1989

The Darius Milhaud Society Newsletter, Vol. 5, Summer/Fall 1989

Darius Milhaud Society

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!
Follow this and additional works at: http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/milhaud_newsletters
Part of the History Commons, and the Music Commons

Recommended Citation
http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/milhaud_newsletters/23

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Michael Schwartz Library at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Darius Milhaud Society Newsletters by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact library.es@csuohio.edu.

This digital edition was prepared by MSL Academic Endeavors, the imprint of the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University.
MADELEINE MILHAUD ACCEPTS HONORARY DEGREE During commencement exercises at The Cleveland Institute of Music on May 13, 1989, Madame Madeleine Milhaud was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music degree. She was introduced by CIM President David Cerone, who said:

Throughout her career, Madeleine Milhaud has been acknowledged as an outstanding artist in the field of French drama. She has provided dynamic leadership both in France and the United States as an actress, opera producer and coach, educator, administrator of Maison Française, and as an opera librettist. For many years a leading professional in the French theatre, she served on the dramatic arts and speech faculty of the Schola Cantorum in Paris, organized and ran a poetry program on Radiodiffusion Française both before and after World War II. She taught French language and literature at Mills College in California for 30 years, receiving an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Mills in 1987. At the Aspen Music Festival she coached singers in French diction, produced opera and often performed as recitante in works which her husband, composer Darius Milhaud, wrote for her. Mme. Milhaud authored libretti for three of her husband's operas, and in 1982, published the first complete and comprehensive catalogue of the composer's 443 works. Long ago, she received the highest honor France awards, the Legion of Honor, for service to her country.

Following President Cerone's remarks, Mrs. Barbara Robinson, President of the CIM Board of Trustees conferred the degree upon Madame Milhaud, saying:

MADELEINE MILHAUD, in acknowledgement of a lifetime of devoted service to the arts and culture of your native France; for having achieved great distinction in the theater arts of France; for your activities as an advocate of the work of your husband, Darius Milhaud, one of the foremost composers of the 20th century; for your years of commitment to education as exemplified by manifold teaching activities in French language and literature, in speech and diction, in poetry, as well as in the coaching of opera; and for your steadfast and life-long commitment to the values inherent in artistic excellence and humanism, we consider it fitting and in accord with the purposes and ideals of this institution to honor you on this thirteenth day of May, nineteen hundred eighty-nine.

With the full approval of the Board of Trustees of The Cleveland Institute of Music, and by virtue of the authority vested in me as Chairman of that Board, I hereby confer upon you the honorary degree of Doctor of Music, and admit you to all the honors, rights, and privileges appertaining thereto.

The Darius Milhaud Society extends warmest gratitude to Lucile Soulé and Clinton Warne for editorial assistance as well as for typing to help prepare this issue of the newsletter.

AMERICAN PREMIERE OF LE TRAIN BLEU On November 10, 11 and 12 1989, Milhaud's ballet Le Train Bleu, Op. 84 (1924), with libretto by Jean Cocteau, will be presented in its American premiere by the Oakland Ballet at the Paramount Theater. Not seen since its original performance on June 20, 1924, as part of the Diaghilev season in Paris' Champs Elysees Theatre, the new production is a revival in all respects. Reconstruction of Bronislava Nijinska's choreography has been overseen by her daughter Irina and dance historian Frank W. D. Ries of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Based on his extensive interviews with Anton Dolin with whom Ries was long associated, and others, including four Ballet Russe members, the recreated choreography will be highly authentic. Sets, after the originals by sculptor Henri Laurens have been recreated by Rod Steger. Costumes modeled on those designed by Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel have been created by Mario Alonzo and Dale Foster. Front curtain for the 1924 Paris production was designed by Pablo Picasso.
HOMAGE TO HENRI SAUGUET On June 8, 1989, exactly two weeks before his death following a long illness, Henry Sauguet’s music was presented in a concert sponsored by the Dosne-Thiers Foundation, held at the Institut de France in Paris. Two of the performers, Billy Eidi, piano, and Jean-François Gardeil, baritone, had been featured in Milhaud works heard during the Festival of Ville d’Avray in 1987, and each has a compact disc of Milhaud works currently available. (See below.)

Performed on June 8th were Sauguet’s Sonate en Deux Chants (1972) for clarinet and piano, Philippe Laforêt, clarinetist, Billy Eidi at the piano for the entire program; Sonatine (1924) for flute and piano, Daniel Florens, flute; Petites Valses (1973), two volumes of pieces for piano; and Visions Infinerales (1948) for voice and piano, Jean-François Gardeil, voice. The works are varied in style, and all were performed lyrically and musically by the executants.

Billy Eidi has recorded Milhaud piano works, L’Automne, Sonatine, Four Sketches and Sonate N° 1 on compact disc EMS CRN SBCD 5400 DDD. Jean-François Gardeil is heard in Le Pauvre Matelot, Cybélia CY 810 DDD, compact disc.

BOLCOM OPERA COMMISSION William Bolcom, musical composition Pulitzer Prize winner for 1988, and former student of Darius Milhaud at Mills College and in Paris, has been commissioned by Chicago’s Lyric Opera to write an opera for performance during the 1992-1993 season, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Based on the story “McTeague” by Frank Norris, much of the action takes place in San Francisco about 1899. Librettists are Robert Altman and Arnold Weinstein, and Dennis Russell Davies will conduct. Soprano Catherine Malifitano and tenor Ben Heppner will perform principal roles.

Mr. Bolcom is also filling other commissions. Two are scheduled for 1990-91: Casino Paradise for the American Music Festival in Philadelphia (with Mr. Weinstein as librettist) and a 40-minute curtain-raiser opera on Mozart’s librettist Lorenzo da Ponti, to be performed by New York City Opera on the Mostly Mozart Festival, Chicago’s Grant Park summer series, and the Mozart Festival in San Luis Obispo, California. In addition he has a symphonic commission scheduled for 1993.

MILHAUD ASSOCIATION MEETS The Association des Amis de l’Oeuvre de Darius Milhaud held its annual meeting at the Conservatoire Darius Milhaud in Paris on June 23, 1989. Two sonatinas for flute and piano were heard, performed by Daniel Florens, flute, and Billy Eidi, piano. The pair played Milhaud’s Sonatine, Op. 76 (1922), and that of Henri Sauguet who helped organize the Association and served as President until his recent death.

The Darius Milhaud Society was deeply saddened to learn of the death on June 22, 1989 of composer Henri Sauguet, close friend of Darius and Madeleine Milhaud since the 1920s. In addition to being President of the Association des Amis de l’Oeuvre de Darius Milhaud, Mr. Sauguet was head of the jury for the Prix Darius Milhaud competition sponsored annually since 1984 by the Société Marseillaise de Crédit, and was a member of the Honorary Committee of the Darius Milhaud Society.

The Milhaud Society has received the information that John Donald Robb, Emeritus Dean at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, died in January at age 96. Dean Robb studied with Darius Milhaud at Mills College in 1950. Turning to music after a career in law, Dean Robb wrote nearly 100 surviving works ranging from symphonies to small ensemble pieces. The Composer’s Symposium held at UNM in March was dedicated to his memory and included one of his works.

The Milhaud Society has the pleasure of announcing that Dr. Andrew White, baritone, is the 1989 recipient of the Darius Milhaud Award. He received this distinction at the commencement exercises of the Cleveland Institute of Music on May 13th, when he also graduated with a Master’s degree in voice. Mr. White, a student of George Vassos at CIM, also holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Case Western Reserve University, with a minor in theatre. He appeared in Lyric Opera Cleveland’s production of Don Giovanni in July, and has had previous experience in opera, music theatre and plays. Mr. White is currently an Artist Diploma candidate at CIM.

RIETI PROFILE Vittorio Rieti, Italian composer born in Egypt and long-time friend of the Milhauds, was featured in “Profile”, written by Suzannah Lessard for the New Yorker magazine of January 9, 1989. The sympathetic portrayal of the 95 year old composer includes much information about Paris in the 1920s, when Mr. Rieti also became acquainted with Darius Milhaud. They had many friends in common during those years, and when World War II forced both men into exile in the United States, they each lived in the California Bay area, where Daniel Milhaud and Fabio Rieti, respective sons, both of whom are painters now living in Paris, became acquainted. The families have remained close friends to the present day, and Mr. Rieti, a resident of New York, visits Paris annually.

The Milhaud Society is deeply saddened to acknowledge the death of Virgil Thomson on September 30th. Mr. Thomson was an inventive composer who wrote varied works, including operas and music for films. He was for many years a perceptive, witty and acerbic critic for The New York Herald Tribune. His new book, Music With Words, is due out the press on October 18. A close friend of the Milhauds for many years, Mr. Thomson was a member of the Honorary Committee and a contributor to the Darius Milhaud Society.

FLUTE SONATINE FEATURED Duo Linos — Yaada Cottingham Weber, flute and Philip Manwell, piano — presented Milhaud’s Sonatine, Op. 76 (1922) at the American Church in Geneva, Switzerland on September 27th. This opportunity arose through selection of Duo Linos by international audition for sponsorship by New York-based Concerts Atlantique. Mrs. Weber is an alumna and prize-winning former Milhaud student at Mills College. She and Mr. Manwell also played the Sonatine at Feather River Camp in Quincy, California on August 16th. The Webers with Mr. Manwell enjoyed tea with Madame Milhaud in Paris as they returned to the U.S. after their Geneva concert.
HOMAGE TO PAUL COLLÆR - A concert of music was presented in homage to Paul Collãer on February 12, 1989, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Palace of Fine Arts in Brussels, Belgium. Mr. Collãer has long been known as a friend of Darius Milhaud and a strong proponent for 20th-century music. The program opened with Milhaud's Symphony No. 8, the "Rhodanienne", performed by the Philharmonic Orchestra of Liège and the French Community, conducted by Pierre Bartholomé. Mr. Bartholomé, who with Henri Pousseur founded the Belgian Musical Research Center, has been since 1977 a professor at the Brussels Conservatory, and has led the Orchestra in concerts over most of Europe, in Canada and in the U.S.

Included in the program booklet was part of a letter written to Mr. Collãer by Darius Milhaud on May 42, 1921, in which he said: "I have confidence in you because I feel you understand my music far beyond technical details. This is so rare, very precious and reassuring..." In the same booklet, Mme. Milhaud is quoted as saying in January 1989: "For more than half a century, Paul Collãer has not been content only to like and discover contemporary music, he has defended and presented it to the public with tenacity and courage..."

In his description of Paul Collãer, who pursued music as an avocation even while he studied for a doctorate in chemistry, and who has served as an organizer and performer of unfamiliar music of all eras, R. Wangermé, President of the Council of Music of the French Community said: "Fortunately, shortly after Paul Collãer left off his duties as a chemistry professor... he became in 1937 the Director of Belgian radio. He mounted [radio performances of] Milhaud's Les Euménides, Les Chœphores, Christophe Colomb, ... and himself conducted a number of works... In 1953 he was designated President of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies, founded in Berlin by UNESCO. In 1955 the International Prize for music [was given him] by UNESCO at the same time as to Olivier Messiaen and Wanda Landowska..."

Paul Collãer for fifteen years organized concerts by the Pro Arte Quartet, and wrote the books La Musique Moderne, Darius Milhaud, Strawinsky, Les Six, and other studies on ethnomusical topics. About Darius Milhaud he wrote:

The art of Darius Milhaud is free from systems. The ideas of his work flow forth with an urgent pressure in a complex where poetic idea, the melodic sense, the technical means are so intimately blended that one could never dream of separating them. In Milhaud's prolific production there are no contradictions. His art does not digest onto capricious by-paths. It follows one track; it advances, sometimes taking the aspect of a refreshing stream, but more often resembling a torrent of burning lava that burns to ashes whatever it finds in its path. It is an art which does not ask for concessions, and which concedes nothing, that one accepts or one flees from. But whoever flees it [does so] for fear of what it contains, of what it reveals. If you accept it, you are enthralled by it, moved to the depths of your soul.

This art is ruled by certainty, by a particular way of thinking and conceiving of the world. This music doesn't exist for the satisfaction of its own beauty or to divert us. Its essence is neither sonorous nor pictorial nor literary. Milhaud's music is not objective, but spiritual — of a religious essence. It links up all things by virtue of human sensibility. It makes objects, plants, animals, individual men themselves, the witnesses of the interminable and invariable drama of Man. It is not only Man and His Desire that carries that title; Milhaud's entire output could be entitled thus, singing of the sadness of man over the impossibility of happiness, his regret for a perfection he will not attain, and his reaching toward God, toward all perfection, toward consolation, toward the Spirit in which all is resolved and simplified....

The vision of Milhaud concerns the universality of life, independent of the individual. Not at all romantic, where man proposes himself to himself as his own end, but exaltation of the vital strength of man, that he uses to conquer and raise himself above the sadness which is his companion, in an act of grace where he celebrates the Creator and his creatures.

The art of Milhaud is profoundly French in its rationality. It says what it has to say, using the best musical means and without prolixity. Besides an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration is found this Cartesian attitude of thought that operates like a filter to control and channel the torrent of imagination. The work may be very long, full-bodied — it will always be concise.

The Darius Milhaud Society is very grateful to Madame Madeleine Milhaud for sending an archive copy of the program honoring Paul Collãer.

MILHAUD CONCERT AT MILLS - On Sunday April 16, 1989, the Milhaud Collection Archive Endowment of Mills College presented its second annual free public concert of Milhaud's music to an enthusiastic audience in Haas Pavilion on the College campus. The program was planned with the assistance of Randy McKean, graduate student in music composition, who assisted Eva Konrad with the Milhaud Collection Archive during academic year 1988-89.

The program opened with Chansons Bas, Op. 44 (1917), texts by Mallarmé, sung by Mills alumna Amy Neuberg with Belle Bulwinkle of the Music Department faculty at the piano. The eight song texts deal with working occupations, such as The Cobbler, The Road Builder, The Merchant of Garlic and Onions, for example. Although the songs vary in length, all are brief. Ms. Neuberg enunciated understandably and sang with a clear pure tone in spite of suffering a cold, and Ms. Bulwinkle provided sensitive, musical, well-shaped accompaniments. Ms. Neuberg also sang a song collection, Lusions, by Erik Satie, who was closely associated with Les Six for the two years of their existence.

Milhaud's String Quartet No. 10, Op. 218 (1940), the first of three quartets commissioned by Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, was performed by Suzanne Beia and Susan Wong, violins, Meg Eldridge, viola and Gwyneth Davis, cello. This work, partly written on shipboard while the Milhauds were crossing the Atlantic to seek refuge in the U.S. after the Nazis overran France, is in four movements, with the slow movement as third in the sequence. Introduced by repeated dissonant chords in a brief motif that might suggest the blowing of a foghorn, the entire movement is rather funereal, not an atypical aspect, since five or more of Milhaud's quartet slow movements suggest tragedy. The last movement of No. 10 is in decided contrast, with vigorous rhythms, lyrical melodies and an affirming ending chord. Although the players sounded tentative in the first movement, they settled in to give a well-defined interpretation of the remainder.

Ending work was La Création du Monde, Op. 81 (1923) played on two pianos by Judith Rosenberg of the Music faculty and alumna Betty Woo, danced by the Tandy Beal Dancers. Before the music began, dancers Tim Harling, Scott Marsh, Kathleen McClintock, Wayland Quintero, Ellen Sevy and Sara Wilbourne held a white sheet onto which were projected slides featuring Tandy Beal, and then a miniature house that became covered by overgrown lush vegetation.

The dancers were costumed in black leotards with trim of patterned tan half-skirts on the women, matched by neckties of the same fabric on the men. Tandy Beal, whose movements are lithe and supple, "activated" each dancer, after which the ensemble moved as couples and all together. The choreography followed the changing rhythms, tempo and moods of the music, the dancers were adequately prepared and the ensemble showed fine precision.

The enthusiastic audience included members of the Susan and Cyrus Mills Society, who met for a reception following the concert at the home of Mills President Mary Metz. Many former Milhaud students and friends as well as College faculty and staff were in attendance.
MILHAUD PERFORMANCES IN AIX-EN-PROVENCE

As part of the festival Aix en Musique '89, a series of events entitled Hommage à Darius Milhaud took place in Aix-en-Provence, Milhaud's boyhood home, on June 15 and 17. Under the direction of Robert Lichter, students from the Académie Supérieure de Musique de Detmold (a town of around 3000 in northern Germany about half way between Münster and Hannover) presented a varied program of Milhaud's music on June 15, much of which was repeated on June 17.

Earlier on June 15, a conference on Darius Milhaud was held under the shade trees in the pleasant courtyard of the Hotel Maynier d'Oppède, a 15th century building on the street Gaston de Saporita near the Cathédrale de San Sauveur. Participating were Madame Madeleine Milhaud, Mr. Lichter and Gabriel Vialle, journalist for the Marseille newspaper La Marseillaise. Madame Milhaud answered questions about Milhaud's work, and there were occasional questions and comments from the audience.

In the late afternoon, Mr. Vialle presented an illustrated talk with musical examples, in the same courtyard of the Hotel, which now serves as the University of Aix-Marseille for foreign students. Mr. Vialle chose many recorded excerpts of Milhaud's music, including Suite Provençale, Deux Poèmes d'Amour, L'Hommte et Son Désir, Marche Funèbre from Quatuorze de Juillet, La Création du Monde, Carnaval d'Aix, Le Pauvre Matelot, Les Choéphores and La Cheminée du Roi René. Key ideas from Milhaud's autobiography Ma Vie Heureuse were quoted, and the speaker commented on the evening program selections.

At the evening program, Mr. Vialle gave oral program notes before the performances. The opening work was Cent Cinquant Mésures, Op. 400 (1962), the fanfare commissioned by the publisher Heugel to celebrate their 150th anniversary in business. Also performed by students of the Académie was the wind quintet La Cheminée du Roi René in a musical performance. La Création du Monde, Op. 81 (1923) was conducted by Robert Lichter, who organized the program and helped prepare the performances. The student players enjoyed the jazzy rhythms, and even though the conscientious percussionist was heavy-footed with the bass drum, balances in general allowed the music to sound. The players were seated on three-tiered risers spaced in a semi-circle. Placement of high winds, percussion and saxophone to the left, middle-tessitura winds in the center and strings to the right gave spatial assistance to balance of ensemble. An important aspect of such a student performance is the exposure to this music, not only through hearing it, but also through experiencing the preparation and performance.

Final performance of the evening was staging of the Trois Opéras-Minute: L'Abduction d'Europa, Op. 94, L'Abandon d'Ariane, Op. 98 and La Délibération de Thésée Op. 99, all written in 1927 for Hindemith's Baden-Baden Festival. The risers served as sets, and the singers were dressed in Grecian-style costumes and wigs. The three presentations were given with good spirits and humor (even slapstick in the seduction scene of La Délibération...), and the singing was excellent — open, lyrical, and, for the most part, well developed.

These performances differed sharply from the professional production of the Opéras-Minute at the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris during 1982, (recorded by Arion ARN 32780), in which the singers stood on two sides of the stage, while dancers mimed the action. The 1982 performances were interesting, imaginative and serious; the student performances in Aix were fresh, simple, and clear in regard to the story action.

The Milhaud program of June 15th was performed in a building that formerly had been the site of a match factory, across the courtyard from the Bibliothèque Méjanes, a centuries-old and famous library of Aix. Being used for concerts for the first time, installed with bleacher seats, and with end walls covered by dark blue velvet curtains, the room was visually converted into a hall. Lighting was simple but satisfactory. Imagination and musical expressiveness, essential for any enjoyable performance, were in evidence.

FESTIVAL MEDEA IN CLEVELAND

From May 4th through 25th, nine events in Cleveland featured the Medea legend in plays, films, lectures and panel discussion, culminating in the first performances in new English translation of Milhaud's opera Médée (Medea). Sponsored by the Darius Milhaud Society and presented with the assistance of The Cleveland Institute of Music, Case Western Reserve University, The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Cleveland Institute of Art through Cleveland Cinematheque, Cleveland State University and Baldwin Wallace College, the festival featured dramatization of five different versions of the Medea story from classic Euripides to Black Medea, set in New Orleans in 1810 with use of voodoo ritual. Madame Madeleine Milhaud, honored guest artist, gave a lecture on Milhaud's operas, and scholars discussed the implications of Medea in literature, drama and music. Below are brief summaries of these events.

BLACK MEDEA Opening Festival Medea on May 4 was the play Black Medea, presented in Cleveland-area premiere in a student production at Baldwin-Wallace College, directed by alumnus Ken Lowstetter. By Jesuit priest Ernest Ferlita, the play is based on the Euripides drama, but is set in New Orleans in 1810, following the Haitian revolution. The Greek chorus of three women, led by the nurse, danced and sang to voodoo rhythms played by three percussionists, including Len Luri, one of the original ensemble who created the prize-winning New York production.

Although the characters are renamed, the story holds true to tradition with a danced hexing scene to symbolize the killing of the unfortunate new bride and the use of red laser lighting to represent the penetration of the poison into her body. The production was imaginative and well-coordinated, and the students performed commendably. The nurse's song after Medea's escape following the death of the children was especially effective.

ROBINSON JEFFERS' MEDEA Produced for television in 1982, this film is based on the 1947 Jeffers play produced in New York starring Judith Anderson and John Gielgud. In the film Zoe Caldwell plays Medea and Judith Anderson the nurse. Jeffers freely adapted the Euripides play, adding his own imagery. The result is a powerful and moving film that takes advantage of film techniques and at the same time projects clearly as a filmed play. Both actresses gave bravura performances. To the Medea role Ms. Caldwell brought power and depth as an obsessed, tormented woman, and in Ms. Anderson's heartbroken recouting of the deaths of Creusa and Creon, she created one of the most memorable and moving moments of her career. David Amram's music for the film sounds competent, but is present only occasionally and is sometimes obvious to the point of banality. One wishes for more consistent pacing and greater subtlety.
 AppDelegate abstractly with a minimum of fuss. Set changes, altered lighting reflected the emotional tone of each scene - a creative solution to the necessity of suggesting standards were moved about by chorus members to symbolize ominous. Eugene Hare's costumes and set props were appropriate, and his lighting gave depth and shifting coloration to Creusa began to experience the burning sensation of the robe.

The complexity of Medea's character is admirably expressed in Milhaud's music, and Ms. Shelton, singing opera in Cleveland for the first time, was equal to the challenge. The entire second act consists of Medea's invocation to Hecate, structurally like the slow movement of a symphony in three parts. The atmosphere is lyrical, evocative, quasi-religious, and exceptionally beautiful, with Medea's sustained vocal line supported by deep soft chords in the contra-bassoon and other low-pitched winds. Ms. Shelton made this scene quite magical and one of the most effective of the evening.

The entire opera contains moments of intense lyricism and high drama, well-handled by Quentin Quereau (Jason), Edward Payne (Creon), Susan Wallin (Creusa) and Deborah Dunn (nurse). Trained by Assistant Conductor Jerry Maddox with assistance by Karen Wilberg, the chorus (Kate Bill, Shari Clapper, Jennifer Cochran, Timothy Cochran, Houston Dunleavy, Anne Foradori, Steven Green, Lynnette Guttmann, Brent Johnson, Roseanna Keough, Harvey Krage, Deborah Lewis, Michelle Robinson, James Schuster and Richard Tuomala) was outstanding. Many of their words were easily understood, and they functioned as citizens, set-movers and observers, in addition to singing.

The orchestra played well under the capable leadership of Conductor Jean-Louis Le Roux, who paced the opera with a sure understanding of Milhaud's music and with fine sensitivity for balance and dynamics. Stage Director Elizabeth Bachman succeeded very well in suitting the action to the subject matter and avoiding interruption of the flow, a vital point, since the scenes are continuous, as is the music. Certain key movements enhanced the emotional depth, such as having Medea enter the side apron of the stage with her lighted taper when Creusa began to experience the burning sensation of the robe. Medea's unobtrusive presence made Creusa's plight far more ominous. Eugene Hare's costumes and set props were appropriate, and his lighting gave depth and shifting coloration to the metallic panels on standards that served as scenery. As the standards were moved about by chorus members to symbolize set changes, altered lighting reflected the emotional tone of each scene - a creative solution to the necessity of suggesting locales abstractly with a minimum of fuss.

The production of Milhaud's Medea was the recipient of a cultural award by Northern Ohio LIVE, a monthly magazine produced in Cleveland, which in its May issue ran a feature story by Rice Hershay about Festival Medea.

At the awards dinner, broadcast live over station WCLV, the three Founding Trustees were each given a plaque reading: "In recognition of outstanding contributions to the quality of life in this region, the publishers and editors of Northern Ohio LIVE Magazine present their 1988-1989 award of Achievement in Opera, on this 25th day of September, 1989.

SENECA'S MEDEA It was fortuitous that Professor James Barthelmess of Cleveland State University chose to mount the Seneca Medea in his new English translation, since Madame Madeleine Milhaud's French libretto for Milhaud's opera Medea draws frequently on the Seneca imagery.

The Seneca drama was presented in Cleveland State's Studio Theatre with the parts of Medea (Harper Jane McAdoo), Jason (Wayne S. Turney) and Nurse (Rebecca Fischer) read from behind a wall extending half a story above stage level. The chorus (students selected from a Barthelmess Classics class) spoke and moved together on stage level, and provided the only motion in the drama. Directed and effectively lighted by Eugene Hare, they gave rhythmic and visual shape to the play. Ms. McAdoo stressed the untamed and evil aspects of Medea, Mr. Turney presented a bewildered Jason, and Ms. Fischer made a sympathetic character of the nurse.

MARI CALLAS IN MEDEA Made in Europe, this film begins with the childhood of Jason and follows his boyhood, including the legend of his rearing by a centaur. Much early footage is given to ritual enactments that appear to have been filmed in Greece using locals, thus giving a strong sense of folk superstition along with fascinating landscape shots.

Maria Callas plays Medea but does not sing. She acts creditably and is often affecting. Pacing of the film varies, often seeming glacially slow, and is flawed by repetition of Creusa's death in two versions. In spite of its limitations, to see the film once is worthwhile.

MEDEA DISCUSSED AT ART MUSEUM Hosted by The Cleveland Museum of Art on May 20, 1989, different aspects and implications of the Medea myth were discussed by scholars and artists. Classics professor at Case Western Reserve University Peter Bing opened the session by describing classical treatments of the myth in Greek and Roman literature, followed by Walter Strauss, Chairman of Modern Languages and Literature and Treuhaft Professor at CWRU. Dr. Strauss, Moderator for the panel discussion, gave an ongoing description of times and authors dealing with the Medea story. Klaus Roy, recently retired long-time program annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra and a composer, talked about and played examples from musical settings of the Medea story, including Milhaud's opera, Samuel Barber's ballet and Edmund Kurtz's suite. Elizabeth Bachman, Stage Director for the Cleveland production of Milhaud's opera, described her insights and understanding of the motivations for characters in the story and stimulated responses from other speakers as well as the audience.

BARTHELMESS CONTRIBUTIONS Dr. James Barthelmess, Director of Classical and Medieval Studies at Cleveland State University, not only translated Seneca's Medea into English for presentation in Festival Medea, but also created a Prologue for presentation preceding the performances of Milhaud's opera Medea on May 24 and 25. Dolores Lairet (Medea) and Randolph Wines (Jason) read their poetic lines detailing story background in evening dress on-stage. Dr. Barthelmess was also instrumental in engaging Dr. Peter Bing for participation in the panel discussion of May 19, and invited Dr. Martin Helzle to give the lecture presented on May 22. The Milhaud Society extends warmest gratitude to Dr. Barthelmess for his generous participation in Festival Medea.
How and why did Darius Milhaud choose a libretto - what dictated his choice? It was dependent on many things. Sometimes he chose - sometimes he was chosen. Fate worked also in his favor. But it was always for him a great pleasure to compose an opera. He loved poetry and was always interested in human beings, their behavior and their feelings.

I suppose that every young musician who thinks that he is a composer or hopes to become one writes a symphony or an opera. At least it was the case of young artists before the intrusion of electronic instruments or the computer. It is not surprising that Darius Milhaud wrote an opera Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, named after a little harbor town in the Camargue in the south of France, where he used to go often. Two saints and their black servant Sarah are supposed to have landed there. They were honored, and Sarah became the patron saint of the gypsies, who were numerous at that time. Every year on May 25th, the gypsies still go on a pilgrimage to Saintes Maries de la Mer. Milhaud's libretto was by Eric Allatini, his cousin. After composing and orchestrating his whole opera, Milhaud burned these 600 pages, as well as youthful compositions written before 1911. By that time he was a composition student and knew better, but he neither forgot Les Saintes Maries de la Mer nor the gypsies.

Darius was always fascinated by poetry. His two first opuses are songs. Some of them are inspired by Francis Jammes' poems. This writer impressed him. Jammes was fed up with impressionism and preciosity and a certain sophisticated jargon. Jammes used simple words such as tables, shoes, umbrella, and expressed the deepest feeling with simplicity. When Milhaud read Jammes' play, he decided to use it as a libretto. Francis Jammes agreed.

The action of Jammes' play La Brébis Égarée is entirely internal and lends itself to a musical setting that is totally lyrical - a lyricism which probes deeply into the innermost souls of people and things. The story subject is simple: Paul's wife Françoise is a devoted mother and intelligent woman, but she admires Paul's friend - a composer - and the two lovers elope and go away to Spain in Burgos. They are poor, tortured by remorse. Then Françoise becomes sick and undergoes surgery. Her husband sends her a letter pardoning her behavior, and he says that the whole family expects her to return. She does, and the lost lamb is met with love and tenderness.

I do not know if 20 years later Milhaud would have been attracted by that play, but in 1910 he was very moved by the whole situation, and by those straightforward and modest characters.

The relationships between Darius and the libretto authors are sometimes exceptionally easy. [La Brébis Égarée] was already known in France as a stage play. I am always astonished when I think that a famous author accepted the idea that a student could use his play as a libretto — it happened though, and in 1910 Darius began to write his first dramatic work, completed at the beginning of the First World War.

When he finished the first act, he visited the poet in order to play it for him. Jammes and his wife seemed delighted. They were eager to hear other compositions, so Darius sang and played his Poèmes de la Connaissance de l'Est, which are songs on Claudel's text. Jammes knew Claudel very well. He wrote him about Darius, and one day Darius received a letter from Frankfurt where Claudel was Consul to say that he would visit Darius very soon. I can well imagine Milhaud's excitement. Claudel was the writer he admired the most. Darius had bought all Claudels' books, and with his friend Armand Lunel read plays every Sunday afternoon, but he had never imagined that he would meet Claudel.

After Claudel heard Milhaud's interpretation of his poems, he cried, "How manly it is!" and began to speak about the Oresteia that he was translating. He needed music for scenes in which the text became so intensively lyrical that it called for musical expression, and he thought that Darius would be the right man to do it. This is how their collaboration began. They didn't realize it would last all their lives.

Claudel was an exceptional collaborator — he did not mind whether or not his words were heard. He accepted cuts in the text if it was necessary. If Milhaud needed a text, Claudel was always ready to write one for him, and vice versa. Sometimes Claudel made some suggestions, but if Milhaud didn't agree with Claudel's ideas, he just ignored them. I don't suppose it satisfied Claudel, but he never mentioned it.

Of course neither La Brébis Égarée nor the Oresteia were librettos, properly speaking. There are three different plays in the Oresteia. For Agamemnon Milhaud wrote one scene only: for Les Choéphores lengthy incidental music, and for Les Euménides, a complete three-act opera. When the Oresteia is performed in concerts or staged as it was in Berlin, the music is played alone without the words, and as the scenes chosen by Milhaud explain the action perfectly, the spoken text is not necessary in this case.

For Agamemnon Claudel wanted music only when Clytemnestra comes out of the palace after killing Agamemnon, still holding the blood-stained axe, when she encounters the chorus of old men. Milhaud hated the intrusion of a musical phrase while the actors are speaking. He wanted a transition from speech to song. The music is static, undisturbed by any kind of psychological tension.

For Les Choéphores he tried to find the most appropriate and simple way possible to convey a feeling of tragedy. He chose several passages to be sung rather than spoken. There are seven musical sections, lasting about thirty minutes.

Darius and Madeleine Milhaud with Fred Schiller, designer of the set for Médée at Mills College in 1963. Photo by Don Jones
Strictly speaking, *Les Choéphores* is not an opera. Milhaud names it "musique de théâtre." He chose a few scenes where music seemed adequate to express his ideas. Two scenes have such a violent character that they created a problem which he solved by having the words spoken in time with the music by a woman narrator, while the chorus uttered words or disjointed phrases. He indicated the rhythm but not the pitch, and these elements were supported by percussion instruments. I must tell you that after the first performance the audience was so surprised and enthusiastic that the piece had to be repeated. I think that Darius was the first composer to use percussion as he did. There are a few scenes with voice and percussion in *Les Eumenides*, but not treated the same way.

*Les Eumenides* begins with a priestess intoning a prayer of homage to deities from whom she derives her power. A discreet muted background of percussion accompanies her. After Orestes kills his mother, he flees because the Furies are seeking to punish him. Apollo advises Orestes to take refuge elsewhere, and he reaches a little temple in which there is an old statue of Athena. Milhaud has written Athena's part for three female voices. The soprano declaims the text, the mezzo and contralto provide a wordless counterpoint. Athena decides to bring Orestes' plight before a panel of godly judges. The trial begins, with Orestes on one side with Apollo, and the Furies on the other. The issue is put to a vote, and the count is evenly divided. Athena votes for Orestes, tipping the balance in his favor, and Orestes is acquitted. The Furies refuse to accept the decision and are ready to punish the city, but Athena wisely invites them to stay and promises that they will be loved and honored as *Les Eumenides*, which means the gracious ones. The citizens celebrate with a grand procession, and finally Athena and *Les Eumenides* join in singing with the others a jubilant hymn in praise of the gods, mankind and nature.

After taking five years to compose *Les Eumenides*, Milhaud was ready to turn to something quite different. The Princess of Polignac was an excellent musician and commissioned several works (such as Stravinsky's *Renard*, Falla's *El Retablo*, and others). In 1924 she asked Milhaud to write a work for her. Orpheus' desolation after Eurydice's death had long occupied Milhaud's thoughts. For years he had been haunted by the idea of composing an Orpheus drama, but he wanted a human Orpheus, a simple fellow of the south. He asked Armand Lunel to write a libretto, and it turned out to be perfect — concise and lyrical at the same time. Milhaud had very explicit ideas for that work, and Lunel did exactly what Milhaud wished. Orpheus is a folk doctor — he heals human beings as well as animals. Eurydice is a young gypsy who breaks the law of her people to join Orpheus whom she loves. It is dangerous for her, so the couple seek refuge among the wild beasts who are all friends of Orpheus. Unfortunately Eurydice becomes deathly ill. Orpheus is powerless to save her. She dies, and the animals carry her body away. Desperate, Orpheus returns to his home, where he is alone with his sorrow. Eurydice's three sisters accuse him of their sister's death and kill him. He dies stretching out his arms towards Eurydice, and the lovers are reunited in death.

The libretto is beautifully balanced, and the action is brief and dramatic. *Les Malheurs d'Orphée* is Milhaud's first chamber opera, written for 17 instruments, and instead of a chorus, Darius uses a vocal quartet. *Les Malheurs d'Orphée* and *Le Pauvre Matelot* are probably Milhaud's most popular operas, and the first in a series of chamber operas that he wrote.

Armand Lunel had written a comedy inspired by old family stories and an 18th-century play in Jewish dialect from the county of Avignon. Lunel's play had just been published, and Milhaud found it an ideal subject for a comic opera. The scene is laid in Carpentras before the Revolution of 1789. The Jews live among the wild beasts who are all friends of Orpheus. Unfortunately Eurydice becomes deathly ill. Orpheus is powerless to save her. She dies, and the animals carry her body away. Desperate, Orpheus returns to his home, where he is alone with his sorrow. Eurydice's three sisters accuse him of their sister's death and kill him. He dies stretching out his arms towards Eurydice, and the lovers are reunited in death.

The libretto is beautifully balanced, and the action is brief and dramatic. *Les Malheurs d'Orphée* is Milhaud's first chamber opera, written for 17 instruments, and instead of a chorus, Darius uses a vocal quartet. *Les Malheurs d'Orphée* and *Le Pauvre Matelot* are probably Milhaud's most popular operas, and the first in a series of chamber operas that he wrote.

After taking five years to compose *Les Eumenides*, Milhaud was ready to turn to something quite different. The Princess of Polignac was an excellent musician and commissioned several works (such as Stravinsky's *Renard*, Falla's *El Retablo*, and others). In 1924 she asked Milhaud to write a work for her. Orpheus' desolation after Eurydice's death had long occupied Milhaud's thoughts. For years he had been haunted by the idea of composing an Orpheus drama, but he wanted a human Orpheus, a simple fellow of the south. He asked Armand Lunel to write a libretto, and it turned out to be perfect — concise and lyrical at the same time. Milhaud had very explicit ideas for that work, and Lunel did exactly what Milhaud wished. Orpheus is a folk doctor — he heals human beings as well as animals. Eurydice is a young gypsy who breaks the law of her people to join Orpheus whom she loves. It is dangerous for her, so the couple seek refuge among the wild beasts who are all friends of Orpheus. Unfortunately Eurydice becomes deathly ill. Orpheus is powerless to save her. She dies, and the animals carry her body away. Desperate, Orpheus returns to his home, where he is alone with his sorrow. Eurydice's three sisters accuse him of their sister's death and kill him. He dies stretching out his arms towards Eurydice, and the lovers are reunited in death.

The next opera happened to be a long one. Milhaud began to compose what could be called historical operas — *Christophe Colomb*, *Maximilien*, *Bolivar*, *David*, *St. Louis*. Claudel was asked to write a libretto on Corneille's play *Le Cid* for a chorographic divertissement. He refused to treat such an enormous subject in a few lines, although it was supposed to be given at the Court of the King of Spain. In 1927, a Spanish painter, Sert, suggested the subject to Reinhard, who was a famous director, for a show or a film with the music of Richard Strauss. This idea appealed more to Claudel, but he suggested Darius Milhaud as the composer on the strength of having worked with him so often.
Christophe Colomb was exactly the type of work that appealed to Darius. Claude’s play gave the possibility to compose lyrical vocal passages for the singers and the chorus — rhythmic declaimed speeches and especially the opportunity to describe an exceptional human being in expressing his feelings through music.

The message of the play is that Christopher Columbus is a great man because he united the world and thereby made it possible for Christianity to triumph over paganism. Columbus (his name in French means dove: colombe) is symbolic of the Holy Ghost.

Since Milhaud has always chosen melody as the real means of portraying human drama, his whole work is lyrical. Claude has excellent ideas. He imagines a Reader who enumerates Columbus’ adventures to a Chorus of auditors who react constantly to the account and sometimes participate in the action.

We see in one scene Christopher Columbus as a very old man, ready to die, then in another he is a young sailor. Later he faces skeptical courtesans. Finally as the captain of the ship trying to prove that the earth is a sphere, Christopher Columbus is a victim of envy and whipped by the fury of men. There is also a second Christopher Columbus, who watches the action. He represents the famous Christopher Columbus who remains in our memory. Now we are accustomed to seeing playback in the movies, but in 1928 that effect was absolutely new. Claude imagined using movie film during certain scenes. The action on the screen was a little different from the action on the stage. It was not another description of a fact. It was another interpretation of the idea.

Claude’s libretto suited Milhaud perfectly. He wrote to a friend: “The tremendous diversity of the scenes and the enormous rhythmic drive that animates the entire drama make it an absolutely fascinating challenge. I have a whole lot of ideas that will make it easy to produce. It is amazing how each work makes one turn one’s back on all previous ones and find the special vocabulary that the new one requires.”

The first performance took place in Berlin in 1930. It was quite successful and played again the following year. It has been staged in Hamburg, Buenos Aires, Rome, Graz, San Francisco, Marseille etc. It has also been presented in concert form many times.

Maximilien is the next historic opera. Did Milhaud choose this subject, or was it Fate? On our return trip from the United States in 1927, Milhaud read a book by a Belgian officer about the Mexican expedition. Darius did not know much about these events previously. He was struck by the timorous character of Maximilian of Hapsburg, who was thrown into a tragic adventure by his ambitious wife and by Napoleon III, who forced him to occupy a throne in a country unknown to him.

As soon as we were back in Paris, we saw at the book store a new book — memoirs of Count Corti who had been Ambassador to Mexico at the same period as Maximilian’s stay. We bought it, of course. Then we went to Brussels for a concert. The king’s Aunt Charlotte, the widow of Maximilian, had just passed away. In the newspaper there were pictures and details about the tragic adventure of Mexico and Carlotta. We left for Vienna to spend a few days with Milhaud’s publisher and found that Franz Werfel had written a successful play inspired by the same facts. Darius met him, to discover that Werfel had just received a rough translation in French of his play. So you see, Milhaud could not escape, and he didn’t.

Based on historical facts, the plot is about the Hapsburg Archduke Maximilian, who after many intrigues becomes the Emperor of Mexico. He is not shrewd enough to be a politician, but weak and dominated by his ambitious wife Carlotta. The strongest presence in the drama is Juarez, President of the Mexican Republic, though he is never seen on stage. The guerillas loyal to Juarez drain the resources of the insufficiently armed expeditionary forces, and neither Napoleon III nor the Pope will help. Maximilian will stay, remaining faithfully at his post until he is shot.
them to the fate of their own ancestors. Lunel managed to introduce in his libretto most of the important events of David’s life. Darius did not write “difficult” music. He didn’t want it to become a problem for the Israelis to perform. However, David’s part is very long. He has to be on stage most of the time.

We heard David in Jerusalem. It was a very moving performance. We also saw it in Milan, with an absolutely theatrical atmosphere, and finally we saw it as a pageant in the Hollywood Bowl.

The last historical opera is St. Louis, Roi de France. It was commissioned by the French Minister of Cultural Affairs as a commemoration of the seven-hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. Louis. Henri Doublier made a selection of 13th-century texts for the dramatic part of the opera. Milhaud chose excerpts from two poems that Claudel had written about St. Louis.

The work is an opera-oratorio involving four characters. The action is carried by the soloists and by a madrigal group of sixteen singers who have minor roles. They are accompanied by thirteen musicians on stage. The full orchestra and the chorus are in the pit, and they are heard only between scenes and at the end of each act. It was not premiered in France, but in Rio de Janeiro.

It is Darius who chose to write an opera on La Mère Coupa­ble, the third play by Beaumarchais. (The others are The Barber of Seville and The Marriage of Figaro.) The play is subtitled “The New Tartuffe”. Tartuffe is a character in a Molière play. He is a villain — dishonest — a liar who takes advantage of the weakness of an old man and is ready to ruin the whole family to gain his advantage. He is the character of Bégéars in the Beaumarchais play. The action takes place long after the marriage of Figaro. We find the same characters, but they have become older, some are wiser, others not, but always human. The fight is between Figaro and Bégéars. Figaro naturally wants to prevent Bégéars from creating absolute chaos for the family.

The only thing I did in creating the libretto was to reduce five long acts to three, speeding up the action. However, I never departed from the Beaumarchais text.

Milhaud only once chose a feminine character to be the center of one of his operas. That is in his opera Medea. He was attracted by the combination of love and horrifying cruelty. He wanted to depict a jealous character whose passion could drive her to crime, and Medea seemed to be the right choice for that.

He was commissioned by the French State to write an opera. It was summer time, with no writers around. Lunel was not in Aix, so Darius asked me to write the libretto. I tried my best to help him. Now the Milhaud Society has produced it, and you are all going to come, aren’t you?

COMMENTS

MARTA LE ROUX [Festival Medea has] certainly touched so many people . . . an unforgettable experience, from which all of us emerged enlightened, illuminated. . . . I sincerely hope for more gatherings like this one . . .

MURA KIEVMAN MAGER: . . . one of the highlights of my time at Mills College was taking part in the Mills production of “Médee” as one of the student choristers during the Festival which celebrated his 70th birthday. Being one of his students (I was a music major) was also a tremendous experience because he was a wonderfully warm and giving man . . . Prior to the Festival I had the opportunity to audition for Mr. Milhaud as a potential understudy in “Medea” and his comments to me after I sang for him were absolutely on target, so I know that here was one composer who knew a great deal about voice . . .

BARBARA ROWAN Jean-Louis Le Roux was a perfect conductor for Milhaud’s music. There was nothing to interfere with the music itself; it came out with total naturalness.

CONTENT SABLINSKY I enjoyed all aspects of Festival Medea, and how glad I was that I came . . . the opera was a smashing success.

The Milhaud Society thanks Paul Bunker for all photos taken at the Patron dinner and Peggy Campbell for photo development.
“I am not a musician nor a musicologist. I am of course interested in music and in all means of expressing feeling and ideas, embodied in the human adventure. When music is conveying a well-known myth, furthermore attainable through a libretto pleasant to read, I feel more at ease. On the other hand Madeleine and I are just coming to know each other a little more. So there is a paradox, but perhaps, there is also some reason for it.

I met Darius Milhaud and Madeleine for the first time some years ago, at a fine luncheon on the terrace of the friendly house of Martha and Frank Joseph. Paul, my husband, was the Representative of France in Cleveland. Because of his position, Martha seated me at Milhaud’s side. I was thrilled, as I knew so much about him and had never met him.

Martha introduced me very officially as Mrs. Wurzburger, the wife of the Honorary Consul General of France. Milhaud paid no attention to me. He was listening to a bird. When the lovely song faded away, I turned to Milhaud, mentioning shyly, ‘I am also Odette Valabrègue. Your grandmother was the cousin of my father.’ As the name was said, the picture on Milhaud’s face changed and lighted up. He talked to me kindly as somebody coming from his family, with ties to his grandmother, but also with Aix-en-Provence, Avignon, the Comtat Venaissin and more, the ghetto of Carpentras, which inspired in him the burlesque opera Esthé de Carpentras, based on a text by Armand Lunel, who had been a friend of Milhaud’s since childhood. By a decree of the ‘Assemblée Constitu­tionnelle’, dated January 28, 1790, the ghettos of the Comtat were opened. Before that time the city itself had belonged to the Popes, and the people of the city were reunited with France. As a result, in Avignon, the city where I was born, nobody could be recognized as more French than the Jews, and by the same token than myself.

Why has it taken so long for me to meet the Milhauds? It is very simple. At the time when Milhaud was breaking with the past in music, bursting into a new language, already belonging to the future, my very conventional, bourgeois family, the Comtadine branch, as well as the Parisian one, considered Darius Milhaud some kind of maverick, even a devil. And this is the reason for which I was so anxious to meet him, but I didn’t.

Now from the old roots, let me turn to Cleveland, where I begin to have roots too. Cleveland is a place of innovation. It is the blessing of this city to create and to bring new ventures to success. It is not necessary to make here a list of such achievements. Yes, the fate of Cleveland is really to break new ground. A new ground is the first night of Milhaud’s opera Medea, libretto by Madeleine Milhaud. English translation made under the auspices of the Darius Milhaud Society. The event is to be celebrated on May 24, preceding opening night of Milhaud’s opera Medea, a Patron Dinner welcomed local dignitaries as well as out-of-town guests. Included from other localities were Madame Marie-Charlotte Bolot, Cultural Attaché and Director of the Visual and Performing Arts Program for the French Embassy in New York, Grant Johannsen, international concert artist, former President of The Cleveland Institute of Music and an Honorary Trustee of the Milhaud Society, Professors Paul Cherry of the University of South Dakota, Anne Kish of the University of Virginia, Barbara Rowan of the University of North Carolina, and Content Sablinsky of the University of Virginia. Soprano, concert artist and Board member of the Kurt Weill Society, Anne Gresham came from Los Angeles. Honorary Trustees Vitya Vronsksy Babin and Odette Valabrègue Wurzburger were present, as were Advisory Board members President and Mrs. John A. Flower of Cleveland State University, Mr. and Mrs. Frank E. Joseph and others, along with the Festival Committee.

Public recognition and deepest gratitude are due Ursula Korneitchouk, Trustee, for her beautiful design for Festival Medea brochure and program booklet and for her efficient work serving as general manager for the production of Milhaud’s opera Medea.
NEWS THROUGH REVIEWS:

PERFORMANCES

ROBERT FINN, Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 25 and 26, 1989:

The Darius Milhaud Society, headquartered in Cleveland, pulled off an elaborate and fascinating musical coup on behalf of its favorite composer last night at The Cleveland Institute of Music.

The occasion was a rare fully staged production of Milhaud's 1939 opera " Médée" (here done in English translation as "Medea") using a mix of local and imported professional talent.

It was a daring, imaginative and perilous undertaking, and it came off very well. Certainly Milhaud's opera was revealed as a work well worth hearing and knowing.

Despite being in three acts, Milhaud's setting of the bloody mythological story takes only a little over an hour to perform.

Milhaud's music, full of his typical bitonality, explosive dramatic outbursts and stretches of lovely lyric writing, rises to real expressive eloquence in the second act, as the demonic Medea... prepares to wreak vengeance. This act is a sustained flight of lyric and dramatic brilliance... and there are fine things scattered through the other two acts - the impressive, brief funeral dirge in the third act, for example.

Soprano Lucy Shelton, in what was actually her [Cleveland] operatic debut, sang Medea with dramatic conviction, superb musicianship and beautiful sound. Also impressive was soprano Susan K. Wallin in the shorter but crucial role of Creusa. Quentin Quereau did what he could with the... part of Jason, and Edward Payne was excellent as King Creon. The nurse was capably sung by Deborah Dunn.

The 42-member orchestra showed a good grasp of Milhaud's sometimes craggy lyricism under the baton of Jean-Louis Le Roux, and the small chorus sang its commentaries and interludes expressively.

The staging was simple but effective. A series of abstract movable panels were the only scenery. They were shifted about by the chorus to indicate scene changes. The characters, appropriately costumed [by Eugene Hare], moved about the nearly bare stage with grace and tragic dignity in Elizabeth Bachman's staging.

Milhaud's "Medea"... is genuinely moving... and moves along swiftly and compellingly...

PHILIPPA KIRALY, Akron Beacon Journal, May 25 and 26, 1989:

French composer Darius Milhaud's opera Medea, written in 1938 to his wife's libretto, is not a work we are going to hear often... It's a short work, lasting 70 minutes, into which is packed all of Medea's fury and appalling vengeance when she is scorned by Jason. Milhaud always wrote briefly, and the work is pungent and forceful.

... Shelton brought some tension and vitality to her role... Quereau's [voice] came closest [to suiting] this French music... Payne and Dunn sang competently in their small roles... It was the chorus that presented the most satisfactory performance musically... Milhaud made good use of instrumental color in his orchestration, and the small orchestra of local musicians did well under the well-paced direction of Jean-Louis Le Roux of the San Francisco Ballet. Eugene Hare designed the modern-art set and lit it equally successfully. His costumes for the principals were appropriate and those of the 15-piece chorus imaginative.

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING MEDEA

Dr. Jeremy Drake, whose book The Operas of Darius Milhaud, published by Garland of New York, is off the press, shares his chapter on Milhaud's opera Médée, here presented in part. The Milhaud Society thanks Dr. Drake and Garland editor Dr. J. Scott Bentley for permission to quote from Dr. Drake's forthcoming book. If you wish to order this publication, write Hal Dalby, c/o Garland Publishing Inc., 136 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016. The book is priced at $74.00, but Mr. Dalby will give newsletter readers a 25% per cent discount.

For a long time — fifteen years according to Paul Collaer — Milhaud had wished to portray a jealous woman... on the scale of Phedre or Hermione. Thus when asked by Georges Huyssmans, the Minister for National Education on behalf of the French Government, to write either a ballet or a one-act opera, Milhaud chose the latter, and for a subject suggested Medea.

This subject had in turn been suggested to Milhaud by his wife. He therefore asked her to prepare a plan for a libretto. This she did by selecting and rearranging passages from the Medea plays of Euripides and Seneca, adding for dramatic contrast the character of Creusa which is absent from the ancient classics but a principal character in the 1635 Médée of Corneille. With the libretto plan complete, [the Milhauds] considered whom they might ask to prepare the libretto proper, passing in review a number of noted writers in the course of their discussion. Milhaud suggested that Madeleine herself write the libretto, and after a moment's hesitation, she agreed.

 Médée was composed at l'Enclos in the summer of 1938. Its first [Parisian] performance, on 8th May [1940], was noteworthy as being the last production of the Paris Opera before the fall of France and the German occupation, something undreamed of by Milhaud at the time "despite the dull sound of the anti-aircraft guns that were heard throughout the spectacle. Had it not been for the many military uniforms, it might have seemed a pre-war performance, so great were the crowds, so brilliant, so elegant the audience. [On May 25th] the last performance, before an almost empty house, was broadcast by the State Radio and I heard it at my home in the country in Aix-en-Provence... How moving it is for me to think that the last performance of the Opéra de Paris was granted to me like a magnificent present from my country before the curtain rose on the terrible period of the German occupation." [Darius Milhaud, Ma Vie Heureuse.]

In discussing the libretto we must first get an idea of the relationships of these three original plays to the text of the opera. The earliest play is that of the Greek dramatist Euripides. Seneca's Latin "Medea" is based partly on Euripides' play, but more especially on Ovid's "Medea", now lost. Corneille's play is in turn based on Euripides and Seneca, but adding the parts of Creusa and Pollux (absent in Milhaud's opera) for questions of balance.

For the broad outlines of the story Madeleine Milhaud followed Euripides' version of events. However the detail of the argument comes rather from Seneca, and she quotes much more liberally from the latter. The reason for this dependence on Seneca is not hard to find. Seneca's play is more in keeping with modern dramatic demands: there is rather more dialogue, its division into shorter but crucial roles... the long invocation to Hecate which in Medea... prepares to wreak vengeance... leaves dramatic outbursts and stretches of lovely lyric writing, rises to real expressive eloquence in the second act, as the demonic Medea... prepares to wreak vengeance. This act is a sustained flight of lyric and dramatic brilliance... [and] there are fine things scattered through the other two acts — the impressive, brief funeral dirge in the third act, for example.

For a long time — fifteen years according to Paul Collaer — Milhaud had wished to portray a jealous woman... on the scale of Phedre or Hermione. Thus when asked by Georges Huyssmans, the Minister for National Education on behalf of the French Government, to write either a ballet or a one-act opera, Milhaud chose the latter, and for a subject suggested Medea.

This subject had in turn been suggested to Milhaud by his wife. He therefore asked her to prepare a plan for a libretto. This she did by selecting and rearranging passages from the Medea plays of Euripides and Seneca, adding for dramatic contrast the character of Creusa which is absent from the ancient classics but a principal character in the 1635 Médée of Corneille. With the libretto plan complete, [the Milhauds] considered whom they might ask to prepare the libretto proper, passing in review a number of noted writers in the course of their discussion. Milhaud suggested that Madeleine herself write the libretto, and after a moment's hesitation, she agreed.

 Médée was composed at l'Enclos in the summer of 1938. Its first [Parisian] performance, on 8th May [1940], was noteworthy as being the last production of the Paris Opera before the fall of France and the German occupation, something undreamed of by Milhaud at the time "despite the dull sound of the anti-aircraft guns that were heard throughout the spectacle. Had it not been for the many military uniforms, it might have seemed a pre-war performance, so great were the crowds, so brilliant, so elegant the audience. [On May 25th] the last performance, before an almost empty house, was broadcast by the State Radio and I heard it at my home in the country in Aix-en-Provence... How moving it is for me to think that the last performance of the Opéra de Paris was granted to me like a magnificent present from my country before the curtain rose on the terrible period of the German occupation." [Darius Milhaud, Ma Vie Heureuse.]

In discussing the libretto we must first get an idea of the relationships of these three original plays to the text of the opera. The earliest play is that of the Greek dramatist Euripides. Seneca's Latin "Medea" is based partly on Euripides' play, but more especially on Ovid's "Medea", now lost. Corneille's play is in turn based on Euripides and Seneca, but adding the parts of Creusa and Pollux (absent in Milhaud's opera) for questions of balance.

For the broad outlines of the story Madeleine Milhaud followed Euripides' version of events. However the detail of the argument comes rather from Seneca, and she quotes much more liberally from the latter. The reason for this dependence on Seneca is not hard to find. Seneca's play is more in keeping with modern dramatic demands: there is rather more dialogue, its division into clear-cut acts and scenes (unlike Euripides) renders it more easily taken as a model. In addition Seneca includes... the long invocation to Hecate which in Madeleine Milhaud's libretto becomes the central pivot of the opera (Act II)...

The main problem in constructing the libretto would have been the integration of those parts of the story which concerned Creusa and which, included directly in Corneille, were only reported in Euripides and Seneca. As for including extracts of Corneille's play, this would, if
done at any length, create too serious a breach of style, French Alexandrines making uneasy company with the free prose-cum-blank verse of the translated classics. The main scene in question is that of Creusa’s and Creon’s deaths. Here Madeleine Milhaud freely reworks the available material, taking from Corneille the dramatic expedient of having Creon die before Creusa... enabling the latter to have a last, sorrowful farewell of Jason. Following Corneille too, but an obvious step in view of modern convention, is the showing of the deaths on stage, a procedure foreign to classical convention... ...

Madeleine Milhaud’s task in rewriting and restructuring the elements of the story was no small one and her part in the literary creation of the libretto is remarkably in keeping with the general style of the translated classics. Paul Collaer has justly written that “Le texte est, par le choix des sonorités, par le rythme, par la valeur des périodes, exactement proportionné au style du compositeur.” [Revue Musicale, XXI, (1940)]

Madeleine Milhaud’s basic aim was to provide a concise well-balanced drama which never deviated from its central theme. Thus she not only cuts out entire scenes from the originals, ... but also considerably edits the speeches that she does choose, her own contributions being similarly concise and rapid-moving. The part of the chorus she most effectively limits to three main utterances which provide structural pillars of comment or preparation for the action (scenes 1, 5, 7) and one briefer passage in scene 3. Since the play centers upon Medea, she is naturally the one whom we see for the most part, in her relationships with the Nurse, with Creon, with Jason and in the important central scene on her own, these scenes being roughly balanced on either side of the invocation. By contrast Medea and Creusa are never seen together, an important point which heightens the cold-blooded malefic manner of Medea’s revenge. To prepare for her presence in scene 7, Creusa is given a brief air in scene 1, written by Madeleine Milhaud. We note here that unlike for example Strauss’ Elektra - which bears other obvious points of comparison with Médée, as far as aesthetic atmosphere is concerned, though there is no direct influence — the dramatic entrance of the obsessed heroine is not prepared by a suitably unquiet and foreboding introduction. In Médée, after a portentous but non-committal orchestral prelude and a relatively tranquil chorus, Creusa is the first to make her appearance with a delicate, simply constructed song. It is only when she has quite finished that Medea appears and the dramatic tension of the opera becomes manifest. Similarly straightforward formal balance is apparent in Act I, which begins (after the introduction) and ends with substantial choruses, though musically they are different. It is within this tableau, particularly in scenes 3 and 4 that one notices a practice reminiscent of Les Euménides, viz. changing the musical material and the texture whenever the voice part changes. To a certain extent this practice occurs in almost any Milhaud opera, although little enough in his operas which make extensive use of song-forms (Orphée, Esther, Matelot, Opéras-Minutes, Fiesta). What makes it especially significant in Médée is the fact that there is little, if any re-use of musical material. For this reason, detailed formal analysis of Médée as of much of Maximilien, Bolivar, David, could become too easily bogged down in an endless string of alphabetical tables. Such an approach, however, does serve its purpose as an introductory guide to the musical physiognomy of the opera. Yet it also indicates that the real principles of musical balance and cohesion are not in these cases to be sought in elementary formal symmetry.

Certainly Milhaud takes advantage of the dramatic parallelism between Acts I and III... but we must look to the texture, not to the actual musical material to appreci-
Milhaud’s controlled deployment of the different styles, as well as of their close dramatic relevance. At her first entry she lets forth a torrential recitative, quite in the manner of Act 1 because, as she says, “Ma rancune n’est pas encore assouvie.” She is softened nonetheless to a gentle arioso by the thought of her innocent children. Once with her children however, her mood, and the music, revert to the unnerving restraint of Act II. Medea sings to them, first in a broad arioso, but her tone later changes, the arioso becoming less broad, rhythmically more rapid, until a climax is reached. It is the bite, however, not the bark that kills, and so in the moments before she kills her children, Medea again adopts the arioso style as she makes it quite clear she knows what she is doing.

Then as Jason comes in, frantic, using the recitative style, Medea maintains her calm self-control, replying in arioso style until the end of the opera. Only momentarily does she adopt the recitative style, as she spits out, “Je les ai égorgés.” It seems clear therefore that Milhaud used these three vocal styles to communicate three basic emotional states: recitative for more or less uncontrolled fury or at any rate high emotional pitch; arioso for calmer, controlled passages of dialogue; aria for complete, indeed unnatural restraint, as in Act II. A similar curve of melodic contour runs in parallel: at one end angular and highly disjunct when Medea is furious, at the other smooth and conjunct when she controls herself. The same considerations apply to the other characters, with obvious modifications, especially as they do not run the gamut of Medea’s emotions.

Milhaud had found for Médée in this technique what he had not found for Les Euménides, .... The flexibility is a result of its belonging at once to the realm of melody (even as recitative), rhythm, structure as well as character-portrayal. It is not however a technique that is successful in all circumstances. It is such a notable success in Médée because the opera is just the right length, long enough for the attempt to be worthwhile, yet not so long as to place too great a reliance on what is after all primarily a melodic feature.

The orchestral role becomes of increased importance with so much recitative and arioso, for the texture might rapidly become too disjointed or repetitive. Thus, apart from its usual role of creating atmosphere and providing harmonic support to the singers it also has to ensure the continuity and development of the musical fabric. It is common enough in Milhaud’s operas to find that the important musical material, the form-building elements are almost exclusively in the orchestra (except in the case of arias, songs and choruses), but the degree to which this is important aspect [of which] for our purposes is the doctrine of the passions. For the Stoics the prerequisite for right actions is a sane rational faculty...The consequence of a mistake in reasoning is suffering....To [make a mistake] means to succumb to one of the passions.... Anger is one of the most prominent ones; this is defined as the desire to take vengeance on someone who seems to have treated us unjustly..... The main cause for anger is pain, and anger is therefore also defined as the desire to repay pain..... There is a development from pain or grief to anger; once you have succumbed to anger the passion cannot be restrained any more, it develops into frenzy and insanity..... But insanity here means something different from our modern concept..... The Stoics regarded everybody who was foolish as insane. ....[the insane] are easily irritated, unapproachable in word or deed; they deal with everything by means of violence; they are prepared both to fight with the sword and to commit suicide with it.

Madeleine Milhaud with Pascale Honegger, daughter of the composer. Photo given by Micheline Mitrani.

HELZLE DISCUSSES SENeca’S MEDEA As part of Festival Medea, Dr. Martin Helzle, Visiting Scholar at Cleveland State University, gave a lecture at the University on May 22nd, entitled Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy. Below are excerpted remarks of Dr. Helzle as he described aspects of Seneca’s play Medea, one of the sources for Madeleine Milhaud’s libretto for Milhaud’s opera Médée.

......Seneca’s tragic characters appear to us as voices of characters, rather than full human beings. Seneca’s Medea, for instance, comes across to us as the voice of certain attitudes and emotions....

......Medea’s words are drawing a verbal picture of her state of mind, of her emotions. She is devastated, profoundly upset and asks herself, “Where do I find revenge?” On the other hand she is still in love with Jason: “Let Jason live, mine now as he was before.” In her dichotomy between love and grief she blames... Creon, the father of Jason’s new bride Creusa. This static display of emotion continues in the ensuing dialogue with the nurse who tries to restrain the hurt woman. So the declamatory character of Seneca’s drama manifests itself in the static rather than dramatic exposition of emotion by a voice rather than a character. The drama, the action... is in the development of this emotion of one character rather than in the plot or the interaction of many characters. The drama also lies in the words....

......Seneca [was an adherent of] Stoicism...the most important aspect [of which] for our purposes is the doctrine of the passions. For the Stoics the prerequisite for right actions is a sane rational faculty...The consequence of a mistake in reasoning is suffering....To [make a mistake] means to succumb to one of the passions.... Anger is one of the most prominent ones; this is defined as the desire to take vengeance on someone who seems to have treated us unjustly..... The main cause for anger is pain, and anger is therefore also defined as the desire to repay pain..... There is a development from pain or grief to anger; once you have succumbed to anger the passion cannot be restrained any more, it develops into frenzy and insanity..... But insanity here means something different from our modern concept..... The Stoics regarded everybody who was foolish as insane. ....[the insane] are easily irritated, unapproachable in word or deed; they deal with everything by means of violence; they are prepared to fight with the sword and to commit suicide with it.

Medea is a prime example of this pattern.... Medea’s passion, once admitted, dominates not only her, but everybody around her, in short, it dominates the entire play down to the choral odes which illustrate and orchestrate the destructive force in Medea’s nature. The drama lies within Medea.... is confined to her psyche where the passion of anger takes hold and spreads like a cancer which can only destroy her mind in the end....
CONTRIBUTORS
The Milhaud Society extends profound thanks to the following people who have sent contributions since publication of the last newsletter. Sustaining contributions of $100.00 or more are marked with an asterisk. If your gift arrived after press time, your name will be included in the next issue of the newsletter.

Maurice Abravanel
*Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Alder
*Ms. Victoria Austin
*Mrs. Victor Babin
*Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Barsky
*Courtlandt D. Barnes
Mr. and Mrs. Fred Biehle
Michael Blume
Elizabeth Breckenridge
*Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Bushman
*Marguerite B. Campbell
Mr. and Mrs. David Cerone
Alice Arabian Chamberlin
Paul Cherry
Eleanor Cohen
*Mrs. Merritt Cootes
*Mr. and Mrs. Allen Deutsch
*Mrs. Patricia J. Doyle
*John P. Dunn
*Mr. and Mrs. John A. Flower
*Richard Franks
*Jane Hoffeld Galante
*Mrs. Howard A. Garnett
*Ruth Gillard
Ann Gresham
*George Gund Foundation
*Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Hardy
John Heavenrich
John D. Herr
Rice Hershey
*Mrs. Walter Hinrichsen
*Grant Johannesen
*Mr. and Mrs. Frank Joseph
*Anne Kish
Dr. and Mrs. Michael Lamm
Faye Liebman-Cohen
*Mrs. Harry Lott
*Mr. and Mrs. Richard Manuel
Michael McConnell
*Hannah Morgenstern and Ben Shouse
*Mrs. A. Reynolds Morse
Barbara Miller
Stephen Miller
*Mr. and Mrs. Bain Murray
*Mrs. and Mrs. Paul E. Nelson
*Mr. and Mrs. M.I. Nurenberg
*Dr. and Mrs. Nicholas Pellecan
Roslyn Pettibone
Eunice Podis
Christina Price
James Ringo
Harriette Rosen
Barbara Harris Rowan
Content Mott-Smith Sablinsky
James Schwabacher
Jean Roy Shell
Michael Shemo
*Mrs. and Mrs. Leon Soulé
Martha Stacy
*Mr. and Mrs. Edward R. Stell
*Mr. and Mrs. Harrison M. Stine
Judge and Mrs. William K. Thomas
TransOhio Savings Bank
Hope Troyer
George Vassos
Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Victor
*Mrs. Ernst Wallfish
*F. Katharine Warne
*Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woide
*Mrs. Paul Wurzburg  

NEWS THROUGH REVIEWS: PERFORMANCES

Review of program including Psalm 121, Op. 72 (1921) for men's voices:

... In a consistently well-sung and interesting program... still timely for today's music [was] the music that Darius Milhaud wrote for Psalm 121, "I was glad when they said to me,"... The Milhaud [work] combined remnants of Hebrew psalmody with 20th century dissonance and bright sonorities at climactic points. Beyond that was its flavor, compellingly French...

MARILYN TUCKER, San Francisco Chronicle, April 18, 1989:

The Mills College dance and music departments honored the memory of the renowned and prolific French composer Darius Milhaud Sunday afternoon in a bracing hour of music and dance in Haas Pavilion on the leafy campus in Oakland. Sunday's program consisted of the song cycle "Chansons Bas", performed by Mills alumna Amy Neuberg, with pianist Belle Bulwinkle, the String Quartet No. 10, and Tandy Beal's dance version of what is perhaps Milhaud's most famous piece of music, "La Création du Monde"...

Neuberg, a soprano, gave a vibrant account of the Milhaud songs, settings of seven poems by the French symbolist poet Stephen Mallarmé... Beal originally choreographed "Creation" for the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, which premiered it in 1985. It is a highly amusing account of how life began, with Beal appearing as our Mother Nature in Sunday's performance. The jazzy score was presented in Milhaud's own two-piano reduction, ably played by Judith Rosenberg and Betty Woo.

The dance impulse, so evident in many of Milhaud's works, is carried over into his String Quartet No. 10. The combination of the first-movement dance figures, offered in Milhaud's characteristic use of polytonality, was given the perpetual motion treatment in the finale, ending with a slashing flourish. Good marks to the youthful performers for a vital performance.


Lyricism and transparency were the predominant themes that ran through the Marin Symphony's impressive concert at the Marin Center Auditorium on Jan. 21. The program of Mozart, Milhaud and Mendelssohn drew a very large crowd.

Sandor Salgo was at the podium with guest artist Peter Zazzofsky. The young violinist played a spirited interpretation of Milhaud's "Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2, Op. 63 [sic]." His warm and singing tone quality, subtlety and gracefulness were very well suited to it.

The nostalgic, blues-like flavor of the second movement is a wonderful example of Milhaud's lyricism and ability to enhance the feeling of intimacy between solo and orchestral lines. Never shy about using the trumpets, unusual instrument combinations, or extreme ranges to produce striking effects in his orchestrations, the eclectic Milhaud was equally at home employing his customary polytonality, and jaunty rhythmic and thematic designs, which he did quite effectively...

We owe a debt of gratitude to Sandor Salgo for presenting this neglected and important work. Too often it is cast aside because of the limited imaginations of those in charge of programming...

Those whose operatic tastes go beyond routine repertoire should take a look at Mount Vernon College's "Opera in the Chapel" series. This series has a small budget . . . so there are no lavish spectacles. But imagination, ingenuity, youthful energy and high spirits enliven these small unpretentious productions.

[Last December, four performances on December 3, 4, 8 and 10, featured] well-contrasted short operas by Darius Milhaud and Jacques Offenbach, both sung in English translation. The voices generally are good, pianist Carla Hubner is an exemplary "Orchestra", Geoffrey Simon's musical direction is well calculated, and the stage direction of Deirdre Kelly Lavrakas is modestly brilliant - notable particularly for the good-natured way it accepts and transcends budget limitations.

Milhaud's "The Unfortunate Sailor" ("Le Pauvre Matelot") is in three lightning-quick acts (totaling about 40 minutes) with pungent, angular melodies and a succinct, hard-hitting libretto by Jean Cocteau . . . Tenor Peter Clegg, light and supple of tone and equally at home in tragedy or comedy, stood out . . . soprano Maureen O'Day . . . sang well and communicated effectively. Bass John Vroom and baritone Charles Kopstein-Penk did smaller tasks commendably . . .

JOSHUA KOSMAN, San Francisco Chronicle, November 16, 1988. Review of Entr'acte:

The evening [of musical surrealism] began with a delectable piece of history: "Entr'acte," the 20-minute surrealist film created by René Clair and Francis Picabia as a "cinematographic intermission" for Erik Satie's 1924 ballet "Relâche." The film begins with the appearance of a self-propelling cannon; soon an impeccably groomed Satie and his more slovenly comrade, Darius Milhaud, leap into the frame in gooey slow motion to load and fire it.

From there, a succession of dreamlike images leads to a murder, then to the murder victim's funeral procession in a camel-drawn hearse, and finally to his unexpected resurrection. Pianists Imamura and Orland performed the lovely and characteristically deadpan score in Milhaud's four-hand arrangement.

MARTY TUCKER, San Francisco Chronicle, November 5, 1988. Review of Clarinet Concerto and Scaramouche:

Benny Goodman's contribution to classical music was highlighted at Thursday's Performances at Six concert at The Cultured Salad in Embarcadero III. Clarinetist Tom Rose, backed by Patrick McCarthy on bass and Betty Woo on the piano, performed compositions that Goodman commissioned or had written for him. Goodman played this solid repertory often, as Rose indicated in his informative and entertaining program remarks.

The trio offered skilful performances of music by Morton Gould, Aaron Copland and [two works by] Darius Milhaud . . . the music was stylish and distinctive. With his technical expertise, controlled expression and tone of exhilarating sweetness, Rose is just the player to offer insight into this fascinating world, and Woo's piano exuded with [sic] orchestral strength . . . [Milhaud's Clarinet Concerto is] a lovely and ingratiating work. Rose, McCarthy and Woo played two movements. To end this intriguing and short program, Rose and company offered Milhaud's "Scaramouche", in the lively arrangement of 1942 that followed the original two-piano version and later arrangement for saxophone and orchestra . . . [The program was repeated on November 6th at the San Francisco Community Music Center. See Calendar listing.]

NEWS THROUGH REVIEWS: RECORDS

JOHN SWAN, Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) Journal February 1989. Review of Concertino de Printemps, Op. 135 (1934) with Darius Milhaud conducting; Louis Kaufman, violin and National Radiodiffusion Orchestra. Orion OC 787 . . . Louis Kaufman . . . a contemporary of Heifetz . . . has always shared certain traits, in the portamento, the biting spicatto, the warm vibrato and a lunging force in the bowing, that align him with the Great One and his generation. His sound is very much his own, however, instantly identifiable . . . Given this vivid presence and the long and brilliant career . . . he is surely a member . . . [of] the violinistic elite . . .

This composer-led performance of Milhaud's Concertino de Printemps is also available on another Orion Kaufman cassette (OC 771, with the Second Violin Concerto and the Danses de Jacrémim). Before that on an Orion LP, and before that on an early Capitol LP.

This brief, transparently scored 1934 celebration of spring . . . is a masterpiece, one of its composer's most perfectly realized works. Milhaud led three recorded versions of this concertino, the first with its creator, Yvonne Astruc, for Decca and Polydor 78s, and the third and most famous with Szymon Goldberg for an Epic (and later Philips) LP devoted to all four of the master's seasonal concertini. The Goldberg-Milhaud collaboration is, of course, a well-nigh perfect realization of this lovely score, but Kaufman's version, despite its dimmer sound, is every bit as effervescent . . .


. . . The idea of recording in its entirety a publisher's collection of pièces d'occasion is attractive enough, although it relegates quality control to the editor who put the thing together for the publisher . . . [Bennett] Lerner's playing in this newest record maintains the previously established high technical standard and level of interpretative penetration . . . Those who wish to . . . hear . . . the seventeen composers represented here are assured that they are unlikely ever to find recordings to improve on this one.


Now that Nonesuch has begun releasing older LP material on CD, we can look forward to having such welcome items available as this delicious product of Era of Sterne I. There are other arrangements of some of this music, of course - such as the orchestral version of the macaronically entitled Saudades, for example - but it is in their piano guises that they seem purest and most direct. Bolcom, whose credentials as a player and composer of rags have been amply demonstrated long ago, takes to the rhythms of these sweetly nuanced suites of miniatures like an American eagle to a tropical updraft; his original and excellent notes are included; and what more is there to say?


20. La Création du Monde. (See # 7)


22. La Création du Monde. (See # 10)

23. La Création du Monde. (See # 8)


