

MUSIC: popular and otherwise

By Rodger H. Skidmore

Music has grown in popularity and changed in form in the last century; this has had both good and bad effects on music as an art form. The invention of the radio and the phonograph has made music available to all who wish to hear it (also to those who don't). The phonograph and radio broke New York City's monopoly on the Metropolitan Opera House and Caruso's voice was heard throughout the country by every small town opera buff who had a crystal set or the price of a record. Via electricity the New Orleans banjo group moved onto Park Avenue in New York, and onto every Main Street in the U.S.A. Today, East Coast and West Coast Jazz meet and mingle in Kansas City enabling not only everyone to hear the various styles, but to affect and be affected by all forms of music, jazz or otherwise.

A person who has a love of classical music can listen to the complete works of the best composers as performed by the top symphonies in the world anytime that he wishes. This is something that the richest persons in the largest cities could not do before the advent of the phonograph. The increased availability of music in all of its forms (operatic, classical, semi-classical, popular, jazz of all styles, chamber music, folk music, etc.) has been more than matched by an increase in interest on the part of the public, yet one wonders if these increases in total listening hours have been accompanied by an increase in knowledge about music, or by a raising of musical taste i.e., standards.

I maintain that the standards of music have not been raised in the last fifty years, and that, in the years since World War II and Korea, they have been lowered. This lowering of musical standards must be laid at the feet of our own generation not at the feet of our parents, although, as in all things, they could be blamed indirectly. When someone of our generation gets into trouble or does something wrong (sometimes there is a difference between the two), the excuse given by his analyst is that the youth lives in an insecure world torn by the tensions created by two globular powers that are at opposing ends of economic

and ideologic scales. I do not know if this is said simply to reduce the charge against a delinquent from murder in the first degree to malicious mischief or if the social psychologist really believes it, but whether he does or not, I don't. The younger generation, in this country at least, has it too soft and is too secure for its own good. This is shown by increases in juvenile delinquency among the middle and upper classes and by other diverse indicators such as musical standards.

We, the modern youth of America, have more money to spend than any other similar age group in the history of man. It is this increase in personal spending power that has made us secure, and I for one would



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not like to lower my personal standard of living (I do not know of anyone besides Barry Goldwater who does), but it is also this increase in spending power that has lowered standards in music, as well as in other fields.

Today, the record manufacturing industry is one of the most lucrative of any in the country. It is also the largest industry that has changed its sales orientation to cater more and more to the teen, pre-teen and young adult. The number of small professional instrumental groups and singers that have appeared upon the American scene in the last fifteen years—all being recorded—is astronomical. All of the record companies that are started do not last nor do all of the

singers and musicians signed get their contracts renewed, but there is by far enough money in the business for people to keep trying. The key to success is that old standby axiom—"give them what they want." What the record companies are doing is giving us what we like, but only if a lot of others like it also. They are using the lowest common denominator concept in producing music and the lowest common denominator seems to be modified rock and roll. The popular records produced in the last ten years have been, for the most part, of no lasting value. Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Dean Martin, Doris Day, Chris Connor, Peggy Lee, etc. are all good singers, they can put a tune over effectively and a few years after they record it it still sounds nice. These singers have been around for years, they have not lowered their standards and as a result they consistently do very well with their records. It is the ones who have lowered their standards that make the wildly successful hit records; but do you "Frutti" today? I believe the answer is "no." Songs like "Tutti Frutti," "Black Denim Trousers," and "Speedo" do not last, neither do "Alvin the Chipmunk" records. The lyrics are ground out, the music is poorly composed and equally poorly played, and the song shouted out with very little style. The records are pushed very heavily on the radio and dumped on the market while they are hot items; overnight they become seven day wonders and then die. They are meant to die as there are others right behind them ready to take their places on the music charts of the nation and "sell a million." As long as consumers buy inferior products manufacturers will continue to produce them, and they will be produced somewhat to the exclusion of other types of recorded music.

The radio plays many different types of music but for the most part modified Rock and Roll is played. It isn't necessarily because the station owners like Rock and Roll but it is what sponsors are willing to pay for. Another reason it is played so often—on some stations it is the only type of music played—is the same reason that people but it even though the quality is poor; this reason is the beat that the music has. It is insistent beat that drags on the mind; it

(Please See Page Seven)

Federico Garcia Lorca

(Continued from Page Four)

PRELUDIO

The ox
closes its eyes
slowly
(heat of the stable)
This is the prelude
of night.

In Lorca's second book of poems, *Cante Jondo*, we find the Andalusian landscape definitely fused into his work. Death becomes a symbol that never leaves the Lorca now used in the typical Moorish ballad tradition, with green suggesting luxuriance, growth, and despair, and yellow and black symbolizing hopelessness. Lorca's preoccupation with death is more a reflection of the Spanish temperament rather than a stylistic or symbolic element of his poetry. No geographic area dramatizes death as much as Spain and the Spanish Americas. Unlike many countries of the West, where the inevitableness of death leads to an emphasis on life, in Spanish-speaking countries, death and life are sides of the same coin. The death of Christ is dramatized much more in Spain than in the Vatican. Even in the national sport of Spain, bullfighting, the battle moves from ferocious charges of a green and black rosetted bull and graceful passes of a skillful matador, to a determined and inevitable climax of life or death for something or somebody. Death predominates in the following poems from *Cante Jondo*.

CANCION DE PRIMAVERA

(Song of Spring)
On the lonely mountain
A village cemetery
Appears like a field
Sown with seeds of skulls
And cypresses have
flowered
Like gigantic heads
Which with empty sockets
And green hair
Pensively and sadly
Contemplate the skyline.
Death is symbolized as a
woman in the following
poem:
Lady Death
enters and leaves
the tavern.
Black horses pass
and sinister authorities
on the deep roads
of the guitars.
And there is an odor of salt
and of female's blood
in the burning tuberose
of the sea.
Lady Death
enters and leaves
and leaves and enters
Lady Death
of the tavern.

There is mystery and an eerie atmosphere, all developed against Cordoba in the background, as death awaits its prey in *Cancion de jinete* (Song of the Horseman).

CORDOBA

Remote and lonely
Black pony, big moon,

And olives in my saddlebag.
Even though I know the
roads

I never will get to Cordoba.
Across the plain, across
the wind

black pony, red moon,
Death is looking at me.

Oh what a long road!

Oh my brave mare!

Oh that Death waits for me,
before arriving at Cordoba!

Cordoba.

Remote and lonely.

The tragic end of a gypsy
is brought out in *Sorpresa*.
(Surprise).

Dead he remained in the
street

with a dagger in his chest.

No one knew him.

How the streetlamp

trembled!

Mother,

How the little lantern of

the street

trembled!

The easy success of *Ro-*

mancero Gitano (Book of

Gypsy Ballads), which was

published in 1928, threat-

ened Lorca's creative im-

pulse. To escape profession-

al rivalry and a depression

of spirit which he was suffer-

ing, Lorca came to New

York in 1930. The imperson-

al, highly indifferent, and

mechanistic life of New

York City was not conduc-

ive to Lorca as a poet. Not

having his "querencia"

(stompin' grounds), Andalu-

sia, he felt the nostalgia of

being an exile. He lived in

the dormitory at Columbia

University while attending

classes there, but language

difficulties forced him to

drop his courses. The poetry

of *Poeta en Nueva York*,

reveals only longing, loneli-

ness, condemnation of the

evils and injustices of the

big city, and an occasional

flash of his old fire. New

York, the city that doesn't

sleep inspired:

No one sleeps in the sky.

No one, No one.

No one sleeps.

But if someone shuts his

eyes

Whip him, my sons, whip

him.

There is a panorama of

open eyes

and bitter, burning sores.

No one sleeps in the world

No one, no one. I have

said it.

No one sleeps,

But if someone has at night

an excess of moss in his

temples

open the trapdoors for him

to see beneath the moon

the false things, the poison

and skull

of the theaters,

of the theaters.

In *Muerte*, Lorca expresses

astonishment at the desire

of almost everything in a

materialistic society to lose

itself and become some-

thing else.

DEATH

What an effort,
what an effort of the horse
to be a dog.

(Please See Page Seven)