

by Alan Zingale

(the eighth in a series of reviews of records in the NCSA library)

CAGE: Music for Keyboard 1935-1948. Jeanne Kirstein, prepared piano, piano, and toy piano. Columbia M2S 819.

In the past, John Cage has been one of those avant-garde composers approached either with mild curiosity, or virtually ignored. Recently however, interest has grown steadily, especially among the young. Dick Cavett programmed some of Cage's prepared piano music as demonstrated by Michael Thomas of the Boston Symphony. More recordings of his works have been issued on various labels, and he now finds that the international firm of C.F. Peters is putting all his scores into print. Cage even has a few books that have become "underground bestsellers." A big, controversial name, some say he is already a part of official music history.

This two-record disc features some of Cage's earlier keyboard works performed by Jeanne Kirstein, currently Pianist-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati. The instruments employed are the usual piano, along with Cage's notorious invention: the prepared piano (a piano stuffed with various bolts, wooden screws, glass, rubber, etc. for special effects.) Also, a toy piano is used, but this is merely a normal piano operating in restricted registers.

There is really not much objective to say about a record of this nature. It seems that people either like this type of music or they don't. It's only natural to fall back on what is appealing to the personality. Unfortunately, it is rare that a person will take the time to objectively appraise a new work on an intellectual level. 'If it first offends the emotions-forget it.' Nevertheless, though it is not always possible to agree with what a composer is communicating, it certainly seems

possible to appreciate, or at least respect the degree of creative efficiency with which he communicates.

In other words, a musical composition can be respected intellectually if only for its inventiveness, choice of idiom(s), or structure, as opposed to an entirely intrinsic-aesthetic, value-judgement of a work. It will probably be necessary for many people to begin their approach to Cage with the former attitude. And then, who knows? Maybe the experience will, by chance, prove enjoyable.

Of course, despite all this, it is immaterial whether a person "likes" a work or not. The important aspect, especially in an arts school, is that the individual cultivate an awareness of contemporary music. It is the blind indifference and shutting-out of new and original ideas which wastes the creative imagination of contemporary composers.

As for Cage, his music is generally distinguished by its rhythmic dominance, structural complexity, and lack of harmonic organization. A student of Schoenberg, he occasionally employs serial techniques, both intervallically and rhythmically with the usual variations of retrograde, inversion, and retrograde-inversion. Perhaps the most interesting quality in his keyboard music is the contrast in piano-string sound achieved by the placement of the bolts, screws, etc. within the piano. Also, his unique and always unpredictable balance of noise against tone can greatly stimulate the imaginative listener. Here, Cage's works receive an intelligent and enthusiastic performance from Miss Kirstein, and Columbia's engineering is superb.

In the future, it is hoped that NCSA students will be more adventurous in their exploration of modern music. This album can offer a good start. Give it a listen, if only for curiosity's sake. (Record number: M-5177).

"Commons Playhouse"

by Jon Thompson

One of the latest features to be added to the former North Carolina School of the Arts is an ugly white blockhouse that contains the following: a lunchroom, several dance studios (only one of which is used), a gym, a pool, a billiard room, a bookstore, several rotten vending machines, etc., etc.

This million dollar bleached cracker box also doubles, at times, as a makeshift theater, art museum, dance hall and all around pain in the neck. For a moment, let us look at the thing as a dramatic theater (and please, it's not that funny).

Earlier this year, when "rumblings" were heard about the building which had been the drama theater, it was decided that drama convocations would be held in the well of the Commons. For some reasons this was good, and for some it was not. It did almost always guarantee a large group to view shows, for that was a time when everyone wanted to get inside the new Commons. The only thing is, they might come up right out of the backdrop into the audience, and sometimes did. Also, the seating reminds one of football bleachers, all hard and cold and ecch.

Then came that fateful day when it got that our beloved "dollar-a-year" theater would be closed for any kind of public performance. The faculty mused. Where could they go with their work? To Summit (where a few NCSA shows had been done before)? No, too far away, too much work. Into a studio? No, too small, never work. Well, how about in the well of the Commons? Uh sure

And it came to pass that the

Commons became a theater. Unfortunately, nobody wanted to do anything there. They gripped and bitched and said it couldn't be done. As it turned out, these were "The Last Sweet Days of Isaac," and the show needed a home. Bill Dreyer (Isaac's director; decided to give the Commons a whirl. The budget for the show was a workshop budget, but since it was very simple in design, the production was almost complete, scene-wise.

Now certain problems arose. First, being a Commons building and by definition open to all, it would be difficult to throw everyone out, lock up the doors and have closed rehearsals. So the show didn't get into the place of presentation until the week before opening. Also, the place has many small openings on the outside and blocking each one so people don't just wander unwittingly on stage is also hard. NEXT we had to seat the audience on the steps and hope they'd be comfortable in both dignity and ass. Then there is the fact that the place is not designed for safety, and accidents do happen.

There were other problems, but they were pretty much conquered. "Isaac" went on, and I'm told it was a success. People came, and came again. They enjoyed themselves. It was intimate.

The moral: It looks like the Commons would be a good place to hold a show or two, now and then . . . but it should not become an easy out for the administration. We desperately need a new theater (and a good one) soon, but for now, all's well that ends well.

Reviews

ROCKNROLL

Last Time Around

by mif

"They could make beautiful music when they wanted, dazzling, glorious music that would take your breath away. But most often they settled for something less than that, something superficial and flashy and easy. Four Way Street is final testimony to that fact." - From an unpublished review of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's Four Way Street by Michael Ferguson.

"The dream is over and so my dear friends you'll just have to carry on" - John Lennon, from the song "God."

I first got off on rock and roll when Elvis Presley sang "Hound Dog" on the Ed Sullivan Show, Good Lord, fifteen years ago. At that frenzied moment, something snapped in the back of my brain and an eternal battle was begun: the choice between Mickey Mantle and The Big E. Finally, years later, The Beatles and The Stones and Bob Dylan and The Byrds, et. al., did me in forever. I've lived and breathed rock and roll music (a precarious occupation) ever since John, Paul, George & Ringo shook their many heads and sang "She Loves You (YeahYeahYeah)." Those were good times, in many ways the best times, but it's a past time and it won't ever be quite the same again.

Even though we've been told not to look back, perhaps we should, briefly. I guess I'll always identify the beginnings of my own personal metamorphosis (and the development of a whole generation of young people) with the music of that period (a certain sign of age: I remember my parents talking about the "good old days" and the music of Glenn Miller). But way back then - five or six years ago - it was a different world and it was easy to mark the time by the music we heard (" . . . when Rubber Soul came out . . ."). It was a time when we were young and were discovering and experiencing new things and ideas daily. A time when the world still seemed capable of incredible beauty; when we got truly excited about a new lp from The Beatles or Country Joe or Moby Grape. When we grew our hair long and spouted crazy words until dawn, never once suspecting that anyone would mind, let alone come to hate us for it. From here, now, that is a long time ago. Perhaps Zimmerman was right. Of course he was.

Rock and roll came a long way from those early days of Elvis, Alan Freed and black-leather jackets (with an eagle on the

Review

Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet by Gail Grant (Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y.) paperbound \$1.50

Gail Grant, a ballet dancer and a successful teacher, has written an amazingly helpful book that every student, teacher, choreographer, dance director and ballet enthusiast should have. It is a manual and dictionary of classical ballet. From "abstract ballet" and "adage, adagio" to "volee, de" and "voyage", the book fully describes and defines over 800 ballet steps, movements, poses, expressions and concepts compiled from 22 references on classical ballet.

The three schools of ballet technique, Italian (Cecchetti method), French and Russian, are represented. The terms used in each method or technique are defined and are cross-referenced to alternate names for similar steps and positions that vary from each school.



THE FAB FOUR:
A CLASSIC STORY OF
TALENT AND GENIUS
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back). It's gone through every conceivable manifestation and mutation, even having been taken seriously by just about everyone. And it's not the same anymore, just as the people who one listened so earnestly are not the same anymore.

Don't mistake what I'm saying: there is a lot of good music around today. But it's also become a business, full of the same greed and corruption and power-trips that have ripped out the gut of the rest of America.

Witness the countless undeserved hypes. The ego-trips that have destroyed the best and original bands. The incredible rip-offs. Witness the lines of eager, second-rate, no talent bands trying to get a slice of the pie (Black Sabbath, just one example). Witness the many good bands who aren't heard because they haven't received the hype (Randy Burns & The Sky Dog Band, the subject of recent Essay review by Tony Angevine, but one). Witness Altamont. Witness what happened to The Beatles, a classic story of talent and genius ruined by \$uckce\$\$\$. Witness the kind of life it leads to. Witness Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin; all talented, all stars, all dead.

"Success - making a lot of money, being famous - it changes you. It changes your life - emotionally, physically, intellectually, sexually."

. . . Mick Jagger, who should know, from an recent interview.

Rock and roll has become anybody's game and artistry is no longer a factor. It's a dirty, evil business filled with con-men, hangers-on and pretty boys with long hair and sweet talkin' smiles and no ability (The Fabian Syndrome). It's a lousy business and the only thing that saves it all is the fact that there are those

precious few artists in the field who can survive and create, somehow, in the midst of astonishing non-sense.

If this sounds bitter, it is meant to. Because there was a time when there did seem to be a real desire to avoid this kind of pettiness, when the only concern was to make honest, meaningful music. But rock and roll became a product, a very marketable one, and everyone blew it: the artists, the agents, the promoters, the record industry, the media, record buyers who would accept anything, and the legions who horded into the Fillmore night after night screaming "More!" at the lamest hacks in the field. We all blew it because we went for the jive - the star trip - and because we did, our music is in trouble.

There are those, however, who have amazingly bypassed all this and who have made music that is free from the pretensions of their lesser peers and free from the cut-throat games of stardom. These people are intent upon creating unique and personal expressions, guided not by what is popular or saleable, but by their own natural instincts. These are the people I listen to, the people I seek out. It is artists like Randy Newman, Tim Buckley, Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa, John Cale, Rod Stewart, David Bowie, Smoky Robinson, Carole King, Van Morrison, Neil Young, Lenoard Cohen, Jesse Winchester and Boz Scaggs (and there are others, but these are a few I feel you should know about, people you might not have heard of or listened to) who render the Bloodrocks, etc. as trivial and meaningless. If you have an interest in this music, or if you would like to, I suggest you investigate these people, for they have managed to keep alive the creative spirit of the music.

But overall, rock is not in good condition; it is lackadaisical and largely uninteresting. It lacks the qualities that once made such an engaging art form. It is filled with people who care only about the easy money, the cheap thrills and the misinterpreted glory. Oh, it will survive, but I doubt it will ever be the same.

Do you wanna be a rock and roll star? No, not any more. I will be content, as John Lennon said concluding his recent Rolling Stone interview (and in a sense the entire rock scene of the '60's) to sit years from now looking over (or rather listening to) "my scrapbook of madness."

"I don't believe in Beatles . . . the dream is over" - John Ono Lennon, from "God."

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