RECORD NOTES

OUT OF THE GHETTO. Leon Lishner, bass; Lazar Weiner, piano. (*Vanguard, $4.98.*)

Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a vigorous American-Jewish literature and theater were developed during the decades of mass migrations from Eastern Europe. Despite brave and stubborn survivors, the Jewish theater is fading quickly; and contemporary American-Jewish literature is more accurately represented by Philip Roth (*Goodbye, Columbus*) than by the few elders still writing in Yiddish. American-Jewish music is also disappearing unless one includes the rather attenuated new settings for services at Reform and Conservative temples.

Accordingly, this collection of "Songs of the Jews in America" has nostalgic as well as intrinsic attraction. There are insights for social historians and good, yearning tunes for anyone. Much of the material consists of poems set to music, but the poems were not riddles in aesthetics sold in small editions. They were as familiar in many Jewish households as the daily life they described. There are memories of Czarist oppression in the old country and contemporary complaints of employer oppression:

"*Seek me not where myrtles bloom!*
You will not find me there, my love.
Where life withers at the machines,
There you'll find my resting place."

It's not all grim. There is a Sholem Aleichem lullaby, an infectiously joyful Chassidic tune, and even a Yiddish variant on "Mr. Froggy Went A-Courting," which has, however, a sternly unwhimsical ending as the frog is added to the stork's larder. The sweatshop songs still sound with anguish, particularly Morris Rosenfeld's "My Little Lad," at one time the most popular of all American-Jewish songs. The weary protagonist rises so early to get to work and comes home so late that "strange to me is the look of my own child."

Leon Lishner, who has appeared in several NBC-TV opera productions, sounds vehemently determined in the songs that presage the coming of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and is equally convincing in the range of other moods included. There are complete texts and translations and excellent historical notes by Ruth Rubin.

MOUNTAIN MUSIC OF KENTUCKY. (*Folkways, $5.95.*)

Despite those relentless homogenizers—radio, records, and TV—some rebelliously regional styles of music remain. John Cohen, a remarkable New York photographer and a member of the New Lost City Ramblers (a revivalist folk-music group), has documented here the musical mores of a section of the Eastern Kentucky hills. The performers are among those vanishing Americans, non-professionals who entertain themselves. The group includes a farmer, a coal miner, a housewife, a banker, and a politician.

Cohen opens with unaccompanied Baptist church singing, which sustains a venerable American institution—a lead singer "lining out" the verses to the congregation, which responds in raggedly vibrant unison. For some reason, there are no sound tracks of the fiercely abandoned music of the "Holiness" congregations. The rest was recorded in kitchens and living rooms and on front porches.

There are clangingly expert banjo picking, sizzling fiddle playing, mountain blues, tales of past contests with the bottle, and union songs such as "Death of the Blue Eagle" ("But if you're undecided, boys, and don't know what to do/ Just think how much a day you got in 1932"). A sixty-eight-year-old state legislator sings a social gospel ("We have a Father up in heaven, some day will call the aged home/ And when they meet there up in heaven, there'll be no lien against them all"). But there is little solace in these songs, as in the bitter daydream of the mountain wife's "I Wish I Were a Single Girl Again" and "Young and Tender Ladies."

In addition to his extensive record notes, Cohen has included a portfolio of photographs, some of which are on a par with those of Walker Evans in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

MINGUS DYNASTY: CHARLES MINGUS AND HIS JAZZ GROUPS. (*Columbia, $3.98.*)

Charles Mingus is becoming the most indomitably original and emotionally penetrating of contemporary jazz composers. He is also a bassist of staggering virtuosity. As a composer, his clearest influences are the gospel music of his childhood, the tart lyricism and harmonies of Duke Ellington, and the blazing, blues-based power of the key modern jazz innovator, the late Charlie Parker.

There is no shop steward in a Mingus unit. He insists that his men relate completely to the composition, even in their most self-expressive improvisations; and he will scold them if they fail, as he does here in his uniquely candid liner notes. Mingus can compose with rare depth of lyrical feeling (as in "Diane"), with sardonic anger ("Gunslinging Bird"), and brooding promise of future revolt ("Put Me in That Dungeon"). The intensity of his works is not unlike that of the Yiddish sweatshop songs and the raw Kentucky mountain musical ruminations. I also recommend his occasionally demonic *Blues and Roots* (Atlantic).

DUKE ELLINGTON: BLUES IN ORBIT. (*Columbia, $3.98.*)

The perennial vigor of Duke Ellington's own roots in the blues is freshly re-emphasized in this set of unpretentious pieces, immediately identified by the distinctively variegated Ellington sound. By contrast, many jazz writers appear to work with a limited or at least blurred palette. There are also the leader's own pungent, rhythmically prodding piano and such vintage stalwarts of the Ellington pantheon as Johnny Hodges, an alto saxophonist of uncommonly graceful phrasing and serene tone; the ruggedly unsentimental baritone saxophonist Harry Carney; and the wry, skeptical trumpeter Ray Nance. Mr. Ellington, now past sixty, refuses to disband and relax on his ASCAP income. "I have to have a band," he has explained patiently. "If I couldn't hear at night what I'd written during the day, I'd lose much of my reason for living." He is one major American composer who does not want for performances. —NAT HENTOFF

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Home Thoughts from England

SANTHA RAMA RAU

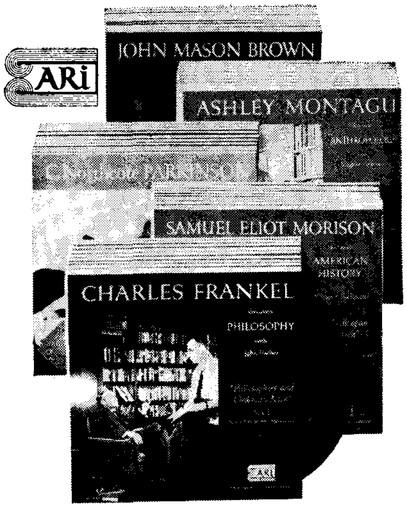
A Passage to England, by Nirad Chaudhuri. ***St. Martin's Press. $3.75.***

Occasionally, at rare intervals in history, it has happened that the intellectuals of a whole nation are educated in an entirely foreign language and tradition. This was true, I suppose, in medieval England when the medium of instruction was Latin. Most dramatically and most recently it has been true of colonial Asia. In India during the struggle for independence, even while "If every Indian spits once we can drown the British" was a popular crack, India's future leaders and intellectuals were still learning a love of English literature and English civilization in their schools and colleges.

I can remember at an Indian kindergarten learning that "A" is for "apple," and wondering vaguely what on earth an apple was. The fruits I knew were mangoes, pomegranates, papayas, guavas. My mother, a generation earlier, was equally puzzled by Wordsworth's famous daffodils and for some time really thought that these flowers were made of gold—it said so in the poem. From my childhood I recall alternately the sound of my grandmother (who never went to school at all) reciting the Bhagvat-gita, and of my mother reciting long passages from Shakespeare. I was sent to school in England itself very early, already able to talk, read, write, and study in English. But my mother, with all her love of English literature and all her familiarity with English history, saw the country of its origin for the first time when she was thirty-six. She took me to stand on Westminster Bridge and recited, "Earth has not anything to show more fair:/Dull would he be of soul who could pass by/A sight so touching in its majesty," and both of us were astonished that compared with Indian rivers the famous Thames was so small.

Mr. Chaudhuri records in far more detail a similar experience, the curious result of a literary and artistic familiarity with a foreign milieu—the utterly strange seen with a profoundly prepared vision. Mr. Chaudhuri, born and bred in India, educated by Indians to a knowledge and appreciation of English culture, went to England for the first time at the age of fifty-seven at the invitation of the BBC. He gave some talks on the radio, traveled widely and met some English men and women. It took him five years to digest the experiences of the five weeks he spent in England, and his account of his trip abroad has turned out to be in the nature of a love letter. Rather than the tag that Mr. Chaudhuri's publishers have seen fit to attach to his title—"O East is East and West is West . . ."—perhaps a more appropriate one would be "I did but see her passing by,/And yet I love her till I die."

It is one of the odd ironies of history that years of domination should



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