

Art, of course, is an illusion, though many frequently overlook that fact and treat it as a direct representation of reality. Increasingly, modern novelists are calling attention to their form so that people will recognize fiction as fiction. Some, like John Fowles, do it well by masterfully manipulating time, while others take a more heavy-handed approach and spill type all over the page.

A question that film-makers interested in doing the same thing might pose to themselves is: How does one make a serious film that says something about the nature of acting, one that calls attention to itself as a work of art, but which doesn't collapse under the weight of undue seriousness or have the substance of a trivial bubble? The filmed version of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is an answer to that question. The film functions both as an entertainment and as a commentary on acting.

When the film opens, Meryl Streep, famous Hollywood actress, is shown being prepped, getting ready to walk out on the Cobb at Lyme Bay as Sarah, "the

French lieutenant's woman." It almost seems as if this is not the actual start of the film, but rather a short preview, "The Making of . . ." But then the action begins, and the actress becomes a character. We forget about the opening until we see Charles Smithson answer a telephone—in 1867?—which makes us aware that he is actually Jeremy Irons, an actor, whom we might remember seeing in the British television adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*.

Back and forth the film goes, but in a manner more complex than a play within a play. That is, there's a real actress performing as an actress, who plays the role of a fictional character who is based on a character in a novel, a fictional character who pretends to be something that she isn't—which is at least five levels. Yet an average filmgoer, one who simply wants to see a modern Victorian melodrama (i.e. one in which the so-called prudes are shown to be as licentious as goats), can watch the film without being unduly disturbed by the Chinese-box effect. □

his "Third String Quartet" in which he speaks of "turning away from . . . the cultural pathology of my own time." That pathology is characterized by a wholesale rejection of the past and the "pursuit of the one-idea, uni-dimensional work and gesture which seems to have dominated the esthetics of art in the 20th century."

What are the origins of this pathology? The answer is adumbrated in the opening *New York Times* question as to the necessity of the 12-tone revolution. The fact is that the 12-tone revolution was thought to be necessary not because it was needed, but because it was historically inevitable (due to the supposed exhaustion of the tonal system). In other words, this cultural pathology was rooted in modern ideology and translated into a musical dialectic which turns into strong hints of gnosticism, as in Schoenberg's own case. There is certainly such a thing as ideology in music, and to no one's surprise, its influence has been reductionist. Like anything else that can be affected by ideology, music has suffered from what Eric Voegelin calls "a loss of reality." The loss was purposeful. The source of much "originality" in modern art has become not creation but destruction, a process of taking away what has been given—not only by tradition but by nature itself. Of course the principal premise of modern ideology is that wholesale destruction is necessary for the development of the truly new. We were thus given in music a second-hand, or ersatz, reality which operated according to its own self-invented and independent rules divorced from the very nature of sound. In their attempt to discredit tonality as a matter of mere convention, the 12-toners subjected audiences to all manner of manufactured and systematized noises. The audiences fled—in spite of the critics' barbs that they were musical rubes. Abandoned by and eventually unconcerned about their audience, the dodecaphonists shed any remaining restraints on their sterile hermeticism and sank into total incom-

MUSIC

Against Atonality

by Robert R. Reilly

"What if, we may ask now, the 12-tone revolution was not really necessary and it has taken us half a century to find that out?" When such a question as this appears in the *New York Times* "Arts and Leisure" section (12/9/79), one may safely assume that the academic stranglehold of the dodecaphonic disciples of Schoenberg et al. has been broken. It was a stranglehold that nearly suffocated modern music; rather, it

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was almost modern music's suicide. This suicide was attempted by a systematic fragmentation of the language of music, the same fragmentation that is easily discernable in so much modern painting and sculpture, wherein a single component or ingredient of art is elevated into its own autonomous, isolated whole.

After a half-century's drubbing, melodic thought and tonal structure are once again emerging in music, at first painfully, slowly, cautiously, as if from a coma induced by a terrible beating, but now almost ebulliently. I know of no better prescription for this recovery than George Rochberg's essay on

prehensibility.

Now, however, we are hearing refreshing voices crying out "The Emperor has no clothes." It is revealing to read of the reactions to the good news in Walter Simmons's account in *Fanfare* (June/July, 1981) of a seminar last spring in New York City on the state of modern music. He relates a number of examples provided by the participants—distinguished critics and composers—of "the coerciveness with which the 'traditional wing' of 20th century music has been suppressed by the academic musical establishment, and the degree to which dissent has been silenced through subtle forms of intimidation." One of the most harrowing examples is the critic for the *Village Voice*, for instance, who confessed that he admitted to himself his admiration for Benjamin Britten's music only after Rochberg had publicly rehabilitated it.

For this service alone, we should thank him. But there is also Rochberg's recent music, an attempted renewal "by regaining contact with the tradition and means of the past, to re-emerge as a spiritual force with reactivated powers of melodic thought, rhythmic pulse, and large-scale structure." His "Quintet for Piano and String Quartet" (1975), now available on Nonesuch Records (N-78011), follows three years after his "Third String Quartet." It is a most interesting attempt at reintegrating the past into our musical consciousness, though it may be less than a totally satisfying musical whole. Rochberg, like T. S. Eliot, recalls the past by simply including it, sometimes literally, sometimes stylistically. In any event, one is often extra-musically reminded by the time-machine aspect of his music that this *is* an exercise in reclaiming the past.

This large "Quintet" (45:36) is laid out symmetrically, with three movements preceding a piano solo and three following. The outer movements are atonal; the middle movements mix tonal and atonal elements; the inner

movements are tonal, surrounding the murky, brooding piano solo. It is interesting that Rochberg characterizes this structure as "a progression from dark to light, to dark again." The "dark" music is bearable, and the "light" quite delightful, particularly the third movement, which sounds like a Schubertian romp, and the fifth, which is a lovely *adagietto*. The middle, transitional music, especially the sixth movement, is fascinating: the 19th century fighting it out with the 20th. The newcomer to modern music will no doubt find this composition puzzling, but anyone interested in Rochberg's reconstructive enterprise will perceive beauty and stimulation in it. The pressing and sound quality are good.

At the same New York modern-music conference, a *New York Times* music critic apparently confessed to a long-held, but hidden, admiration for the music of, among others, Samuel Barber. Even during the "reign of terror," I doubt that the popularity of Barber's music really declined. Though it was derided as old-fashioned and romantic, people apparently liked it, and will continue to do so precisely for those reasons. New World Records (NW 309) has released Barber's swan song, "Third Essay for Orchestra," Opus 47. Barber's romanticism remained, up to the end, undiminished. This is an opulent, luxuriant, melodic work. For these reasons it reminded me of John Williams's equally opulent and quite beautiful score for the movie *Dracula*, but, like movie music, I doubt if its grand gestures will

have the staying power to hold one's attention.

The much larger work on this record is brash, splashy, "Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra" by the young composer John Corigliano. Corigliano is also known as a romantic; however, anyone whose tastes do not go beyond Barber might have a hard time recognizing it. But any ear acclimated to modern music will quickly recognize that the sometimes-aggressive modernisms in Corigliano's music are on the surface, that he has only orchestrally updated (with occasional tone clusters and dissonant effects) what might have been heard from Copland a few years ago. In fact a few passages do strongly remind me of Copland's wonderful "Clarinet Concerto." If I were initiating someone into Corigliano's music, I think I would begin with either his piano or oboe concerto, both of which are bravura showpieces as well. Certainly anyone who enjoyed those will like this virtuoso orgy. A large part of the excitement of both works on this record are due to Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic, who play them to the hilt, and to the superb sound and excellent pressing from New World Records.

Another refugee from the "long term tyranny which has brought contemporary music to its current state of constipation and paralysis" is Robert Muczynski whose words I quote from a letter he wrote to *Fanfare* in appreciation of their report on the New York modern-music conference. Helping break the logjam is Laurel Records, which has issued a disc of Muczynski's music,



shared by two other tonal composers, Ernest Bloch and Paul Creston. Muczynski's "Dance Movements" (1963) and "A Serenade for Summer" (1976) on LR-110 could be classed as light music for chamber orchestra, but it is well enough constructed to delight the listener repeatedly. Muczynski notes in his letter that the most effective means of condemnation under the old tyranny was to say that one's music "sounds like . . ." Derivativeness was the kiss of death. Well, anyone who sounds like Mozart is fine with me, and Hummel's best piano concerto sounds just like Beethoven. So I mean no insult by saying, in the interest of placing his music for the reader, that Muczynski sounds, in places, like Copland, perhaps a little like Gail Kubik (who also sounds a bit like Copland), with a dash (in the "Serenade for Summer") of Malcolm Arnold. Or would it be fairer to say he is representative of what someone called our country's "mid-Western school of prairie classicism" (perhaps this should be changed to "prairie neo-romanticism")? In any event, his music is easily accessible and quite delightful.

"A Serenade for Summer" is particularly beautiful.

The other side of the record features Bloch and Creston. Bloch's "Four Episodes for Chamber Orchestra" (1926) were written years after he had come to this country from Switzerland. The episodes are independent of each other: Humoresque Macabre, Obsession (the beginning of which sounds like Alan Hovhaness), Pastorale, Chinese Theatre. Sort of Bloch's version of "Ports of Call," except it has three psychological and only one geographic location. All have the character of impressions, and are enjoyable examples of this kind of descriptive music.

Creston's "Two Choric Dances" (1938) are short works whose stridency seems a bit overbearing, although I was most appreciative of the rare opportunity to hear some of his orchestral work. He speaks of these dances as abstract in conception, but they sound cinematic and dated. All in all, this disc is an enjoyable journey off the beaten path. It is enhanced by decent sound, good record surfaces and dedicated performances. □

the American public and civic ethos. If a civil servant has doubts about what he's doing, his sacrosanct duty is to convey them to his official superior, his political comrade in arms, his ideological soul mate. If his doubts are not assuaged,



if they become a burden on his conscience, he should resign his position and *then* go public with his objections, reservations, opposition, discoveries and denunciations. This is the only way a man in public service can prove his honesty, integrity, responsibility and honor. If he confides his doubts to a journalist, the latter's probity notwithstanding, he automatically becomes a sort of Benedict Arnold. In America *anno Domini* 1981, journalists see disasters as news—thus they are principally interested in harm, abuse, ravage. Any portent of failure and defeat—personal, moral, mental—is for the journalist a good tiding: it promises him money, celebrity and even that spurious feeling of being a savior to his people. The contemporary American journalist sincerely believes that his attitude of indiscrimination toward the telling of everything "like it is" improves the world and enriches society. This shallow perception of politics, history and human affairs has—as recent times clearly demonstrate—inflicted irremediable impairment on our shared reality. The journalist epitomizes the banality of the evil of our lifetime, and Mr. Stockman is only the newest cadaver to be left behind on the trail of his allegedly well-meaning vampirism.

To expect an American journalist in Washington, D.C. to honor a confidence is to announce one's own mental debili-

THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

The Technology of Errors

At the time of this writing Mr. David Stockman, President Reagan's budget director, is still sitting in his office—sad perhaps, confused maybe, angry with himself certainly. What the future holds for him we don't know. But we do know that by not firing him on the spot, after the publication of his notorious interview with *Atlantic Monthly*, President Reagan has committed a grave mistake.

Those who defend the President's benignity point to Mr. Stockman's expertise and indispensability. We are

skeptical about that argument. If Mr. Reagan cannot find a replacement with acumen and talent among genuinely conservative economic scholars and activists, it seems to us that he just does not understand the ideological movement which brought him to power. Such a circumstance is not rare, but a leader afflicted by such ignorance improves neither his society nor his own reputation. In pardoning Mr. Stockman, Mr. Reagan has betrayed one of the principles of what could be termed the new political morality—an ingredient of his own pre-electoral rhetoric, a basic premise of the conservative renewal of