

A New Music of Political Protest

Bassist Charlie Haden and pianist Ran Blake, two prominent members of the once-controversial avant-garde jazz scene, have concurrently released recordings that offer direction and vehicle for many of the jazz innovations of the early 1960s. They have channeled their efforts and talents into a new, instrumental form of political protest music.

Without riding the merry-go-round of semantics and values, suffice it to say that this music is not dependent upon its political connotations. But the fresh, passionate spirit of the music is a direct result of its inspiration: strong concern for humanity and anger in the face of the atrocities and inhuman conditions that politics have created or perpetuated throughout history.

Charlie Haden amassed a wide range of material and assembled a dozen of New York's leading jazz musicians for his *Liberation Music Orchestra* (Impulse AS-9183). The first side of this disc consists of six songs, welded together by arranger Carla Bley. Hans Eisler's "Song of the United Front" and three folk tunes from the Spanish Civil War of 1936 are beautifully encased by two brief Bley compositions. There are excellent solos from tenor saxophonist Gato Barbieri, guitarist Sam Brown, trombonist Roswell Rudd, trumpeter Don Cherry, and bassist Haden. But Miss Bley's distinctive writing is the major asset. Her voicings are amazing—wide yet rich, dissonant yet beautiful. She has the ability to fuse the contemporary and the traditional with due reverence to both. The orchestra executes these arrangements with empathetic expression and precision.

The second side contains five separate pieces, including a short Bley interlude, a passionate reading of "We Shall Overcome," and Charlie Haden's moving "Song for Che," which offers some fine improvisations from trumpeter Cherry, saxophonist Dewey Redman, and the composer.

The two masterpieces of the album are Ornette Coleman's "War Orphans" and Haden's "Circus '68-'69." "Orphans"

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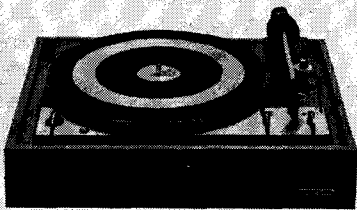
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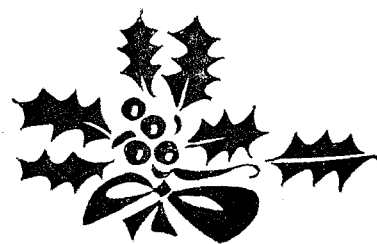
is Carla Bley's showcase. Her sensitive arrangement couples her own unique voicings and phrasing with the dark, rich, impressionistic style of Gil Evans's orchestrations. Miss Bley at the piano is the principal soloist, and her brilliant improvisation befits the mood and meaning of the piece.

"Circus '68-'69," which reveals the Ivesian aspect of Haden's musical mind, is a musical re-creation and interpretation of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The blindly joyful "Happy Days Are Here Again" and the insistent "You're a Grand Old Flag" are played against "We Shall Overcome," an organ dirge, and the angry cries of screaming horns. This is an awesomely penetrating piece of music.

Each component of Haden's music (i.e., the original concept, the material, the arranging, the ensemble work, and the improvisations) works extremely well. Excellent music and excellent commentary.

Ran Blake is of another musical breed. On *Blue Potato and Other Outrages* (Milestone MSP 9021), he works as a solo pianist, creating moods, using melody and texture as his principal tools. Harmonic progression and rhythmic pulse are irrelevant and often nonexistent in Blake's music.

But, if the pianist-composer is only a painter of moods, he is a master at his art. On this disc, he reworks several familiar pieces of music to give them relevance to the times. The lively standard "Chicago" is played with a grotesque and sinister twist on its nostalgic frivolity, eventually falling into dissonance as reality stamps out the American dream. Likewise "Never on Sunday" is attacked with the same violence that the junta used in its take-



over of Greece. The insipid "All or Nothing at All" becomes a revolutionary threat, as Blake states the theme with thick, strong tone clusters, then explores fragments of the melody, building tension all the time.

All the pain and tragedy of Billie Holiday's life are recalled in the pianist's mournful and ironic interpretation of her "God Bless the Child." Charles Mingus's "Fables of Faubus" and Max Roach's "Garvey's Ghost" are given meaningful performances.

This disc also contains some interesting Blake originals, including "Three Seeds," a suite of musical portraits of Roger Debray, Malcolm X, and Che Guevara. "The Blue Potato" has a childlike, burlesque flavor, revealing Blake's view of the policeman's mentality.

Political overtones play a more essential role in Blake's recording than in Haden's. Yet, it is an excellent, creative work by a unique innovator.

From a sociological point of view, jazz has usually been considered the American black man's protest music. With these two albums, a more explicit and more universal protest music has been introduced, which successfully weds avant-garde jazz with various traditional forms of music. The topical folk songs of Pete Seeger et al. have a new and admirable companion.

—MICHAEL CUSCUNA.

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—S.D.

The Cossums aren't trying to save the world. Just a little piece of it.

Lester Davis is a friendly, dark-eyed little boy whose smile can light up an entire room. But for most of his six years, he hasn't had much to smile about.

Lester lives in Laurel Creek, an Appalachian town of 200 people in a county with a per capita income of \$557 a year. Like most of the other people of Laurel Creek, Lester lives in a three-room weatherboard house, along with his mother and father and nine brothers and sisters. They have no well, and of course no inside plumbing. So Lester's mother, Tressie, carries all the family water up from the nearby creek.

Lester's father, Ray, used to work in the coal mines, but since the mines "played out" he's been unemployed. As Tressie admits, "It's awful hard going. We never could get us a good start before." They still wouldn't have a "start" if it weren't for the Cossum family.

Ed and Martha Cossum live in a suburban community of contemporary homes. Looking out back you can see one of those large, above-ground plastic swimming pools. And you can see the beginnings of a redwood deck around the pool, which Ed and his two children, Bill and Carol, are building themselves.

Ed is a systems analyst. He spends most of his day thinking about third generation computers. Fortunately, Ed and Martha also think about this generation of children living in Appalachia.

Through Save The Children Federation, the Cossums are helping Lester and his family. They contribute \$15 a month. Though it's not a lot of money, the Cossums could probably have done a lot of other things with it.

The Cossums' contribution will be made available to the Davises not as a gift, or charity; but as a loan. An interest-free loan which Lester's father can borrow to begin a self-help project.

Mr. Davis already has a project in mind. He plans to use the Cos-



sums' money to buy and feed two cows, then sell the calves as they come along. As Mr. Davis says, "A man likes to find ways to take care of his own family."

Already there is a new feeling of hope in the Davis family, and confidence and pride in their ability to help themselves.

That really is what Save The Children is all about. Although contributions are deductible as a charity, the aim is not merely to buy one child a new pair of overalls or a warm coat. Instead, your contribution is used to give people a little boost to start helping themselves.

Sponsors are desperately needed for other Appalachian children and American Indian children, as well as children in Korea, Vietnam, Latin America, Africa and Greece.

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The Cossums know they can't save the world for \$15 a month. Only a little piece of it. But maybe that is the way to save the world, if enough people care. How about you?

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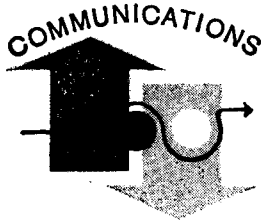
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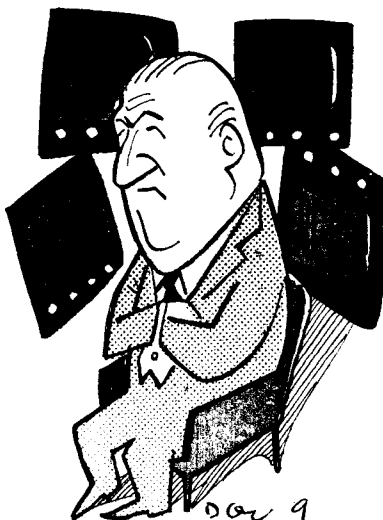
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The Mirror of the News and Big Brother

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Since last we communicated through this column, a perfectly amazing number of incidents have exploded in headlines having to do with the right of communicators to express themselves and, on the other hand, warnings by those in authority that press censorship is very much alive in this world. Most dramatic has been Vice President Agnew's controversial but long overdue case against monopoly press and monopoly broadcasting. But there have been others, too; so let's take them in the order in which they occurred.

First, a drastic new press law in Greece gives any editor convicted of inciting through print a prison term of five years to life. The trouble is, of course, that sedition, as the Greek junta defines it, is just about anything that disagrees with the ruling colonels, who have handed the Greek press a long list of forbidden subjects. Even a cartoon or small article believed to have relighted political controversy in Athens can now mean prison and a heavy fine, while a news story judged to jolt public confidence in the economy can bring an editor, or writer, a fine of \$3,000 and six months in jail. Restoration of democracy and freedom, not to say an unfettered press, is apparently as far from reality now as it was during the military coup of 1967 in the unhappy land that first spawned the idea of freedom of speech 2,500 years ago.

In Rome a few days later, the Vatican threatened to withdraw accreditation of any reporter showing an "incorrect attitude" toward Pope Paul VI, the Holy See, or the Roman Catholic Church. This threat against newsmen declares that credentials of all journalists covering the Vatican can be withdrawn by the "unchallengeable decision of Vatican authorities." Monsignor Fausto Vallainc, official spokesman for the Vatican and its chief press officer, says that a threat

to withhold accreditation applies only against those who "might use expressions contrary to the truth." It is perfectly obvious who shall decide what truth is, as is the case in Athens.

The third and most prominent attack on the right of a people to hear criticism against authority came, of course, from the Vice President, and the best thing we've read on this subject was written by Fred Friendly, the former CBS news boss and now a professor at the Pulitzer School at Columbia. We are printing Mr. Friendly's words in full in this month's Communications Supplement (see index). At the same time, Herbert Brucker, who also taught at Columbia as well as Stanford, recently having been editor of the *Hartford Courant* and once president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, says of Agnew's outburst: "This is just Big Brother wired for sound, and Big Brother has been around a long time. Kings and prime ministers and priests and potentates of all kinds have from the beginning sought to have only their word reach the public." Where history departs from the Vice President, Mr. Brucker says, and indeed from the President himself, is on the need of a system for reporting that is independent of government, and upon occasion hostile to it. That the administration has not read its American history, or its Constitution, any more than have the authoritarians in Rome or in Athens, is to belabor the point.

After Mr. Agnew's two speeches, James Reston wrote in *The New York Times*: "Watchful commentators from the beginning of the republic have tended to be critical of the party in power, and the greater the power of the Presidency, particularly the power to make war, the greater the skepticism and the harder the criticism." On the other hand, Mr. Agnew is dead right when he said that journalists tend to play up the unusual