

Records

by Robert R. Reilly

Bohuslav Martinů's music is undergoing a recording renaissance, thanks mainly to Supraphon, the Czech record company whose discs are generally available in the larger classical outlets in major American cities. Supraphon has recently issued a newly recorded set of Martinů's six symphonies (played by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under conductor Václav Neumann). RCA Gold Seal has also reissued a performance of the Symphony No. 6 conducted by Charles Munch, for whom it was written, and Louisville Records has issued a new recording of Martinů's "Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra."

Martinů, who lived from 1890 to 1959, mostly in France and America, composed prolifically and in a style inimitably his own. Record-jacket blurbs speak of the influence of Debussy and others, but his "sound" is unmistakable. He composed over 300 works, an astounding output for an artist in an age stricken by the paralysis of the 12-tone crisis. But Martinů went his own way, immune to the agonies of those who had convinced themselves that tonality had been exhausted. The only composer of whom Martinů is vaguely redolent is his countryman and predecessor, Janáček. Like Janáček, Martinů was not a "movement" composer. He did not seem to develop from any particular stream of music, nor did his music lead to any "school." Martinů's impulse was genuinely musical. This may seem a strange thing to have to say of a composer, but those who have suffered through their share of modern academic "music," inspired by decidedly unmusical theories, will welcome the news.

As one might expect, Martinů did not write over 300 masterpieces. If

*Mr. Reilly is a special assistant at the International Communication Agency in Washington, D.C.*

Bach may sometimes sound, in Colette's phrase, like a "celestial sewing machine." Martinů occasionally sounds like a terrestrial one. This is not due to a heavy reliance on counterpoint or fugal devices, but to a general sense of mechanical bustle that pervades most of his compositions. His music often proceeds as a succession of skippy knots of rhythm and short, jerky melodies. One can tire easily of his less-inspired pieces; they are motoric, repetitive, rushed. But at its best, Martinů's music is exhilarating, propulsive, mercurial, playfully mysterious. It is music full of surprises and quirky delights. It is tonal, but spiced with ample dissonances that are used *musically*. Martinů's unique orchestrations are brilliant—the piano is used to great effect as an orchestral instrument; winds, brass and percussion often have equal voice with the strings.

All of this is not to say that Martinů is one of the great composers of the



20th century. He is, though, a very good one, and at the very least an interesting musical byway. To anyone who has gotten beyond Brahms (well, perhaps a little further), Martinů's music should be a delightful discovery. Likewise, any intrepid modernist tired of trying to pick the tone rows out of dodecaphonic sound constructions will find welcome relief

in Martinů's musicality.

\* \* \*

My brief mention of Leoš Janáček, Martinů's predecessor and musical superior, brings me to the happy news that the superb performances of Janáček's two string quartets by the Janáček Quartet are once again available, this time through the auspices of the enterprising budget label, Quintessence (PMC-7193). These were available on the Crossroads label years ago. The Quintessence record seems to have been cut at a lower level, requiring a sizable volume boost. This, of course, tends to expose imperfections in the pressing. Nevertheless, they are still the same indispensable performances of two of the greatest quartets ever penned. Janáček said his last quartet was "like a piece of living flesh. I don't think I ever shall be able to write anything deeper and more truthful." Certainly there is little in music that speaks in so direct and passionate a way as these two quartets.

Quintessence has also reissued Karel Ančerl's great performances of Janáček's "Sinfonietta" and "Taras Bulba," which used to be on the Turnabout label. The sound quality may not be the latest, but it is adequate. The last movement of "Sinfonietta" is one of the blazing glories of 20th-century music.

Janáček's music transcends its own necessary limitations and becomes terribly moving as an expression of the fact that the unutterable remains mute: it is music's attempt to say what cannot be said. If music which I would call passionate is beginning to sound metaphysical, recall that Janáček's last work, an opera, was based on a novel, *The House of the Dead*, by Dostoyevsky, that most passionate metaphysician. And if you wish to hear music clamoring at the very gates of heaven, try Janáček's "Slavonic Mass" (Kubelik has

# "A thoughtful and often cheeky monthly" whose "champion is Pope John Paul II." — Newsweek

Yes, that's the *New Oxford Review*! We strongly support the Polish Pope's valiant efforts to protect Poland from the Soviet imperialists and to enhance social justice, both in Poland and throughout the world. Moreover, we unabashedly champion the Pope in his struggle to save Christian orthodoxy from Hans Kung and all the other questionable theologians who have had a field day undermining the faith and morals of a generation of Catholics. And yes, we are cheeky — but then, we believe that with John Paul II on the throne of Peter, orthodox Catholics no longer have an excuse to hide their light under a bushel.

We are a **new and unique** monthly opinion magazine, the kind that Catholics have been searching for — in many cases — for decades. As one professor in Massachusetts wrote us, "Your strong defense of Pope John Paul II in the Hans Kung affair warmed my heart. I wish that other Catholic magazines (one of which I first subscribed to some 33 years ago) had exhibited such courage. I have found some of the best rendering of Catholic teaching and tradition in your *Review* — and not in Catholic periodicals of like format, where one would normally expect to find it."

We feature a regular column by **James Hitchcock** giving a running commentary on the continuing battle between the Holy Father and the modernists, and our Rome

Correspondent files dispatches from **inside the Vatican**.

Published 10 times a year by Anglo-Catholics, the *New Oxford Review* believes the battle for Christian truth is being fought inside all denominations and communions. Hence, we maintain strong links to Evangelicals, Pentecostals, the Eastern Orthodox, and others.

We address a variety of religious and secular topics, and various viewpoints are aired. Our writers include such diverse and exciting people as Peter L. Berger, J.M. Cameron, Francis Canavan S.J., Robert Coles, Joseph Fessio S.J., Carl F.H. Henry, Thomas Howard, Erazim Kohak, Arthur F. McGovern S.J., Richard John Neuhaus, John T. Noonan Jr., Paul Ramsey, James V. Schall S.J., Paul Seabury, Sheldon Vanauken, and Robert E. Webber. Our editor is Dale Vree.

And here's what others are saying about us: *Newsweek* praises our "childlike exuberance," *National Review* pronounces us "first rate," and *Pastoral Renewal* says we're "sharply written and well-edited." But the best is yet to come, for Michael Novak judges us "a cutting edge in American religious thought," and the *Library Journal* has solemnly announced that "this fine journal will doubtless command increasing attention."

(Please allow 2 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue.)

## SPECIAL DISCOUNT RATES FOR FIRST-TIME SUBSCRIBERS

- One-year subscription . . . \$6 (regularly \$9)
- One-year student or retired person's sub. . . . \$5 (regularly \$7)
- Three-year subscription . . . \$15 (regularly \$24)
- One-year Canadian or foreign subscription . . . \$9 (regularly \$11) (Payment must be drawn in U.S. funds)
- Sample copy . . . \$2.50

Make check payable to "American Church Union" and mail to:

**New Oxford Review**  
Room 106  
6013 Lawton Ave.  
Oakland, CA 94618

NAME (Please print or type) \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER

a good recording on DG 138954).

\* \* \*

Four recent releases of modern American music range from great to middling interest. The finest of the four is a rescue operation by Composers Recordings, Inc. They have reissued an inexplicably absent Columbia recording of Harold Shapiro's "Symphony for Classical Orchestra" (1947). The album cover (CRI-SRD 424) is marked "American Historic" (good heavens, even I was alive in 1947 and it is already historic!), and one can only hope that this is the first in a series of such rescues of neglected American symphonic gems. The Shapiro Symphony represents the best of the American neoclassic movement, i.e. tonal music modeled on the formal clarity and concision of earlier classical (preromantic) musical forms. The piece is lively and enlivening, with a lovely *adagietto*. The performance by the Columbia Symphony Orchestra under Leonard Bernstein dates from 1954 and was recorded in mono, but it continues to serve the music very well. The record cover is graced with a delightful caricature of Bernstein conducting, drawn by Olga Koussevitzky. (The Shapiro piece was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation.) I give this record an unqualified recommendation.

\* \* \*

Another CRI release (CRI SD 410) is billed as "American Contemporary," although one of its featured pieces, "The Seasons," by John Cage, was also composed in 1947. The difference, I suppose,

is that Cage went on to write (or not write, as his emphasis on chance would have it) nonmusic, and Shapiro did not, thus making Cage more our contemporary. The other explanation is that the accompanying piece by Charles Wuorinen, "Two-Part Symphony," is dated 1977-78. In any case, in 1947 Cage, though already immersed in oriental philosophy, was still writing music. He would go on to do his best to destroy the distinction between music and random sounds, as if to liberate us from a terrible tyranny. The wreckage of noise this effort left in its wake is only now beginning to be cleared from the musical center stage. Little of this is adumbrated in Cage's ballet composition in which he intended "to express the traditional Indian view of the seasons as quiescence (winter), creation (spring), preservation (summer) and destruction (fall)." It is not Vivaldi, nor is it Milhaud, who also wrote a modern Four Seasons set. The music is simple, delicate for the most part, lightly textured, yet never boring. It contains some beautiful drawn-out sounds that I would almost swear came from a glass harmonica, though the instrument is not listed on the jacket cover. The recording before a live audience in 1978 is interspersed with a few coughs, but the good sound compensates. Dennis Russell Davies conducts the American Composers Orchestra in a fine performance.

\* \* \*

American Music for Strings (D-79002), offers an easy, enjoyable, but only mildly invigorating listening experience. On the plus side, all the works presented here are tonal and accessible.

The longest work is the liveliest. David Diamond's "Rounds for String Orchestra" (1944). Diamond wrote this piece at the request of Dmitri Mitropoulos who was depressed at having to conduct so much twelve-note music. "Write me a happy work," Mitropoulos asked. "These are distressing times, most of the difficult music I play is distressing. Make me happy." Diamond responded with a nice musical pick-me-up. Samuel Barber's "Serenade for String Orchestra" (1929) was written when the composer was 19. It is pleasant, accomplished, but it does not approach the greatness of his later works. Irving Fine's "Serious Song—a Lament for String Orchestra" (1955) is a symphonic elegy, "an extended aria for string orchestra" as Fine called it, which has genuine weight and beauty. It only lacks that little, indescribable something which would make it a minor classic.

Elliott Carter, not someone from whom we are used to hearing easily accessible music, wrote in 1943 a short "Elegy" which he describes as "basically one long melodic line accomplished by slowly changing chords." Not many composers can pull this sort of thing off, even for a time span as short as five minutes, and maintain interest. Barber succeeded supremely with his famous "Adagio for Strings." This piece does not threaten to displace it, pleasant though it is. Nonesuch's sound is very good, as it should be for the steep list price of \$11.95 for a "budget" digital disc, and Gerard Schwarz conducts the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra with vigor and precision. Two of the works on this record (the Fine and the Barber) are already available on other labels. I hope Nonesuch will consider introducing a whole record of otherwise unavailable tonal American music in future releases.

\* \* \*

Louisville Orchestra Records has brought us a good rendition of George Antheil's Symphony No. 5 (1947) on LS-770. Antheil, as a 26-year-old enfant

Back issues of *Chronicles of Culture* are available for \$1.00 apiece.

For a complete list of back issues in stock, write to:  
*Chronicles of Culture*, The Rockford Institute,  
934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103.

terrible, shocked audiences in 1927 with his "Ballet Mecanique," scored for airplane propeller, siren, electric bells, etc. The notoriety of this early music has unfortunately eclipsed interest in his later, tamer efforts. My only acquaintance with his music came from an Everest recording of his Symphony No. 4 (1942), now apparently deleted. The Symphony No. 5 I enjoy not quite as much, but grow fonder of it with each hearing. The reviewer in *Fanfare* magazine found the style of Antheil's Symphony No. 5 embarrassingly derivative—from Shostakovich, he said; others say Prokofiev. I myself would tag him as an American Malcolm Arnold. Whomever he may remind

you of, he is enough of a musician to keep you thoroughly engaged and occasionally entranced. So if you like your Prokofiev, Shostakovich or Arnold Americanized, try Antheil. The reverse side of this record features the Englishman Peter Maxwell Davies's "St. Thomas Wake: Foxtrot for Orchestra." I have no idea of what Davies is attempting to accomplish with this composition, because I cannot follow it musically, despite his advice to view the foxtrot band music in it as an "object," and the orchestral music as an attitude toward this object. I would have preferred one of Antheil's other symphonies, and I hope the Louisville Orchestra will consider recording them. □

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Letter from Washington: Faith and the Future

by James Hamilton

Although the opulence of Senate meeting rooms contrasts sharply with the poverty that surrounds her in Calcutta, Mother Teresa does not seem out of place mixing with those who exercise temporal power. She visited Washington June 3 and 4 and impressed her audiences with the simple strength of her message. Of course official Washington is more open to her message today than it has been in recent years. Open to, but not comfortable with, yet.

Introducing Mother Teresa to a gathering of the American Family Institute, Under Secretary of State for Security Affairs James L. Buckley noted that she is a woman who speaks to concerns other than the ones that dominate our secular age. The terms in which she speaks rest uneasily among the terms that dominate political discourse in a commercial republic. George Gilder, supply-side economist and author of *Wealth and Pover-*

---

*Mr. Hamilton is a scholar who specializes in American political thought.*

*ty*, spoke on the same American Family Institute program. The contrast between his concerns for the material well-being of secular man and her concerns for the spiritual health of the human race outline the central tension of contemporary politics.

Mother Teresa and George Gilder share a buoyant optimism about the capacities of free people. Mother Teresa observes the wealth of America and brings a message of thanks. She asserts that she has never begged, and that her mission in Calcutta has no need to ask for money. She thanks those who have been generous in the past, knowing that the sincerity of her gratitude, and the generosity of our real Provider, will enable her to continue her work in this world.

The Sisters of Charity care for 7,000 people every day in Calcutta, and Mother Teresa is in the process of establishing homes in several American cities. Americans are unfamiliar with the material poverty of India, but this woman spies a far more terrifying poverty in the American soul. "No poor family will

ever destroy a child," she teaches, "so let us learn from them." She calls upon her listeners to deepen their faith that God's message of His creation is in every child. She knows, "The child is the image of God, the temple of God . . . And we must answer to God for each abortion." Mother Teresa notes that abortion demonstrates a fear of the future, a fear of providing for succeeding generations, and a fear of educating our descendants. In short, abortion symbolizes a basic fear of our ability to provide for others. She remembers that God nurtures the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and that He has promised to do as much for human beings as He has done for the least of His creatures.

George Gilder understands the strength of faith that is needed to sustain a free people. Indeed, Gilder believes that the system of capitalism depends critically upon the altruistic impulses of people. He affirms that we cannot create wealth unless we give of ourselves first. We give of ourselves by offering the best of our skills in service to others. If those skills are treasured in this world, others will reward our generosity by giving of their own treasure to accumulate what we have to offer. The creative impulse that is the start of a free economy does not know what others will want; it creates in the hope of inspiring desires in the hearts of others.

Gilder is attempting to save capitalism from the rhetoric of vulgar self-interest that has cluttered its vocabulary, even among its defenders, since Adam Smith first promoted his "system of natural liberty." In a capitalist society, material concerns alone cannot provide the strength necessary to sustain free people.

Contemporary conservatives combine an admiration for the idea of the good life that animates George Gilder and a concern for the ultimate matters that preoccupy Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa realizes that success in her temporal concerns depends critically upon