quoted, Dreiser was always seeking, in his peculiarly anguished way, to discover the meaning of life. In his later years, instead of finishing the novels for which he was under contract, he persisted in working on a kind of universal philosophy, a task for which no one could have been less fitted. The novels, from *Sister Carrie* on, are full of reflections on the mysteries of existence. ("Oh, Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings