

## THROUGH MY CALIFORNIA WINDOW

DARIUS MILHAUD

I HAVE always liked young musicians. I have always tried to understand them, to discuss their ideas and enjoy their confidence. To be a young composer means to face a difficult life, in which courage and indomitable will to work are essential to keep one from compromise.

I should like to be able to study the young American composers, I mean the younger generation. But this country is so large that it is difficult even to imagine all the creative activity of the forty-eight states of the Republic. I know that around each school, each university, each college, in all the broadcasters' music departments, you will find young students, young instructors writing music, and I wish I could know all this music from which the America of tomorrow will rise. But I live on the campus of Mills College in the Bay region of San Francisco, and so that experience is impossible.

During the past four years, however, I have had the opportunity of examining a good many scores by young students in my classes, or by young composers coming for a visit to this wonderful part of the country who have been kind enough to show me their music. I shall therefore limit this little study to the musicians I have seen coming past my California window.

I will begin with those who worked with me. I know them better, having been able to follow their evolution in composition. When I arrived in Mills College, I met three, two who were teaching there, Arthur Berger, and Charles Jones, and the third who was a graduate student and became my assistant, Jean Middleton.

Arthur Berger is an attractive personality. His interest is not confined to music only. He has a subtle and sophisticated way of discussing literature or painting. He is well read and the poets, from the Elizabethans to the latest surrealists, have no secrets from him. He loves pictures. Abstract art attracts him, and he devoted several years to French painting when he studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. In music, he is very difficult to please. Stravinsky is probably the only composer who (save for the Bach



of the *Matthäus Passion*) satisfies him. He was writing a thesis on Stravinsky, and I hope it is finished now because it is certainly a work done with the most minute science and a great love. You can feel this love in Berger's music, which derives directly from the recent Stravinskian esthetic. His sharp intelligence makes him a remarkable critic, but being a writer, a critic, has not prevented him from being a composer. His woodwind quartet is well achieved, with a loving attention to minute detail which is his best quality. This may prevent him from conceiving large and great works, especially if his critical sense restrains him from yielding to the lyrical mood which he seems to fear. He is an excellent reader at the piano. His wife Esther sings with charm, and a visit with them is an assurance of delightful hours well spent.

Charles Jones lives near Piedmont in California. He likes to play the violin and the viola, and is particularly gifted as a conductor. He teaches at Mills College, to which he came directly from Juilliard School after his graduation. From a childhood and youth spent in Canada, he still retains a kind of British manner, though he denies this vigorously. He likes solitude, and he also likes violins; he has a wonderful Guaragnini and follows the Stradivarius market with passion. He also likes books on violins and reproductions of manuscripts of masterpieces, a taste which he shares with his charming young wife, Sally Pickerel. You will find them often studying photostats, he of a Bach cantata, and she of a Shakespeare first edition, or a Blake, in facsimile, with enchanting drawings. Jones' talent has grown, like Berger's, under the shadow of Stravinsky. It is interesting to see that while Shostakovich has played so large a part in recent American musical life, it is Stravinsky's influence that remains most powerful over the young composers. Jones has written a symphony, a suite for orchestra, a sonatine for piano and violin (performed at the I.S.C.M. in 1942) a *danse divertimento*, with women's chorus called *Down with Drink* based on temperance hymns, which was given several times by the dance group of Mills College, to choreography of Marian Van Tuyl. His recent *Victory Overture* was presented last November by the Janssen orchestra in Los Angeles. Jones now plans a school opera based on the life of Emily Dickinson, on a libretto written by his wife.

The third composer I met on my arrival was Jean Middleton. He had just acquired his master's degree. After doing graduate work with me, he went back to the Juilliard School, then returned again with a symphony full of fantasy and musical qualities. Now he has joined the merchant marine.





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Drawn January, 1944 by  
MARION CLAUDEL



During the years at Mills he wrote a piano sonata and a sonatine for clarinet and piano (performed at a League of Composers concert). He studied in Budapest with Bela Bartok and is a good pianist. He likes nature and his hobby is gardening.

## III

Among the young Californians I should like to mention Emanuel Leplin, Howard Brubeck, Leland Smith, Warren Anderson and John Ward. Leplin came from San Francisco to Paris in 1936 and studied there until the war – how to conduct an orchestra with Pierre Monteux, violin with Yvonne Astruc, and composition with me. After I settled down in the neighborhood of San Francisco in 1940, Leplin became a "Mills Boy." Mills College is for women, but men are admitted for independent studies or graduate work in the music department. Leplin has a temperament that is dramatic and romantic, a little in Honegger's mood. He writes prolifically, orchestra pieces, chamber music, in any form. He is a gifted conductor and has led one of his symphonic works at the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. For a production of the *Iphigenia* of Euripides he wrote a strong and impressive piece of stage music. He likes to play quartets and he was a violist in the San Francisco Symphonic Orchestra. Until the day he joined the Army, his entire life was centered on music.

Howard Brubeck was born in Concord, California in 1916, and he still lives there quietly. He studied five years in Mills College. After having been church organist and choir director, he is now music instructor at Concord's Mount Diablo High School, where he also conducts the school orchestra. His music has a peaceful happiness, a rather strong and deep expression that is the absolute reflection of Brubeck's mind. He has written a cantata, *Alleluia*, for orchestra and chorus, music for a Christmas play, *He Still Lives*, a *Californian Suite* and a *Latin Dance Suite*, both for orchestra.

Leland Smith came to me as an "enfant prodigue" or "enfant terrible" when he was fifteen years old. The difficulty has been to give him a solid classical base. I may have had him suffer on Bach chorales but, although his young enthusiasm leads him to write a music of unrestrained freeness, he has studied very seriously for three years and interrupted his work only to join the Navy. I have great confidence in young Smith because he has qualities of imagination and fantasy. He has written two piano pieces, a work for piano and orchestra, two string quartets, and a concerto for string quartet and orchestra. He has poetical gifts, freshness, youthful vivacity, and an ingenuity, that are reminiscent of Mowgli in Kipling's *Jungle Book*.



Leland Smith likes to learn different instruments and plays a little piano, clarinet, bassoon and saxophone. Warren Andersen, now also in the Navy and already overseas, showed me a symphony before he left which impressed me by its lyrical texture. Perhaps it is too rhapsodic, too elaborate but it has an indisputable rhythmic line. John Ward is an exception in this part of America. He lives in a dream state, somewhere between the Renaissance and Eric Satie. That gives to his music a flavor of purity and simplicity from which we may expect very good results.

During the summer session of 1941 I had the pleasure of meeting several young musicians who came to my classes from different parts of the country. Donald Fuller, young composer and critic for MODERN MUSIC was one. In his music there is acute intelligence, a penetrating critical sense, a sensitive shyness. He writes slowly, with great care. His *Trio* for piano and wind instruments, played at a League of Composers concert and at the I.S.C.M. festival, is a delicate and subtle work; his symphony and his two-piano ballet, which were unfinished the last time we met in New York, are full of interesting possibilities. He interrupted his musical life to do war work.

Dr. Everett Helm, born in 1913 in Minneapolis, came here as visiting lecturer in the summer of 1942 and studied composition with me. He is a very accomplished scholar, who has worked at Harvard with Archibald Davison, Walter Piston, Hugo Leichtentritt, and in New York with Roger Sessions. For three years he lived in France, Italy, Austria, England. He studied composition with Francesco Malipiero and Vaughan Williams, and worked in musicology under the guidance of Alfred Einstein. He taught in the Longy School of Music in Cambridge and is now at the head of the department of music in Western College, Oxford, Ohio, where he is also organist and conductor of the choir. Helm can scarcely be dissociated from his wife Helen, who has a voice like a nightingale. They are always trying to sing madrigals, and when they are with a third person, like bridge players, they try to find a fourth so that they can begin to sing Renaissance music. On the Mills campus the Helms met the charming piano team, Virginia Morley and Livingston Gearhart (a very gifted composer but too, too modest and of an exquisite sensitivity). The Helms, of course, made the two pianists sing, and so during the night people were frequently awakened by the aubades and serenades this unexpected vocal quartet sang under the windows of the campus inhabitants. All the beautiful repertoire of sixteenth century music is felt in Helm's music. His knowledge, his back-



ground, give him a certainty, a seriousness which is the best part of his personality. Sometimes he tries to write humorous and sophisticated ironical music, but that is, I am sure, a kind of divertimento, in which he is not so much at ease as when expressing his love for solid and deep music. He has written a sonata for violin and piano, a piano sonata, a string quartet, a suite for viola da gamba and harpsichord motets in eight parts, carols for mixed voices. His choral music is particularly interesting. The most important achievement so far is a *Requiem-1942* for chorus and orchestra.

I must also mention Russel Harris, now teaching in Texas, a pupil of Ernst Krenek, interested in the twelve-tone system; Robert Johnson from Omaha, composer of a lyrical composition based on a text by Archibald MacLeish, and Grace Schnek, from Chicago who wrote an interesting *Suite for String Quartet*. She also plays the bassoon rather well.

Among my Mills girl students are some with great possibilities but not enough experience and a too short list of works written so far. I hope later on to tell you more about their genuine gifts, their charming sensitivity. Among them, however, are two already worthy of mention: Francean Campbell, from Toronto, has written a very interesting *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, fresh and clear. She played it this summer with the Oakland Symphony. Mary Innes, who studied at Queens College with Carol Rathaus, has a very dramatic, tormented musical nature. She has written a *Cantata* for a chamber music group and a *Trio for Piano, Violin and Viola*. She is a fervent Catholic and is now working on a *Mass* for chorus and orchestra in which she hopes to express the ardor of her faith.

### III

I want now to mention the young composers either living in this region or who have come here as visitors. My colleague Charles Cushing, associate professor of music at the University of California, is one of the most interesting characters here. He spent two years in Paris (1929-31) studying with Nadia Boulanger and then traveled extensively all over Europe. He has written many songs and piano pieces, two string quartets, two sonatas for piano and violin. His music is of an extreme sincerity, deep and strong as in the *Psalm XCVII* for chorus and band, and full of charm and elegance as in the *Eclogue* for two clarinets and bassoon. He is a great authority on contemporary music and has an important collection of modern scores and books that every musician likes to consult. He also conducts the band of the University of California, and has made a great number of transcriptions for this kind of ensemble of Bach, Berlitz, Liadov, Ravel.



I have been very attracted by the works of Ellis Kohs, born in Chicago in 1916, who grew up in San Mateo, California, and later studied at the San Francisco Conservatory, the Institute of Musical Art in New York, the University of Chicago and at Harvard. Walter Piston, Olga Samaroff, Bernard Wagnenaar, and Karl Bricken have been his teachers, and he himself has been a member of the faculty of Wisconsin. He has written a sonatine for piano, a string quartet and, since he joined the Army in 1941, an orchestral work entitled *Life with Uncle Sam*. His *Concerto for Orchestra* played during the I. S. C. M. festival in Berkeley in 1942 is a remarkable work which suggests the Albert Roussel tradition. It is full of life and health and its structure has strength.

When Roger Sessions came to teach here at the summer session of the University of California, a young composer, Edward Cone, came to study with him. He had some very interesting music for orchestra and chamber music, but I saw him rarely. However, I should like to know his works better, a wish I also entertain about the music of William Bergsma who lives in Rochester but who comes often to the Pacific coast to visit his mother. I remember his very attractive ballet. Young Denke who works at the NBC in San Francisco has shown me a symphony and a piano concerto, but I prefer his experiments with the jazz idiom in which he is quite at ease and which he uses in an elegant manner.

Well ! this is a long list ! As Erik Satie said: "It is wonderful to give credit to youth." Vive la jeunesse !