SCORES AND RECORDS

By ARTHUR BERGER

RECENT issues of printed and recorded music include three works of Samuel Barber that span a decade of his career and reflect a striking regeneration. Barber is one of the rare native composers whose initiation into their profession has been as thorough, undeviating and early-in-life as the average baptism in the Catholic Church. More like composers abroad, he suffered few of the vicissitudes of a tangential approach, few of the inhibitions of our young men in search of the perfect style. The impressive result has been a very natural musical orientation. At the same time, Barber complacently accepts what may be called the conservatory style – the big noise, the fragmentary motive blown up and overworked, the uninstigated climax – all of these to be found in the *First Symphony* (Columbia), which opens like the score to a Class B thriller. Bruno Walter, in preparing the recording with the New York Philharmonic could, I imagine, have applied much the same methods that he would to a work of the repertory from Schumann to Strauss, his specialty. And yet Barber gives us passages in the scherzo section that follow their own interesting course; and a sustained, affecting line opens the slow part.

In the *Second Essay* for orchestra (Schirmer), composed some years later, we notice similar musicianly details less grandiloquently projected. But not until the recent *Capricorn Concerto* does Barber adjust to a really contemporary critical attitude. The chordal and instrumental sonorities are now more selective, the treatment is more compact. Barber realizes at last that the later nineteenth century models – those he formerly held so dear – are inspired not always because of their formal and textural devices, but often in spite of them. The avant garde opened its arms to Barber when his *Second Symphony*, as yet unpublished, was introduced. But the turbulent "modernism" of this work is of an order that began to date and exhaust itself in the early thirties. The *Concerto's* idiom is more valid and malleable. Its Brandenburgian last movement gets away from slavery to a nuclear motive and spins more exciting lines, with an asymmetry and attention to rhythmic interest that recall the later Stravinsky. The score does not, by nature, aim for absorbing developments, but it makes us look forward to what Barber will do next.

Another native composer represented on both printed and recorded lists is Virgil Thomson. The *Five Portraits* (Columbia) are in his most persuasive vein. A very agreeable quality, that may be tentatively characterized as a purified pathos (the *katharsis* of the tragic theatre), lingers on in one's consciousness after the *Cantabile* for strings and the *Tango Lullaby* have run their placid course.

Some people think of Shostakovitch as sole proprietor of drawn-out, angelic passages for strings. Ironic surprise has been expressed in certain quarters that Thomson should venture so close to enemy territory. But this reaction is just another reminder that Satie is tragically forgotten these days, for the *Cantabile,* with its elegant texture and sensitivity, has some affinity to *Socrate,* but none to Shostakovitch. Thomson, conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra, paces his portrait of Chatelain so that happily now it does not seem so long as when he conducted it in concert. The fast movements have wit and orchestral ingenuity.

Thomson's *Second String Quartet* (Arrow Press), will disturb some people's concept of "modern" music. The piece is not neo-classic in the current manner that applies pan-diatonism and rhythmic variety to lasting classical principles. Nor is it merely academic, an exercise in past methods. Its position is a fascinating, if perplexing, in-between one. In his string writing Thomson grasps the early Viennese idea of alternating homophony and counterpoint, and he understands keenly the irony and the tensions of rococo music, with one of its essential devices: the rapid succession of ideas with no waste of time in transit. A thirteenth-chord, horizontally outlined by the main theme, later engenders still more protracted serial orders based on thirds strung together, and these give the work away as contemporary. There is some dissonance, too, but happily not the deliberately out-of-focus kind that Thomson sometimes delights in.

Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* (Columbia) is not quite the work to hear in the intimacy of a sitting room. Removed from the Eisenstein movie and transformed into a cantata, the music requires a public square. Through sheer size and the eloquence of its message, this is a massive work, but its reliance on folklike material makes for over-simplification. The most striking section remains *The Battle on the Ice,* with its strings col legno and up-bow. There are inspired flashes of well-spaced, freshly orchestrated chords – as at the opening – that remind us Prokofiev is the composer. Though some passages suggest high school anthems, at least there are none of the crudities of other recent Soviet works. Honesty replaces the pose that is likely to invest music of such epic intentions.

The excerpts from Milhaud's *Protée* contained in the *Second Suite* (Victor), and the short orchestral synthesis of Copland's *Our Town* music (Boosey and Hawkes), also raise problems when heard out of their original context. Both are of undeniable consequence. Yet Milhaud's ostinati, his bucolic mood painting extended through two successive movements, and his passages of unrelieved fury elsewhere, all require some further adjunct which the Claudel play must have provided. Copland's serene music, lovely as it is, cries out for incisive contrast. Either *Our Town* or the *Pastorale* from *Protée* is, however, precisely what one wants if one is in the mood for something relaxing, and each is a distinct asset to any program.

If my reservations with regard to such excerpts seem strong, it may be due to the cumulative effect of the

number of recent sets of them, and to the absence of any that is completely self-sufficient. Copland's *Appalachian Spring* (Boosey and Hawkes), for example, has extraordinarily vibrant material, and a fruitful use of scales and arpeggiated figures averts the open spaces of some of his earlier music. I might, however, appreciate it more if *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo* did not already exist in concert suites which, despite all their marked outer differences, have certain common procedures and a squareness and repetitiveness appropriate to the Americana subject matter. Yet *Appalachian Spring,* like its predecessors, is superb theatre music and an outstanding concert piece.

Norman Dello Joio's music for *On Stage,* though much of it is pleasant, appears quite bland in a piano suite of excerpts (Schirmer). Possibly there was not enough strain behind it. Some of the innocuous harmonic progressions also occur in his piano piece, *Prelude: to a Young Musician* (Schirmer). In these recent works Dello Joio has, however, cleaned up his harmonic textures and made them more luminous.

In passing from theatre music to Leonard Bernstein's *Jeremiah* symphony (Victor), one scarcely seems to step out of the dramatic realm. The work is almost sheer attitude, and the first movement appears particularly inflated because its grand mood has little melodic invention of consequence to get a grip on. But enough has been written about *Jeremiah;* it is no more than an index of a facile young musical talent, with exceptional capacity to absorb. He shows a shrewd awareness of how a composition should sound within the limitations of the idiom requisitioned. Above all the piece is expertly orchestrated and Bernstein, as composer-conductor, sees to it that this aspect is fully revealed, though the recording mechanics get in his way a few times.

In Schönberg's *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* (Schirmer) there is, I suppose, more justness in an atmospheric approach. Bernstein has a sung text only in the last movement, but the *Ode* has recited words throughout. Schönberg, by indicating rhythms and intervals on a one-line staff, achieves an unctuousness that could possibly be unfairly pinned on the reciter. Were it not for this schoolboy manner of modulating the voice – one that may be more idiomatic in German – and were the Byron poem more than a pièce d'occasion, there might possibly have been some pleasure in perceiving the words through Schönberg's halo of wistful and elusive music.

The neatness and finely etched quality of Hindemith's manuscript may inspire admiration, but reduced to a miniature score the autograph of his *Symphonic Metamorphosis* on themes of Weber (Associated) is hard on the eyes. In this work, agreeable enough, the themes are put through a now familiar routine, with results neither as striking as those Hindemith can produce at times nor as academic as other of his passages. A warmer and more personal Hindemith emerges from the single Victor disc of *Six Chansons* for mixed voices a cappella on Rilke texts, Robert Shaw conducting. The last song, with imitated instrumental effects and shifting rhythms against a beautifully sustained

soprano line, is probably the most inspired of the set.

In such recent chamber music publications as Elliott Carter's *Pastoral* for piano and either viola, clarinet or English horn (New Music), Lukas Foss's *Early Song* and *Dedication* for violin and piano (Hargail) and Milhaud's *Bal Martiniquais* for two pianos (Delkas), there are refreshing qualities of distinction and invention. In the Milhaud I prefer *the Chanson Créole* to the *Biguine* . . . Villa-Lobos' *Fifth Bachianas Brasileiras* (Columbia, Bidu Sayao, soloist) becomes cloying after a rehearing. His *Seréstas* (Columbia, sung by Jennie Tourel) are more interesting, despite all their limitations as color music.

A thick piano score of Benjamin Britten's much discussed opera, *Peter Grimes* (Boosey and Hawkes), has arrived too near publication time for me to do justice to such a large-scale and ambitious undertaking. It seems to show some sense of theatre, but extended comment will have to await a later issue.

WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

DARK MEADOW presents Martha Graham in a flood tide of energy. Her physical presence is unimpaired, her will absolute. Watching her we hear Chavez' strings and woodwinds as sounds far away, dissociated. The dance makes no concessions. It is large, tyrannical and uninhibited – arbitrary in the way it suggests what she has done before, provocative in the way that it is different.

It is different chiefly in the animation of her young people. *Dark Meadow* appears to be a fertility rite and like *Primitive Mysteries* and *El Penitente* evokes the American Indian. But now Graham's fancy spans the ocean and we are at the same time in Indonesia. The girls in flowery hair-dos and swathed skirts with bare midriffs are dainty and regal. Their handclaps beat out a sharp tattoo, they trip lightly in darting turns or, half-squat like idols, open and shut their bent knees and sweep their arms up in bird-like arcs. The young men court the girls, they rush them in flying lifts. And the girls look charming. Gone is the defiant forward thrust of the pelvis, the threatening heel-toe of Graham's early monolithic groups. The corps now is a living entity.

In this enlivened setting, Graham still moves alone, mysterious and withdrawn. Her aloneness is, in any work, exactly as in *Salem Shore,* the central drama. She has girl friends in *Appalachian Spring* and a matriarchal neighbor, and she gets married, but the climax is a long solitary dance of ecstasy. In physical contact with other dancers she is never arrogant, always benign. But her soloists tend in general to spin off in unrelated movements. Hawkins, the "one who summons" in *Dark Meadow,* is an isolated figure, stamping out a