

It was in MODERN MUSIC first, later in other mediums, that men like Sessions, Copland, Thomson showed us what music means in the life of musicians. Rosenfeld had used all his resources to make the American world

accessible to them. In the end they established their own communication in terms that were precise, personal to themselves, and with an effect which will surely prove more lasting in its influence.

Minna Lederman

### MUSIC OF OUR TIME, MUSIC OF OUR COUNTRY

THERE is one basic rule which the author of any omnibus of musical information ought to follow: Never pretend to know more than you really do. Two recent books, both of which contain – among many other things – extensive treatment of the contemporary scene, illustrate in opposed ways the force of this rule. John Tasker Howard's third and revised edition of *Our American Music* (Thomas Y. Crowell) provides an immeasurably useful work of permanent reference, because there is almost never reason to suspect that the author has lost control of his material; whatever is in the book is generally dependable and worth having on hand. Adolfo Salazar, on the other hand, in *Music in Our Time* (W. W. Norton) fails repeatedly to distinguish between fact and hypothesis, between literal statement and metaphor; consequently, despite flashes of brilliant insight into the procedures of certain composers, the book as a whole is one to be approached with suspicion and doubt.

As an encyclopedist of the work of American composers, Howard commands great admiration. He does not omit many names, and he has a gift for setting down in a small space

those facts likely to prove useful. The recent activities of some musicians, such as David Van Vactor and Eric DeLamarter, have quite escaped his notice. But all people of first-rate significance and all Easterners seem to be well and accurately handled.

The chief defect of *Our American Music* lies in the author's ambiguous attitude toward the composers whose achievement he chronicles. He does not seem to have decided whether he wants to take responsibility for personal critical views toward their music. David Diamond – to choose one of many so treated – a composer of challenging gifts, is represented only by the dry facts of his birthplace, study, prize-winning, and dates of performance or publication of a variety of works. Others, such as Leonard Bernstein, Samuel Barber and Gian-Carlo Menotti, are characterized by fragments of criticism quoted from the New York press. Still others, Copland and Harris among them, are subjected in greater or less degree to Howard's own opinions, which, it must be said, are never ungracious. On the whole, the purely statistical treatment is best, since both the quoted observations and Howard's own are so superficial as to be in-

conclusive. Despite the general air of detachment, the space allotted to different musicians shows plainly where Howard's heart lies. Copland receives slightly more than three pages, Schuman and Barber about two each. Ethelbert Nevin is spread, *con amore*, over four and a half pages, even to details of the music performed at his funeral.

The portion of Salazar's book devoted to American music is a supplementary chapter, written since the publication of the original Spanish text of the rest of the volume. Admitting that his first-hand acquaintance with the music of the United States is limited, and giving passing credit to Howard's book, he deals with the principal American composers in short paragraphs not unlike Howard's, maintaining an agreeable attitude toward everybody. The tone of these afterthoughts presents a great contrast to the rest of the book, which is windy, pretentious and frequently irritating because of the cosmic scope of the views it presents. The passages about Arnold Schönberg, which are extraordinarily well balanced, sound and intelligible, and about Igor Stravinsky, which contain some technical analyses that are both penetrating and correct, provide a suggestion of a true musicianliness which Salazar buries elsewhere under a deep stratum of pseudo-philosophical generalities.

*Music in Our Time* is subtitled *Trends in Music since the Romantic Era*. Salazar endeavors to establish certain absolutes, or universals, which he claims may be found in operation in the nineteenth century. The music of the twentieth is then sorted out,

in complex fashion, and the appropriate labels are attached to the works of each composer. At best this method leads to the invention of unattractive terms like "poematic symphony;" at worst it leads to the sort of confusion I am now in because I cannot remember whether Schönberg's harmony is "functional" and Stravinsky's "non-functional," or vice versa.

Salazar habitually attributes very specific effects to very general causes. He is an addict of the philosophic assumption, so difficult if not really impossible to prove, that all art is the product of the social forces operative at the time of its creation. For one who is so ready to assume that music is caused, in some direct sense, by social forces and not by the special operation of each composer at work on each specific composition, many other loose definitions of causality are equally possible. Form, for example, is something which exists before a composer comes along and uses it; and emotion is something which always stands ready to do battle with form, to see which secures the supremacy in a given piece of music. "Symphonism" is a frame of mind which a composer either has or has not; César Franck was under the sway of symphonism even when he wrote his violin sonata. Richard Strauss, on the other hand, is the pawn of "poematicism."

It is this constant love of the grandiose, which rapidly also becomes the unintelligible, that makes the main bulk of Salazar's book so infinitely irritating. He is at his best when he violates his own tenets sufficiently to descend to fairly explicit technical analysis of particular works,

although he frequently hides the merits of this analysis behind a thick screen of words. He also does not hesitate to deal with composers whose music he obviously does not know well or extensively – most notably, perhaps, the British. And how can anyone acquainted with Debussy's *La Mer* speak of it as a work in four movements!

Editorially the book is not up to Norton standards. There are other

mistakes of pure fact. The numerous titles are subject to no rule of consistency in the presence or absence of italics or quotation marks. Some are given in their original languages, others translated, sometimes oddly, into English, and still others are incomplete or inaccurate in any language. This could perhaps be forgiven if only the book were intelligible a larger share of the time.

Cecil M. Smith

### POCKET-SIZE HISTORY

THE shocking thing about *You and Music* by Christian Darn-ton (Penguin Books) is not that it is a bad book, but that it is a pocket-book and can be bought for a quarter. If it cost ten dollars and weighed ten pounds, its potential for harm might be less. As it is, some innocent "music lover" may pick it up with a package of cigarettes at the corner.

In organizing the book, Darnton has achieved a masterpiece of disorder. "To write about music intelligibly and intelligently is difficult," he observes in his preface; but having faced the problem, he fails to come to grips with it. Writing "primarily for those who like music sufficiently to go to listen to it occasionally," he begins by "first considering not what music is, but what it is not." This topsy-turvy notion of how to make things clear affects the whole book; everything is backwards. Our music lover reaches Chapter V – "Occasions for Music" – after plodding through a fifty-page digest of Forsyth's *Orchestration*. Chapter VII – "The Genesis of Music" – whisks him in reverse

through music's history and deposits him with Léonin and Pérotin in the roles of Adam and Eve. Their "two lovely songs," writes Professor Darn-ton, "must suffice for the earliest known Art-music," glibly and categorically misstating the facts.

As a composer at work on his third symphony, Darnton is a member in good standing of his profession. But this is an amateur's book. One feels, that the faults in scholarship are worn with some of the pride that an English gentleman takes in not being too impeccably dressed; that the careless blending of fact and personal prejudice is the expression of a kind of sporting attitude rather than the result of a deliberate desire to mislead. In writing this kind of a handbook, Darnton has been undoubtedly misguided; but in presenting it to a large public, the publishers are guilty of irresponsibility and negligence.

The same publishers have, however, discharged their public duty with high competence by bringing out a compendium in the same format, *British Music of Our Time*, edited