

patterns of the natural world can be mechanically translated from one to the other by the use of geometry or numbers. When this conception is carried to even greater lengths in the belief that music will stimulate reactions if it follows the graphic projection of geometric patterns of "mechanical and bio-mechanical trajectories," one can only feel that the

whole idea is arbitrary in the extreme. It comes from a Pythagoreanism that is quite out of place as a primary consideration in art music. Wherever this system has been successfully used, it has been by composers who were already well-trained enough to distinguish the musical results from the non-musical ones.

*Elliott Carter*

### MUSICAL FAMILY ALBUM

THE purpose of any anthology like *Letters of Composers* (compiled and edited by Gertrude Norman and Miriam Lubell Shrifte; Knopf, 1946) eludes this reviewer. Fifty years ago its title would have been "Gems from . . ." or "Flowers Gathered . . ." But this is a scholarly age, and the book is decorated with dates, footnotes, sources, index of names and titles. Such paraphernalia tempt one to comparisons that are interesting but may be misleading. Compare for instance the first letter in the book, from Sweelinck to the Burgomasters of Amsterdam, with the last, from David Diamond; the formal periods of seventeenth-century prose with the relaxed informality of the twentieth; Sweelinck's classical definition of music as a divine creation with Diamond's self-consciousness at being asked to discuss his art; the security of Sweelinck's official civic position with Diamond's anxiety for a fellowship, his gratitude for a fifty-dollar loan. This sort of contrast is dangerous only when one tries to draw too many conclusions from the casual evidence of selected personal documents, to substitute these for thorough research in historical fact and the music itself.

The book is really most like an al-

bum of the musical family. Monteverdi has his page, and so do many of our contemporaries, like Schönberg, Prokofiev, Piston, Thomson, Cowell, Copland, Moore. Clementi, boasting that he has driven a hard bargain with Beethoven, is caught in an unflattering pose. Chopin stands in a group of elegant whitegloved aristocrats, gay but a little apart as an artist should be. Schumann's letter from a mental hospital to his wife Clara is a heartbreaking glimpse of helplessness. Many of the letters disclose the authors in official garb; composers appraise a work submitted for their opinion, answer questions on theoretical or philosophical matters. Others show them at the worktable, consulting with librettists, conductors, fellow composers. And in many the composer pushes his scores aside, pours out to a friend his financial worries, his hopes and aspirations, his problems of sickness, timidity, frustration.

Probably all anthologies should fit into a pocket or a knapsack. This volume is much too big and heavy for that. But it needs to be read at leisure and intermittently. Every letter is a point of departure for reflection on the problems of music and the men who make it.

*Frani Muser*