

Inertia and Enterprise in San Francisco

By ALAN RICH

JOSEF KRIPS conducts the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra; Zubin Mehta conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Krips, Viennese-born, is a solid, capable, and unremarkable product of the tradition-oriented cultural patterns of *Mittel-Europa*; Mehta is dashing, exotic, bursting with an exuberant talent still raw in many respects, above all young. There are your antitheses, your opposing touchstones to align the states of cultural mentality that distinguish California's North from South.

San Francisco is the grand bastion of musical conservatism, the Boston of the West Coast. It is, perhaps, curious that it should occupy that position, considering its past as a rip-roarin' frontier town, and its present as a haven of *laissez-faire* where the beatnik (the term was coined by a *Chronicle* columnist) thrived in the 1950s and the "Hashbury" hippie moves relatively unmolested today. But the city's official musical institutions exist on another plane altogether, supported by an ingrained and long-established aristocracy that has long since learned to pick up its collective skirts and walk around any obstruction with magnificent unconcern.

This is a mixed blessing. The cultural climate in San Francisco and its surrounding metropolis is favorable for the growth of the area's major musical institutions. The Opera is certainly the country's best and most active star-system organization outside of the Metropolitan. The Symphony has been recon-

structed by Krips to the point where *qua* ensemble it can again take its place among the country's top ten. Another orchestra, across the Bay in Oakland, has also made remarkable strides in the past decade and is worth anyone's while. But as a city to take pride and attend to the growth of its contemporary, progressive musical elements, San Francisco's record is not at all good. It is still next to impossible for a local musician or composer (or poet, author, or painter) to make his mark on the national or international cultural scene while based in the Bay area. It isn't merely a matter of distance, because that is a trivial consideration these jet-age days. It is a matter of local inertia, of the failure of San Francisco's sponsors to care enough about the activity around them to provide a platform on which its own creative spirits can be seen and then sent into orbit.

In a sense, the San Francisco Opera



Zubin Mehta—"dashing, exotic, bursting with an exuberant talent. . . ."

Company does offer its patrons something mistakable for adventure. Its record over the years for presenting new singers is famous and impeccable; the likes of Sutherland, Tebaldi, Christoff, and more recently Lear and Collier, sang there long before operatic appearances in the East. Its repertory history is, similarly, studded with American premieres, including such prestigious scores as Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (murderously truncated) and Poulenc's *Les Dialogues des Carmélites*. Yet, aside from the disastrous *Blood Moon* of Norman Dello Joio (the first of the long, unhappy list of Ford-sponsored operas), it has given no American opera since World War II in its regular fall season. Nor is its record in regard to native singers any more impressive than the Met's. Like Rudolf Bing, impresario



Josef Krips—"solid, capable, and unremarkable. . . ."

Kurt Adler prefers to wait for Americans until they have safely proved themselves elsewhere. Only in its recent low-budget spring opera season has the company fared somewhat better in experimental repertory and casting, but lack of audience support has placed the future of this venture somewhat in doubt.

Enrique Jordà, countenanced without a yip from the press until the last minute, had produced a demoralized ensemble and a serious decay at the box office. Those few souls who cling to the belief that a symphony concert might be a stimulating experience have defected to Gerhard Samuel's Oakland Symphony, admittedly inferior to its older neighbor in performing personnel, but offering interesting repertory and exceptionally keen leadership. They also go to the smaller halls, or out to one of the several colleges in the area that provide continuing and stimulating musical fare: Stanford, the University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State, and Mills. One of the most interesting aspects of Bay Area musical life, in fact, is the role of the colleges; it is something that New Yorkers, for example, don't experience at all. All of the above-mentioned colleges have well-endowed concert series, so much so that they account for the major percentage of the big-name recitals in the area. They also do well with their own student musical forces. It was Stanford, for example, under the direction of its own conductor-professor, Sandor Salgo, which gave the first performance in the area of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. It was Berkeley



Gerhard Samuel—"interesting repertory and keen leadership. . . ."

Alan Rich, recently music critic of the *World Journal Tribune*, lived for years in the San Francisco area.

that produced operatic works by its own distinguished faculty composers, Roger Sessions and his brilliant pupil, Andrew Imbrie, when the chances of their music entering the San Francisco establishment was practically nil. (It still is nil.) It was at Mills, a women's college with a coeducational graduate department in composition (in deference to its reigning "star," Darius Milhaud), where electronic music and other contemporary far-out practices found their first congenial home in the region.

The campuses, then, provide much of the musical tingle in Bay Area life. Then, pinpointed here and there throughout the area there are other small, privately run enterprises that also work hard and well to fill in the gaps. The Composer's Forum, the local branch of the International Society of Contemporary Music, is exceptionally active throughout the year in offering the works by local composers that the major organizations overlook. Local performing talent, present in an abundance second only to New York's, can be heard in self-sponsored concerts at museums or in a long-running and extremely popular chamber-music series at a downtown bistro with the intriguing name of The Old Spaghetti Factory (which the building actually was at one time). The San Francisco Tape Center, one of the pioneering ventures not only in the production of electronic music but also in mixed-media concerts involving dance and light-color projections, has recently become absorbed by Mills College and continues its wildly adventuresome programming. These are the kinds of ventures that, in most cities, constitute the fringe around a central body of official music-making. In San Francisco, however, the relative lack of vitality at the core has made these fringe operations popular and valuable. They are well attended and, to the great credit of the press, are publicized and even reviewed.

All this has made the musical life in the Bay Area rich, varied, and helter-skelter. One cannot sample it, as in most Eastern cities, by concentrating on the major concert halls. One must be prepared to include in his beat not only the downtown areas—where he will find the San Francisco Symphony performing Beethoven and Schumann, or the Opera Company doing its usual high-level Verdi or its middle-distance novelties—but also a score of vitally important small centers of creativity strung out over a 50-mile radius. In this respect, of course, San Francisco's musical life is as decentralized as that in Los Angeles. But it surpasses Los Angeles by far in the range of its diversification, from the hardest of hard-core conservatism at the center to the persistence of the great old frontier spirit at the outer edges.

HOW GOES THE NEW MUSIC?

By LEONARD STEIN

ALWAYS a haven for great artists from beyond its borders (Schoenberg and Stravinsky were among its pioneers), the Golden State continues to attract prominent musicians from all over who may find, besides health and wealth, an atmosphere of freedom for experimentation and involvement in new activities. The presence and frequent visits of internationally renowned composers have produced an acute awareness of the central movements in music today and resulted, generally, in an absence of cliquishness and chauvinism which characterize many another region.

Performances of contemporary music are plentiful in universities and colleges; festivals (Aptos in the North, Ojai in the South) are very partial to new music;

Leonard Stein, of the Claremont Graduate School faculty, has long been active in the promotion of new music in California.

museums—particularly in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Pasadena—are actively engaged in modern music series; and occasional contributions of new works can even be expected from symphony and opera. Perhaps the most significant recent development in the field of contemporary music has taken place with the appearance of the publication, *Source*. Edited at Davis by Larry Austin and subtitled "music of the avant-garde," this magazine, containing both music and articles, succeeds in giving a clear picture of one of the very important contemporary movements, which reminds one of what that other California publication, *New Music Quarterly* (Henry Cowell, editor), accomplished forty years ago for what was then called the "ultra-modern" idiom. In a more traditional format, the University of California Press has now started to publish compositions by faculty composers of the university system. The first work to appear here has been a String Quartet by



—Columbia.

Igor Stravinsky in his Hollywood workroom—"California has always been a haven for great artists from beyond its borders."