



—E. Fred Sher.

A view of the stage during an early rehearsal for *Antony and Cleopatra*. The floor of the orchestra pit has been raised to the level of the main stage to facilitate the work in progress.

## Birth of an Opera

By HANS W. HEINSHEIMER

**S**AMUEL BARBER, whose opera *Antony and Cleopatra* has been chosen to open the new Metropolitan Opera House, is probably the only living composer who does nothing but compose. He does not perform, he does not lecture, he writes neither newspaper reviews nor books, he does not organize music festivals, he is not at the helm of an opera company or a symphony orchestra. He is no professor nor a "composer in residence" anywhere but in his own house in Mount Kisco, New York.

Once, some fifteen years ago, he took conducting lessons and made a few records of his music in Europe. But no sooner had he listened to them than he decided and proclaimed clearly and decisively that he would forever leave the conducting of his works to others. As a young man he had a fine baritone voice, tried (in vain) to get a radio job as a singer and even made a recording of one of his earliest works, *Dover Beach*, for voice and string quartet when he was twenty-one years old. The recording, featuring the Curtis String Quartet and Barber as soloist, was issued by RCA Victor in 1936 and is now a collector's item. The baritone soloist has never sung in public again.

Barber was also and still is an extraordinarily skillful and sensitive pianist whose technique and whose affinity to the piano, matched by few if any of his colleagues, are reflected in the brilliant pianistic writing of his *Excursions*, a cycle of piano pieces written in 1944, his Piano Sonata (1949), and the more recent Piano Concerto (1962). But he never plays the piano professionally anymore, much to the regret of those who remember, among similar unforgettable treats, the first performance of Barber's song cycle, *Hermit Songs*, at Dumbarton Oaks in 1953, when the composer accompanied Leontyne Price in a beautifully paced, marvelously balanced performance, probably his last public appearance as a pianist.

Barber has chosen to live the life of a composer and no other life, and nothing will distract him. There is scarcely a day when he is not approached with requests to lecture, to attend or conduct a seminar, to teach a master class; but he steadfastly declines any offer to participate in academic musical endeavors ever since, in 1939, he let himself be persuaded to return briefly as a teacher of composition to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. The school is his Alma Mater, where he studied piano, singing, and mostly, of course, composi-

tion from the first day the Institute opened in 1924 until 1934 when, at the age of twenty-four, he won the first of many prizes that were to enable him to devote all of his time to composing—a Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship which, combined with his first Prix de Rome, made it possible for him to spend his first creative year abroad.

It would probably have been beyond human endurance to lead and carry on so dedicated a life if it had not been encouraged and facilitated by success. As one looks back from *Antony and Cleopatra*, which bears the opus number 40, to his early beginnings, the steady, sustained success of Barber's musical output is, again, quite a unique feature. There are no *Jugendsünden* respectfully filed away in libraries and never performed. When he was seventeen he brought a few songs to Schirmer, who promptly rejected most of them but published some, among them *The Daisies*; it is still, after almost forty years, one of the most popular art songs in the contemporary American repertory.

Schirmer told him at the same time that they could not possibly afford the expense of publishing his Cello Sonata, but they changed their minds when the New York Philharmonic played a new work by the twenty-one-year-old composer and when, a little later, his First Symphony had its premiere performance in Rome under Bernardino Molinari, an unheard-of achievement for a young,

almost unknown American composer. Two years later approval came from the highest court: Arturo Toscanini introduced the by now celebrated *Adagio for Strings* with the NBC Symphony in New York. (The latest Schwann catalog lists eleven different recordings of the piece currently available.) From then on, things grew logically. Among the artists who played Barber firsts were Bruno Walter (*Second Essay*, 1942); Serge Koussevitzky (*Second Symphony*, 1944, Cello Concerto with Raya Garbousova, 1946, *Knoxville, Summer of 1915* with Eleanor Steber as soloist, 1948); and Vladimir Horowitz who introduced both the piano cycle *Excursions* in 1945 and the Piano Sonata in 1949.

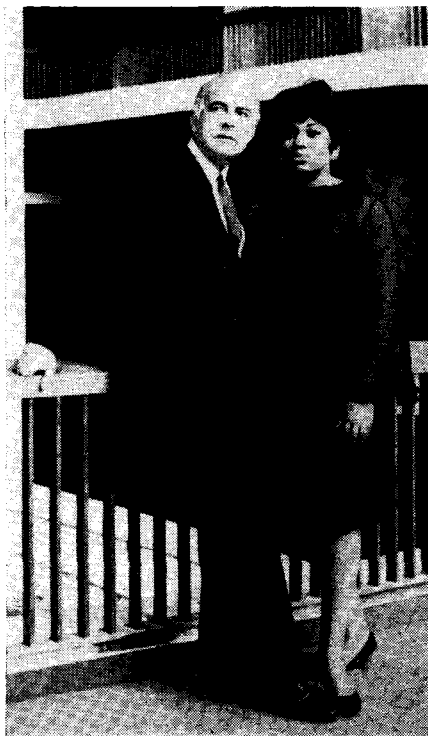
Barber is, of course, pleased but never carried away or, for that matter, even particularly impressed by his success. He doesn't want to hear too much about it. When we show him articles, reviews, letters, programs from all corners of the world he glances at them, gets easily irritated if not bored, usually leaves them behind as he hurries away. He retains a very objective, detached, rather cool attitude toward his work. When, a few years ago, he went through a short period where neither a commission nor a personal creative initiative occupied his mind, he amused himself by making choral settings of some of his most successful songs. He brought them in our office one day, with an almost apologetic, slightly embarrassed smile and asked whether, perhaps, we would want to publish them. Of course, we did—and, again, success came naturally to a man who never seems to seek it; his famous songs "Sure on this shining night" and "A Nun takes the Veil," written in 1937, sold more than 100,000 copies in this choral arrangement, made by the composer almost thirty years later just to while away time between major projects.

A little while ago we had another, even more striking illustration of his attitude of cool detachment, so rare and so admirable among composers (and other creative artists) who usually consider everything they put on paper as an immortal message coming directly from heaven. Barber had come to the office, as he does from time to time, and after we had solved our problems for the day and had refreshed our tired business minds through the brilliant assortment of musical and social gossip that he never fails to bring along, we went to lunch, which he starts most often with a champagne cocktail, a pleasant and perhaps typical change from the traditional Martinis, Manhattans, and J & B on the rocks that are the businessman's lot. The meal, too, is usually chosen along gourmet lines, always elegant (he speaks French, German, and Italian fluently, the latter admirably well), and ordered without much hesitation no matter how

huge and confusing the bill of fare may be. Anyway, I found the atmosphere congenial enough to ask a question which I had had on my mind for some time.

"Why is it," I asked, fortified by the second champagne cocktail, "why is it that all your works are successful, that they all seem to stay alive, no matter how old they are—all, that is, with the exception of one, your Second Symphony. This one we just can't get off the ground." There was, again, no hesitation. "The reason is very simple," Barber said. "It is not a good work." He then briefly explained the circumstances under which the symphony had been written in 1944. Barber was in the service and had been commissioned to write a symphony dedicated to the Army Air Force. For several weeks he was flown from airfield to airfield to absorb the feeling and atmosphere of his subject. The result, he now proclaimed freely, just wasn't right.

**W**HILE such an admission was unusual enough, what followed was even more startling. "Let's go back to the office and destroy it," he said. And this, indeed, is what he did. We went back, got all the music from the library and a few big tubs from the basement, and Samuel Barber, with a gusto that increased our admiration for him from one torn page to the next, tore up all this beautifully and expensively copied material with his own hands. A porter was called, the tubs were carried away and that was the end of Symphony No. 2, opus 19.



—RCA Victor.

Composer Barber and soprano Price during a break in one of the rehearsals.

Among the many works in Barber's catalogue, opera did not play any part until the Metropolitan Opera commissioned him to do his first opera, *Vanessa*, and produced it in 1958. Ever since that production the Metropolitan kept asking him for another opera. He was invited to come and see performances, hear singers, watch conductors, be inspired by the multifaceted activities of an opera house in the hope they might be contagious. Several subjects were mentioned, among them *Moby Dick*. "Too much water for an opera," S.B. commented, "and too much wind." The subject was dropped.

Barber went to see plays on and off Broadway, talked to playwrights, read scripts. When the new opera house began to take form on the drafting boards and an opening date—then seemingly very remote—became tangible, the pressure began to increase. Barber, as always, was detached, tried to avoid so enormous a commitment, rejected ideas that were not, so it seemed to him, quite right. He had spoken about *Antony and Cleopatra* once or twice before, and as the pressure mounted he looked at it again.

**H**OW could the enormous play be cut to dimensions manageable for an opera? What leading parts were there? How could they be cast? Was Antony to be a tenor or a baritone? Which of the many persons of the play could be sacrificed to make room for the music? At last, one unforgettable day, he called to say that he had decided to accept the commission. "I only did it because I realized that none of my friends would talk to me anymore if I didn't," he said in a typical Barberesque understatement.

Soon after, when we visited him in the studio in Mount Kisco, we found the floor, the shelves, the piano covered with books on Shakespeare and his era, on Egypt, and on Rome. After a while it became obvious that cuts alone would not produce a libretto. It needed a different dramatic approach. Verdi had found a Boito to tailor *Othello* for an opera. Barber realized that he, too, needed help. It came, rather unexpectedly, from the man who was to stage and design the performance, from Franco Zeffirelli. He offered to write the libretto, basing it entirely on Shakespeare's play but cutting and rearranging it freely as a vehicle for the music. The two artists signed an agreement and Zeffirelli departed for Europe, where he was soon swept out of the composer's sight while staging an opera in Paris with Maria Callas, preparing a film for Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and embarking on other projects, all on a grandiose, time-and-effort-absorbing scale. Barber sat in Mount Kisco, looking at the calendar, leafing through the 1966 pages with the 16th

(Continued on page 56)



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— Sylvania Products, 1966. Photographed by Joseph Costa.

The two 30x35-foot examples of the art of Marc Chagall which flank the Grand Tier and face the huge windows of the Metropolitan Opera House opening on the main plaza of Lincoln Center have been called murals but are, more properly, paintings in oil. Each was detailed on six rolls of canvas, individually mounted and painted on tapestry frames created for them in the Gobelin Museum of Paris. The twelve sections were assembled, then touched up by their creator and a team of associates when they had been glued to the plaster surface of the walls.





As they face the viewer, the south (left) panel pays tribute to the triumphal nature of music. Intermingled with images of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, and the New York skyline are figures of ballerinas, singers, and musicians. Close inspection will reveal Maya Plisetskaya of the Bolshoi Ballet in a group at top left center, and Rudolf Bing in gypsy garb. The north panel is dominated by associations with Mozart, but Chagall's absorption with themes of love, hope, and peace is also recurrent. The tree of life floats on the Hudson against the towers of Manhattan, King David and Orfeo share a lyre, and a suggestion of Beethoven's *Fidelio* is also visible.



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## Art Works in the New Metropolitan

**L**IKE much else about the new Metropolitan Opera House building, the plans for the two impressive paintings by Marc Chagall (see pages 52 and 53) came into being as the structure itself evolved. There was, in the very first conception, no such wall space facing the Lincoln Center Plaza. However, as the intricate task of fitting into the same four walls—the massive ones of the Metropolitan house the equivalent of a fourteen-story building—all the elements that were deemed desirable for the multiple purposes of public, performers, and backstage personnel, the space came into being. It was as the result of a sizeable contribution from the Henry L. and Grace Doherty Charitable Foundation, Inc. in memory of Mrs. Doherty and Helen Lee Doherty Lassen (said to be approximately \$300,000) that the commissioning of the work to utilize the space became possible.

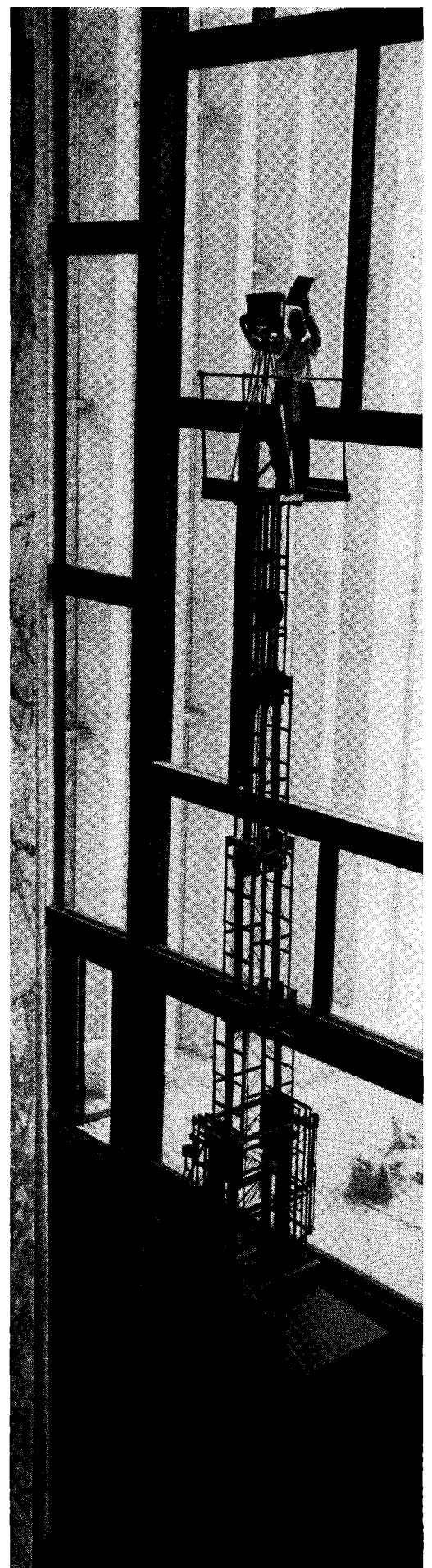
A by-product of the basic project was the creation by Chagall of a 30-by-46-inch poster to commemorate the opening of the new house. Lincoln Center commissioned the Chagall poster as one of a series financed by an Albert L. List Foundation grant. It went on display in New York subways early in September. A limited edition of the poster, which was lithographed in Paris under the artist's supervision, will be offered for sale at a later date.

In addition to the works of Chagall, the new opera house contains a series of Raoul Dufy paintings derived from scene drops from the Gilbert Miller production of Jean Anouilh's *Ring around the Moon*; three sculptures by Maillol; a bronze of Wilhelm Lehmbruck's *Kneeling Woman*, which stands at the head of the grand staircase, as well as many representations of composers and past performers.

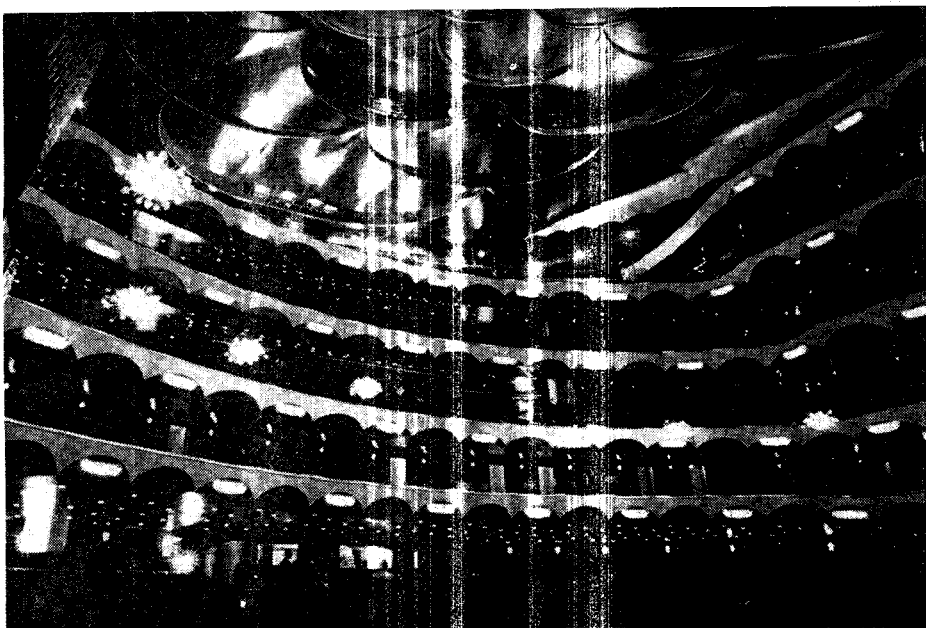
—Photos by E. Fred Sher.

The master (left) looks down from the top promenade as the right hand panel (see page 53) is assembled.

Photographer Joseph Costa atop a backstage rig to get an eye level focus for his photographs (see pages 52 and 53).

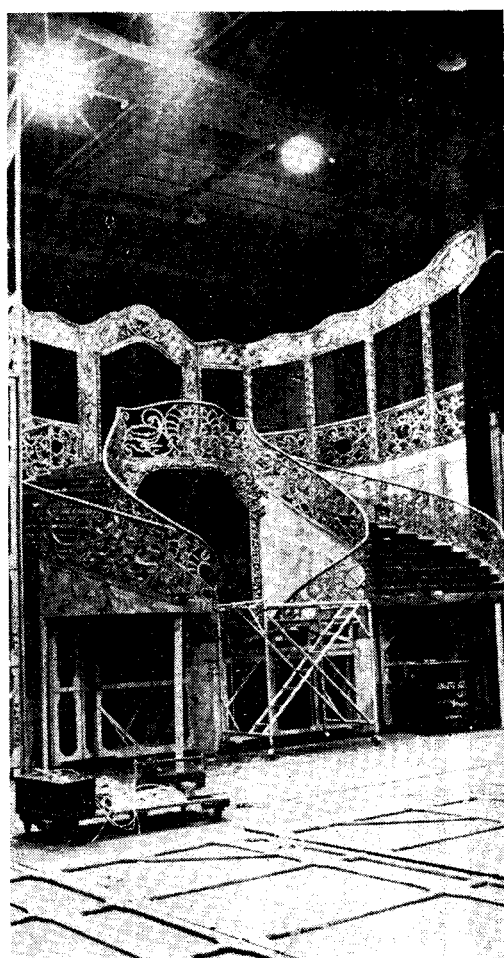






A general view of the auditorium—"a wide arc of rings, or tiers, rising over a broad area of orchestra floor seating.

—Photos by E. Fred Sher.



A staircase for the Cecil Beaton production of *La Traviata* shows the expanse of the side stage on which it can be pre-assembled, then moved into audience view when its turn comes.

## Opera

Continued from page 50

of September staring him agonizingly in the face.

Weeks, months passed. No libretto. He probably remembered the long years he had to wait for the completion of the libretto for *Vanessa*. Gian Carlo Menotti had promised it to him and begun writing the first two scenes, which the composer, as eager as he was inexperienced, had at once set to music. The librettist had brought Anatol to the "country home in a North Country," had him announced to the desperately waiting Vanessa, and had put him in a doorway where he stood listening to Vanessa's aria. Then Menotti departed, busy with organizing his summer festival in Spoleto and with writing himself a new opera, and for more than a year Anatol was left standing in that doorway, never moving, and indeed immovable for lack of words. This time, Barber was determined not to be caught without a complete libretto, one that was not in the dreaming but definitely in the on-paper stage. He knew that he could not wait any longer. He had to get his libretto or return the commission to the Met. He proceeded to Italy and went to the little town on the Mediterranean where the elusive Zeffirelli had his villa.

It was now or never and we were waiting nervously for news. Two, three anxious weeks passed without a word. Then a cable arrived, reporting that the visit had been a full success, that the libretto had been completed, and that the composer was returning happy. Later we heard that, after a little initial trouble, he had at last triumphantly penetrated the aura of spectacularity

that surrounded the villa, and had succeeded in settling himself and his writer down for many hours of concentrated work day after day. A young lady had typed out page after page in English. Nobody went back to any other *vita* but the one dedicated to the preparation of the libretto for *Antony and Cleopatra*. The draft that Barber brought back from Italy is almost line by line identical with the final version which he set to music.

This was a wonderful point of departure for so painstaking and dedicated a composer. He began writing the first scene with its great choruses, thus setting for himself the mood and the style of the whole work. From then on he jumped once in a while, completing scenes that appealed to him at one particular moment before going back to earlier ones. *Vanessa* had been written, largely, in a studio belonging to the American Academy in Rome, overlooking the city, with a beautiful wooden staircase glued to the old wall of the building leading up to the sun-drenched working room, with all the tempting beauty of Rome at his feet.

Work on *Antony and Cleopatra* was done in the self-imposed retreat of Mount Kisco, in a studio whose picture windows look on the trees and shrubs of Westchester, on a few flowers, and on a little fountain, the only memory of Italy. There is complete stillness, only an occasional bird cry and, perhaps, the very distant drone of the shuttle to Boston. A rigid working schedule was established. Barber would answer the phone only early in the morning or at lunch time. Visitors were discouraged. Mail remained unanswered. His own trips to New York were limited to at best one day a week, a day that would have to cover everything from the den-



tist to a visit to our office for strategy talks and for the delivery, every few weeks, of another completed scene of the opera.

In a closet built after his specifications he keeps the enormous music sheets, specially printed for him, on which Barber wrote, in pencil, the initial score for piano and voices. By the time he is ready to relinquish a page it is a model of perfection. It is not only checked meticulously for errors, for a wrong or missing rest, for a hemidemiquaver that has a hemi too much or a demi too little—it is also written very clearly in an interesting, original, yet very legible hand and it is completely ready for the copyist and the printer. It is the first, and at the same time, the final and definitive draft of the music.

Now that the score is completed, the production mounted, the opera printed and recorded and everything that once seemed so tentative, so full of pitfalls, is here and present, we still thrive on the excitement that filled us for so many months—no, come to think of it, for years. The anxious waiting for the libretto. The music arriving from Mount Kisco, scene after scene, sometimes by mysterious messengers who would leave a carefully wrapped huge parcel during lunch hour on our desk, more often than not by the composer himself who would rush in—always hatless, mostly coatless—and leave the package on a corner table of the office, almost embarrassed, not even permitting us to open and glance at it in his presence, rather talking about other things: the delay in the arrival of the new servants from Italy, a sick dog, a letter he had received from Russia, which one of our editors, a Russian-speaking Czech, was to translate for him, or just a little gossip. And then Mr. Wolf, the immaculate copyist, who is kept in perpetual servitude as Barber's court copyist (and whose revolutionary departure on a vacation between Act II and III of *A & C* caused one of the major crises in the history of opera), arriving to pick up the delivered pages and returning them within an incredibly short time beautifully transcribed in India ink.

Original copy going back to the eagle-eyed composer at last, scene after scene to the Met, to the singers, the designers, the choreographer, the chorus, which was promised the music by February 15 and which indeed had it on February 15. The first run-through of the work by a junior cast at the RCA studios in New York. The first complete rendition with chorus and soloists on the roof

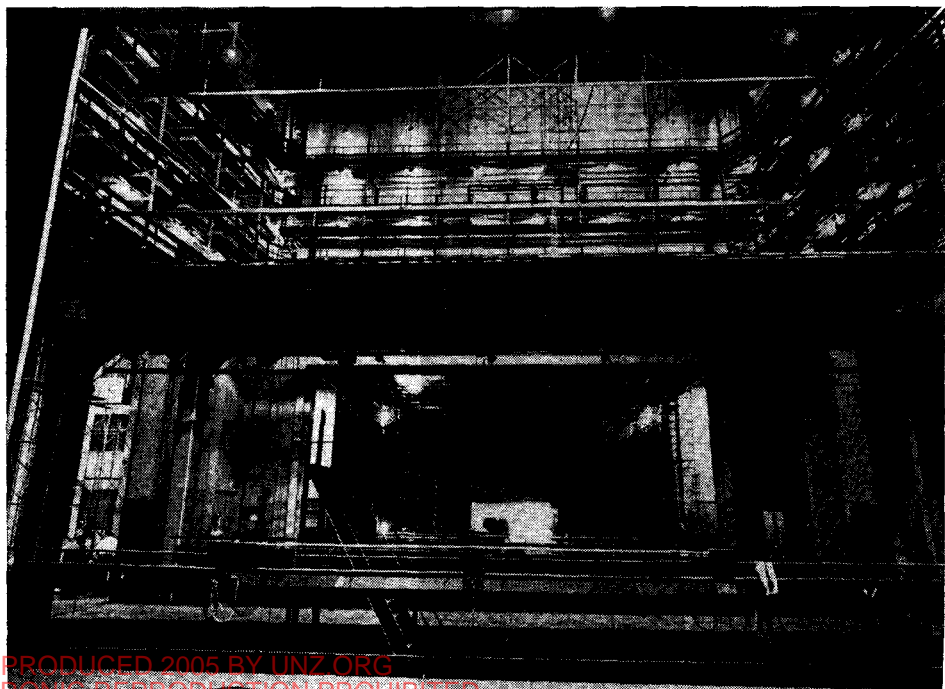
stage of the old opera house on Broadway, the old rickety elevator releasing celebrity after celebrity on each of its arduous trips, with Kurt Adler conducting the chorus from an improvised throne, a coach playing the music on an old upright piano, sometimes replaced by the composer himself, and with all the dignitaries of the Met crowding around the piano on dangerously dilapidated chairs.

And then, the publication of the score which we had set our heart on having before the public on opening night. When we mentioned the plan to Barber, about a year earlier, he was horrified: "Don't even talk to me about it—I can't possibly think of publication—I have to write an opera—I'll let you know when I am ready." So word went promptly out to the staff to proceed and everyone was sworn to secrecy. Then, many months later, and many, many months too late to plan and execute the publication had we heeded the composer's dictum, he came in one morning and told us that now, now at last, he would give us the green light to prepare the score for the engraver. "Would you like to see the finished proofs?" we asked him, pulling the completed score from the secret drawer in one of the great triumphs of our life. Barber took it with graceful admiration, smiled, and rushed away.



(Above) A broad perspective of the promenade on the grand tier level. The vista is north, taking in the main staircase and several of the Lobmeyr crystal chandeliers donated by the Austrian government.

(Below) A view through the stage from the auditorium. In the foreground, one of the main stage elevators is at maximum height. In the distance, the sliding panels through which trucking deliveries may be made are open. At left, the south side stage is visible.



# Music on Blue Note

**W**HEN Blue Note Records was founded twenty-seven years ago, it was one of about three independent labels exclusively devoted to jazz. The company was at first the part-time project of Alfred Lion, together with his associate, Frank Wolff. Its earliest sessions included Sidney Bechet, on recordings that are still in print, and boogie-woogie piano solos by Mead Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, and Pete Johnson. Those latter recordings are, unfortunately, no longer in print, but it was their popularity which made Blue Note a full-time proposition.

Blue Note recorded guitarist Charlie Christian when Christian was easily the most advanced instrumentalist in jazz. But it was not until 1947, a few years after modern jazz began to reach records, that Blue Note began working with modernists such as trumpeter Fats Navarro, composer Tadd Dameron, and pianists Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk, in sessions that, now transferred to 12-inch LPs, are among the glories of the Blue Note catalogue.

Similarly, the label has approached the new thing, avant-garde music of the 1960s, with a bit of caution. It had an able second-generation modernist, Jackie MacLean, under contract, and when MacLean moved into freely modal experimental areas, Blue Note recorded the results. As the label continued to sign promising young talent, it inevitably recorded the new music as played by younger men such as pianist Andrew Hill, trombonist Grachan Moncur III, vibist Bobby Hutcherson and others. By 1966, however, Blue Note had signed such leaders of the movement as pianist Cecil Taylor and alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman. Coleman's first Blue Note releases, as already noted in this space, are excellent, but so far there are no releases by Taylor.

Three recent Blue Note albums are by musicians directly associated with the ensemble of Miles Davis. *Spring* (Blue Note 4216) is led by Davis's young drummer, Anthony Williams. *Speak No Evil* (4194) is by his current tenor saxophonist, Wayne Shorter. The pianist on both of those albums is Davis's man Herbie Hancock, and on *Maiden Voyage* (4195) Hancock leads the Davis rhythm section—former Davis saxophonist George Coleman, and trumpeter Freddie Hubbard.

But the question of sidemen does not end the matter, for a great deal of this

music stems directly and indirectly from the more experimental pieces in the Davis repertory of the past few years, pieces such as "Milestones" (on Columbia CL 1193), pieces like those on the enormously influential *Kind of Blue* LP (Columbia CL 1355) by Davis and featuring John Coltrane, and pieces like those contributed by Shorter and Williams to the more recent (and I think less successful) Davis recording *E.S.P.* (Columbia CL 2350). The familiarity of those Davis records, and the subsequent exploration that Coltrane, particularly, has given to some of their ideas, gives some of the music on these Blue Note LPs an air of *déjà entendu*.

For me, much of it also has the air of calculated experiment without complete artistic success. Wayne Shorter, for one, is clearly Davis's best saxophonist in many years and a dedicated musician, but—at least on records—he has never realized the talent and potential that are clearly implicit in almost everything he does. There is one particularly heartening moment on his LP, however, a slowballad called "Infant Eyes," which shows Shorter undertaking a mood that some young saxophonists seem almost afraid of.

There is a great deal to say about young Anthony Williams and I have said some of it in this space before. For now I will mention only that, while still



Anthony Williams—"astonishing resourcefulness and originality."

under twenty, he had an astonishing resourcefulness and originality on his cymbals that, in itself, should grant him leadership among jazz drummers. Freddie Hubbard is unquestionably a fine trumpet player, but the most encouraging thing about his performance here is the evidence, asserted most clearly on a piece called "Survival of the Fittest," that he has broken away from his influences and is forming, particularly in rhythm, a personal and truly contemporary trumpet style. Hancock is a skillful pianist, and in the past some of his recorded performances have been conceived with real daring, but I confess that for me the results are sometimes bland. Perhaps in him the "new thing" has found, if not its Ahmad Jamal, then its Billy Taylor.

By far the most interesting of the Blue Note releases under review is *Complete Communion* (4226) by Ornette Coleman's ex-partner, cornetist Don Cherry, with Argentinian Leandro Barbieri on tenor saxophone, Henry Grimes on bass, and Ed Blackwell on drums. The LP offers two long, four-part works, "Eliphantasy" and a more successful title piece, "Complete Communion."

Cherry has used his four instruments resourcefully and imaginatively. Each of the horns, as in Coleman's music, is allowed to interpret even a written passage so that in a "unison" ensemble the enunciation of a theme may be simultaneously varied. Cherry also uses counterpoint, written and improvised; he uses both the bass and the drums melodically, and the players respond marvelously. His themes and his improvised sections change tempo and flow logically one to the next; little phrases from each part of the work echo through the rest of it. The solos are frequent but relatively brief, and some of them do rush toward their climaxes a bit prematurely. But in "Complete Communion," Cherry, one of the prime movers on his instrument in contemporary jazz, has offered one of the new music's most interesting efforts at extended composition, a work of many delights, indicative, I hope, of more delights to come.

So far I have been speaking of recording from a label which has maintained its independence for over a quarter of a century. But it was recently announced that that independence has come to an end and that Blue Note has been bought by the expanding West Coast label, Liberty. Blue Note insists on its continuing autonomy in policy. One therefore can hope for the best, the best being that it does hang onto Coleman and Taylor and the others, and record them as they wish to be recorded. For, some day, the results will probably be among the established glories of the catalogue, just as those mid-Forties modern sessions are now.

—MARTIN WILLIAMS.