

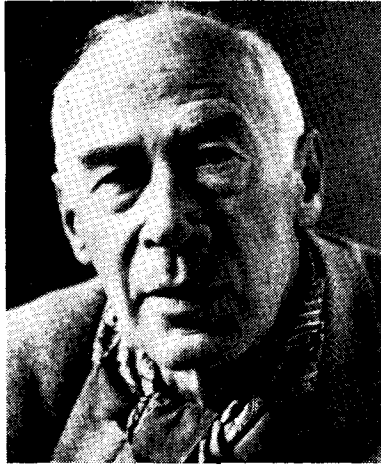
Creators in a Creative Society

By HENRI TEMIANKA



Britten

Miller



Schoenberg



Saroyan



I FIRST moved to Los Angeles sometime during 1943, after living in San Francisco since the outbreak of World War II. Los Angeles at that time had no freeways, no smog, no TV, no jets, no modern airport, no Disneyland, no Music Center, no giant electronics and space industries, and no civic pride. There were very few native Angelenos or even Californians. The standard joke described Los Angeles as "six suburbs in search of a city." What the joke revealed more than anything was the small thinking of the jokesters, none of whom seemed to realize that a megalopolis of 100 suburbs was about to explode right underneath their feet.

In that antediluvian Los Angeles of only two decades ago there lived many notable exiles, like Candide, quietly cultivating their little gardens and contemplating the vast cultural vacuum around them. They were *in* Los Angeles, but not *of* it. Otto Klemperer, the great German conductor, in his less poetic moments referred to Los Angeles as "a toilet in the desert." Like Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and a host of other musicians of varying degrees of eminence, he lived, or vegetated, in Los Angeles. Almost all were exiles from Hitlerism or war, drawn to the beatific somnolence, the eternal spring of Los Angeles, perhaps because of its very contrast with the cataclysm that had engulfed the world outside.

The sunbathed hills of the western suburbs, including Santa Monica and Pacific Palisades, were dotted with the homes of writers whose books had been burned in Germany: Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, Bruno Frank, Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, Emil Ludwig, and Heinrich Mann, the elder brother of Thomas. There was also an English colony that included such luminaries as Aldous Huxley, Charles Laughton, and Charles Chaplin. They were exiles of a different kind. And there were other cultural ambassadors in exile from a dozen countries, if not more: Bruno Walter from Vienna, the Spaniard José Iturbi, Artur Rubinstein from Po-

land, and a whole covey of Frenchmen spearheaded by Charles Boyer and Jean Renoir.

It is one of the bitter ironies of history that Los Angeles, only twenty years ago, had neither the necessary cohesion nor the sense of purpose to make creative use of the great minds who had come to seek shelter. If Los Angeles had any characteristic at all, it was its unlimited indifference and passive benevolence toward anything and anybody.

Schoenberg for a while taught at UCLA, but ceased to be useful on his sixty-fifth birthday, in accordance with time-honored academic usage. Heifetz, according to a story that was widely circulated at the time, wrote to UCLA expressing his interest in teaching there. In reply, he is said to have received a routine communication stating: "We regret to inform you that we have no vacancies in our music department at the present time."

Los Angeles did not have all the talent. There was Benjamin Britten in Escondido, Robinson Jeffers in Carmel, Henry Miller in Big Sur, Ernest Bloch in Berkeley, Darius Milhaud at Mills College in Oakland, Yehudi Menuhin in Los Gatos, Isaac Stern and Pierre Monteux in San Francisco.

OUR Los Angeles exile was the most delightful exile imaginable. Every Sunday, around 4 o'clock, we met either at Charles Laughton's house or ours. Laughton had only recently become interested in reading the Bible, Shakespeare, and Dickens, motivated in part by an almost obsessive fear that his fame as a movie star might not endure. There were gargantuan feasts of great literature, music, good fellowship, food and drink, and discussions that went on until 3 and 4 in the morning. Laughton, addicted to patched blue denims, sat cobbler-fashion in a big overstuffed chair, a martini in one hand and a book in the other. Or he might lie on the floor on his ample belly, or stand by the fire and toss off a few lines of gallant French verse. He also had the best Danish cook in town.

We played late Beethoven Quartets, occasionally joined by violinist Joseph Szigeti, who drove in from Palos Verdes, one of Los Angeles's more remote suburbs, but not as remote as his native Budapest. Thomas Mann and Feuchtwanger occasionally read from their manuscripts. Once, the dining table was

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pushed aside to make room for a dancing display by Paul Draper, who unexpectedly dropped in. And one Sunday afternoon at the Feuchtwangers, Charlie Chaplin held the floor explaining his concept of Hamlet.

We were living in a Shangri-La of our own making. And the Los Angeles of twenty years ago and its celebrated exiles have vanished like a mirage. Most of them are dead. A few, like Chaplin, bowed out during the McCarthy era. The indestructible Stravinsky is one of the few remaining landmarks of that bygone era.

Today, those who do not live in Los Angeles, and even those who do, have difficulty in understanding the difference between what is and what was; among other things, the fantastic growth and the curious split and distinction between the city and the county of Los Angeles. The latter includes the former, but there is a considerable amount of overlapping, intertwining, and rivalry. The county covers an incredible smorgasbord of formerly isolated communities—it would be more realistic to call it Greater Los Angeles. The creation of this monster has proceeded in reverse order. The communities came first, and the umbilical cord, in the form of the all-ensnaring freeways, came last.

AS a result of this revolutionary reversal of the normal biological procedure, it is hardly surprising that the inhabitants of Greater Los Angeles, or rather Los Angeles County, have no overwhelming sense of obligation or loyalty toward their habitat, particularly as so few of them are natives. The prevailing attitude is not "What can I do for my county?" but "What can my county do for me?" The results speak for themselves. The total anarchy of Los Angeles's previous "architecture" has been followed by an equally horrible conformity, imposed by the ruthless builders of communities of tract houses. The mechanized rape and onslaught by armies of bulldozers has laid bare the hills and the countryside, uprooting thousands of stately trees. No city I have ever seen has proportionately so few public parks and playgrounds. No civic master plan seems to be in effect other than the spawning of more freeways to enable more automobiles to produce more smog until the entire population will have to wear gas masks, or die.

The two decades since World War II have witnessed a revolution of cosmic proportions. Gone are the fears and beliefs embodied in the pithy limericks of the fainthearted Forties:

There was a young lady named Wild
Who managed to stay undefiled
By thinking of Jesus,
Contagious diseases,
And the danger of having a child.

Contagious diseases are now controlled by antibiotics; the prospect of pregnancy by the Pill; and confidence in the existence of a heavenly Pentagon has been badly shaken by both of these developments plus spatial exploration. But it is not merely confidence in the forces up there that has been shaken. The young people of California no longer seem to believe in the voices of the angels down here—the older angels, at any rate. A gaping chasm separates the old generation from the young. There are far more old people than young at concerts and plays. The Ford Foundation may subsidize the orchestras, but unless it also subsidizes the audience, the performers will survive the public.

Public concerts may well be a dying art form, in California as elsewhere. Statistics to the contrary notwithstanding, live bodies have to be dragged into concert halls by dint of energetic women's committees slugging away at the job, using perforce old-fashioned promotional methods which are no match for the verbal saturation bombing to which the motion picture industry has conditioned us. The fact that a few thousand faithful patrons, always the same, support and attend musical events from one end of the megalopolis to the other, only accentuates the total indifference of the millions.

In Los Angeles, the vast distances constitute a further impediment to the growth of cultural togetherness. The whole area having been turned into one huge autopia, virtually devoid of public transportation, the majority of potential playgoers and concertgoers choose TV and hi-fi over the hazards of driving, compounded by the desperate search for a parking lot that does not have the "FULL sign" out.

Governor Reagan has stated, literally, that he is not in the business of "subsidizing intellectual curiosity." I believe him. There are many people in California firmly committed to the plain, old-fashioned business philosophy that anything that cannot pay for itself should be allowed to die. By this yardstick, Mozart, Van Gogh, and Walt Whitman were bums; and the Vatican and St. Peter's could have been built only on condition that they bore the donors' names.

Although there are rumors to the contrary, culture in California is expendable. The British Arts Council, during the fiscal year 1966-67, subsidized the arts in Great Britain to the tune of \$20,160,000; the New York State Arts Commission in the same year provided its constituency \$1,504,477. The budget of the California Arts Commission, for what is now the most populous state in the Union, was about one-tenth of that of New York State, namely \$159,370. New York proposes to increase the budget of its

(Continued on page 96)



Steinbeck

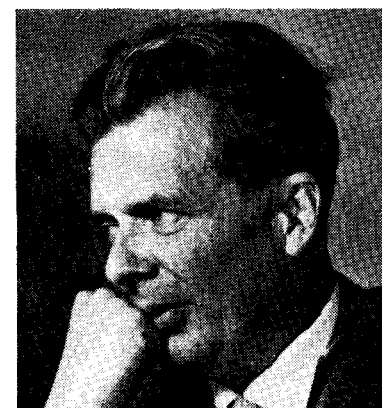
Stravinsky



Klemperer



Huxley



PENMEN OF THE GOLDEN WEST

1. Heritage of the Frontier

By JOHN K. HUTCHENS

AS EVERY California schoolboy doubtless knows, the first book published in English dealing entirely with that state was *The History of Upper and Lower California* (1839), by Alexander Forbes, a British trader in Mexico. At the risk of showing off, advanced members of that same obnoxious schoolboys' class could make their teacher happy by instantly recalling that belles-lettres in California got off the ground as early as 1787 with Francisco Palóu's *Life and Labors of the Venerable Father Junípero Serra*. The rest of us, though, being not as bright or full of useless information as all that, would probably guess that writing in California began with Bret Harte and Mark Twain.

And, as far as really memorable writing goes, we would be correct. At least, the last time I was in California I didn't hear the names of the worthy Forbes and the pious Palóu being bandied about much in literary conversation, whereas Harte and Mark Twain are living presences still.

So, for that matter, are Robert Louis Stevenson—although he was there as a

bird of passage—and Frank Norris, Jack London, Ambrose Bierce, and even George Sterling and Gertrude Atherton, the latter thanks chiefly to her somewhat cantankerous reminiscences. Indeed, it is one of San Francisco's most engaging aspects that, in and around that wonderful city, authors are visibly remembered. In Portsmouth Square a granite shaft reminds Stevensonians that their frail, brave favorite once sat and dreamed there. In Oakland, on whose waterfront the young London drank and brawled, is Jack London Square. A bench on Russian Hill carries Sterling's name; you don't have to write a Sterling sonnet to sit on it. Characters from Harte's stories stroll in bronze down the Post Street side of the Bohemian Club. Driving through the Mother Lode country you pass one old mining camp after another that is happy to associate itself with the Harte stories, *M'liss*, *Tennessee's Partner*, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*. And when you come to Angels' Camp in Calaveras County you find a whole town grateful to the peripatetic Missourian who holed up there one winter, made a jumping frog immortal, and in a matter of weeks was on the way to immortality himself.

Is it mere sentiment—or, as in the case of Angels' Camp, commerce—that keeps those names alive? Hardly. The last

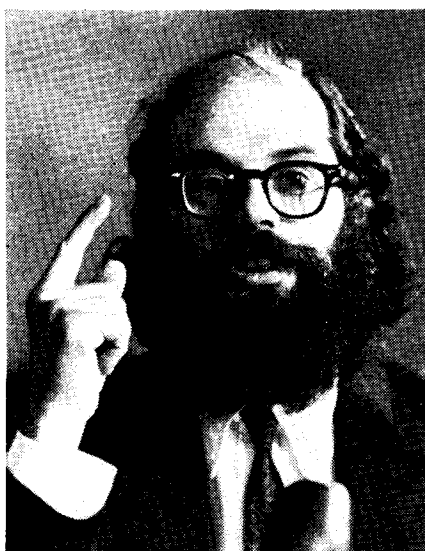
three years have brought new biographies of London, Bierce, and Harte, and a selection of London's letters. A dozen London titles are in *Paperbound Books in Print*, and in hardcover format half a dozen of his books are on the Macmillan backlist in New York, while a London publisher is issuing his works in a uniform series, an accolade reserved for writers who live beyond their time. He may be the most popular of all native California authors, as witness the 100,000 visitors who go annually to the Jack London State Historic Park in the Valley of the Moon. Not all of them, it is to be assumed, are moved only by curiosity. As for Mark Twain, he is, of course, timeless, and California can justly file a claim on him, for as a writer he approached maturity there—not without assistance from Bret Harte that he decently acknowledged, despite the bitterness that developed between them.

But that was to come later, and meanwhile one sees, looking back to the 1850s and 1860s, a literary life as vigorous as the enchanting, cosmopolitan city by the Golden Gate. Magazines of quality, the *Golden Era* and the *Californian*, flourished. In the *Overland Monthly*, Harte, its editor, persuaded himself to let his *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* appear, was pained by the derision it provoked locally, then rejoiced when Eastern approval informed him that he had struck it rich. Although academics today can scarcely bring themselves to



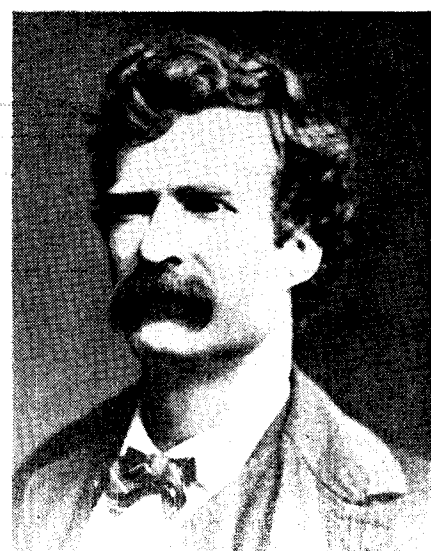
—Bettmann Archive.

Harte—living presence.



—Wide World.

Ginsberg—epoch starter.



—Bettmann Archive.

Twain—peripatetic Missourian.