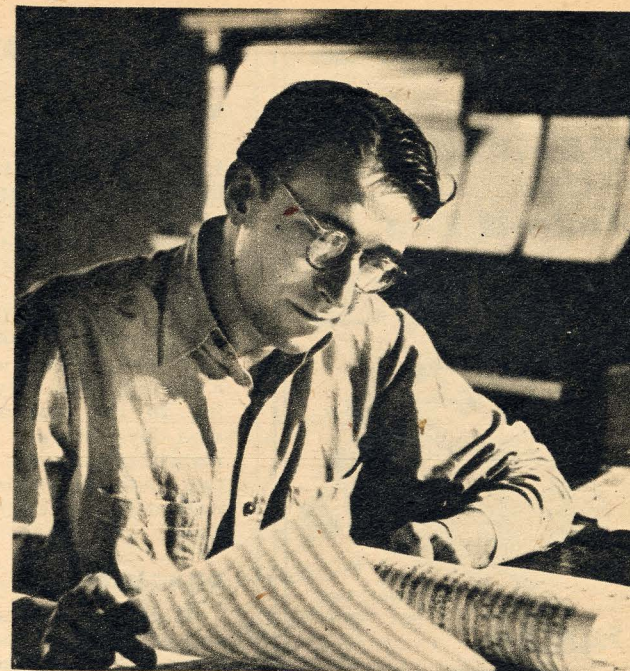




**LEONARD BERNSTEIN**—"At its best, his is music of vibrant rhythmic invention, irresistible elan, terrific punch."



**HAROLD SHAPERO**—"Gifted and baffling; his adroitness is placed at the service of a wonderful musical gift."



**ALEXEI HAIEFF**—"Sensitive and refined; his pieces have personality, sensibility and wit; they divert and delight."



**ROBERT PALMER**—"Always his music has urgency; it seems to come from some inner need for expression."



**JOHN CAGE**—"One of the curiosities of the younger generation; his music stems from Balinese and Hindu styles."



**LUKAS FOSS**—"The Wunderkind of this group; his music has spontaneity and naturalness, absolute clarity of texture."

## The New 'School' of American Composers

**W**HEN I was in my twenties I had a consuming interest in what the other composers of my generation were producing. Even before I was acquainted with the names of Roy Harris, Roger Sessions, Walter Piston, the two Thom(p)sons, I instinctively thought of myself as part of a "school" of composers. Without the combined effort of a group of men it seemed hardly possible to give the United States a music of its own.

Now—and how soon, alas—my contemporaries and I must count ourselves among the spiritual papas of a new generation of composers. But personally I find that my interest in what the young composers are up to is just as keen as it ever was. For it is obvious that you cannot set up a continuing tradition of

**Young men now maturing, says Aaron Copland, are making striking contributions to our music.**

By **AARON COPLAND**

creative music in any country without a constant freshening of source material as each decade brings forth a new batch of composers.

It seems to me one of the most important functions of those who consider themselves guardians of musical tradition, particularly in our Western Hemisphere, where the creative musical movement is still so young, is to watch carefully and nurture well the delicate roots of the youngest generation; to see to it that they get a sound musical training, that their first successful efforts are heard, and that they feel themselves part of the musical movement of their country.

In the United States young composers appear to be sprouting everywhere. My impression is that we are just beginning to tap our creative potentialities. The generation of the Nineteen Thirties—Marc

Blitzstein, William Schuman, Samuel Barber, David Diamond and Paul Bowles—are now well established. The generation of the Forties—with which this article is concerned—is being encouraged with prizes, commissions, fellowships, money grants, and more often than not, performances of their works. Nowadays, in this country at any rate, a young composer with exceptional talent would have a hard time escaping detection.

**U**NLIKE the composers of my own generation, most of these younger men have not (as yet) been to Europe. In a very real sense, Europe has come to them, for many of them have had personal contact with Stravinsky, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Milhaud and Martinu, all of whom are living and composing in the United States. It would be strange indeed if the

presence of these contemporary masters had no effect whatever on our younger generation.

But added to this influence by way of Europe there is a new note: our young composers follow closely the work of their older American colleagues. My own generation found very little of interest in the work of their elders: MacDowell, Chadwick or Loeffler; and their influence on our music was nil. (We had only an inkling of the existence of the music of Charles Ives in the Twenties.) Nowadays a young American composer is just as likely to be influenced by Harris or Schuman as he is by Stravinsky or Hindemith. (Perhaps, to fill out the picture, I should add that numbers of them have been accused of writing like me!)

In general, the works of the youngest generation reflect a wide variety of compositional interests rather than any one unified tendency. In the United States you can pick and choose your influence. Of course, we also have our twelve-tone composers, most of them pupils of Krenek or Schoenberg. (Continued on Page 51)

**AARON COPLAND**, composer, conductor and lecturer on music, is head of the composition department at the Berkshire Music Center in Massachusetts. Mr. Copland's Third Symphony was voted by the New York Music Critics' Circle as one of the two outstanding works of the '46-'47 season.



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## New 'School' of U. S. Composers

(Continued from Page 18)

even though they have not yet played much of a role. All this would seem healthy and natural, given the particular environment of our musical life and the comparatively recent development of our composing potential.

But enough of generalities. I have chosen seven names as representative of some of the best we have to offer among the new generation: Robert Palmer, Alexei Haieff, Harold Shapero, Lukas Foss, Leonard Bernstein, William Bergsma, John Cage. Most of these composers are either just approaching 30 or have just passed 30. (Foss is the youngest of the group, having only recently turned 24.) They are all native-born Americans, with the exception of Haieff and Foss, both of whom came to the United States at the age of 15 and were musically formed here. All of them are composers of serious works that have been publicly performed, and, occasionally, published and recorded.

**R**OBERT PALMER is perhaps the least well known of this group. He is also one of the oldest—32. His music is seldom heard in ordinary concert life; most of it found its way to public performance on special modern music programs or at annual festivals of American music. Palmer happens to be one of my own particular enthusiasms. I remember being astonished ten years ago when I first saw him, and tried to make some connection in my mind between the man and his music. His outward appearance of a grocery clerk simply did not jibe with the complexities of the metaphysical music he was writing at that time.

Ives and Harris were his early admirations, to which he added his own brand of amorphous transcendentalism. Later he came under the sway of Bartók's rhythmic drive. Two string quartets represent him at his best. They are lengthy works, not easy to perform, and not easy for the listener to digest.

But both quartets contain separate movements of true originality and depth of feeling. Palmer is not always as critical as he should be, especially in the outlining of the general proportions of a movement—but always his music has urgency—it seems to come from some inner need for expression.

In two recent works, an orchestral "Elegy for Thomas Wolfe" and a sonata for two pianos, he has managed to discipline the natural ebullience of his writing, though sometimes at the expense of a too rigid polyrhythmic or melodic scheme. Palmer may never achieve the perfect work, but at least he tries for big

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WILLIAM BERGSMA—"A sober and serious workman with a poetic and critical mind; one of the solid values of today's music."

## New 'School' of U. S. Composers

(Continued from Preceding Page) things. In recent years too much of his energy has gone into his teaching at Cornell University—but teaching is a familiar disease of the American composer. Thus far in his career Palmer has enjoyed little public acclaim; nevertheless, if he has the capacity to endure and to develop, his future seems to me assured.

**A**LEXEI HAIIEFF was born in Russia and brought up in China, but had his musical education under Rubin Goldmark in the United States. Later he studied in Paris under Nadia Boulanger. His background and training give him a strong affinity with the music of Stravinsky, and, in fact, Haieff is a close personal friend of that master. Stravinsky's shadow was pervasive in his earlier works, but gradually Haieff has emerged with a sharply defined personality of his own. He combines a sensitive and refined musical nature with an alert musical mind that often gives off sparks of mordant humor. He delights in playful manipulation of his musical materials, and has a special fondness for sudden interruptions of the musical flow with abrupt silences or unexpected leaps or brief back-trackings.

Thus far, Haieff has composed few large and imposing works. Although he has written a "First Symphony," he seems most at home in his shorter pieces such as his "Divertimento" for chamber orchestra, "Sonata" for two pianos, "Five Pieces for Piano," and other short works for violin and piano or 'cello and piano. Almost all of these pieces are a musical pleasure—they have personality, sensibility and wit. They divert and delight the listener, not in a superficial sense but in the sense that such terms might

be applied to a Couperin or a Scarlatti. Haieff is at present engaged on the composition of a long ballet based on "Beauty and the Beast," to be choreographed by George Balanchine for the Ballet Society of New York. It will be interesting to see how he handles a large canvas.

**H**AROLD SHAPERO, it is safe to say, is at the same time the most gifted and the most baffling composer of his generation. This young Bostonian, now 27, has a phenomenal "ear" and a brilliant (though sometimes erratic) mind. The ear and the mind were subjected to a methodical training under Krenek, Piston, Hindemith and Boulanger. These teachers left their mark; Shapero now possesses an absolutely perfected technical equipment.

To examine one of his scores closely is a fascinating experience. Few musicians of our time put their pieces together with greater security, either in the skeletal harmonic framework, in the modeling of the melodic phrases, or in the careful shaping of the whole. Shapero knows what he's doing, but that is the least of it: the exciting thing is to note how this technical adroitness is put at the service of a wonderfully spontaneous musical gift. Despite this, there is, as I say, something baffling about what he has produced thus far.

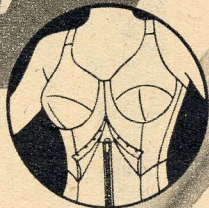
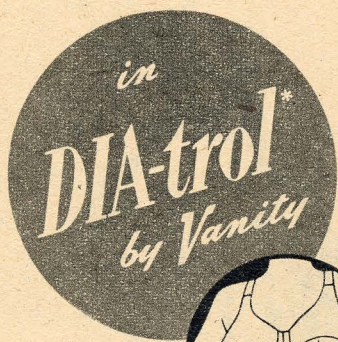
**S**TYLISTICALLY Shapero seems to feel a compulsion to fashion his music after some great model. Thus his five-movement "Serenade" for string orchestra (a remarkable work in many ways) is founded upon neo-classic Stravinskian principles, his "Three Amateur Piano Sonatas" on Haydn-esque principles, and his recent long symphony is mod-

(Continued on Following Page)



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## New 'School' of U. S. Composers

(Continued from Preceding Page)  
eled after Beethoven. For the present he seems to be suffering from a hero-worship complex—or perhaps it is a freakish attack of false modesty, as if he thought to hide the brilliance of his own gifts behind the cloak of the great masters. No one can say how long this strange attitude will last. But when Shapero decides to make a direct attack on the composing problem, to throw away all models, and to strike out unconcernedly on his own, I predict the whole musical world will sit up and take notice.

**L**UKAS FOSS is, in a way, the *Wunderkind* of this group of composers, and something of the aura of the *Wunderkind* still hangs about him. Born in Berlin where he had his first music lessons, he continued his studies at the Conservatoire in Paris during the Hitler years, and finally arrived in New York with his parents at the age of 15. At 13 he had already composed piano pieces (subsequently published by G. Schirmer) which are almost indistinguishable from those of his later master, Hindemith.

The contact with America was crucial. In Europe he had acquired a kind of impersonal cocksureness that was not at all sympathetic. In America, as he grew up, he became more human and more anxious to reflect the atmosphere of his newly adopted country. His first large work of "American" inspiration was an oratorio, "The Prairie," for soloists, chorus and orchestra, with a text chosen from Carl Sandburg's indigenous poems. It was a striking work to come from the pen of a 19-year-old boy. Since then he has composed two long works for solo voice and orchestra—"Song of Protest" for baritone, and "Song of Songs" for soprano, both based on texts from the Bible.

I cannot honestly say that I always admire his treatment of the English language. But it is impossible not to admire the spontaneity and naturalness of his musical flow, the absolute clarity in texture, and the clean and easy handling of large formal problems. That Foss is a born composer is obvious.

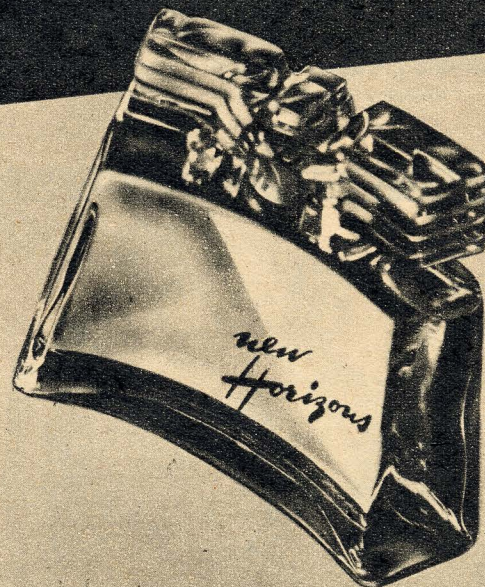
**W**ILLIAM BERGSMA is a native of California and a musical product of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N. Y. Hardly out of school himself, he already is one of the teachers of composition at the Juilliard School. (William Schuman, head of the school, was quick to recognize Bergsma's sure craftsmanship.)

Bergsma is, by temperament, a sober and serious workman. I realize that this

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## New 'School' of U. S. Composers

(Continued from Preceding Page)  
is not a very exact description of his particular talent, but it is difficult to say more at the present time, for the specific quality of his personality is not yet clear. He possesses a poetic and critical mind, and one is certain that his compositions are put together slowly, after mature reflection. Thus far he has composed orchestral and chamber music, songs, piano pieces and a ballet. At this writing he is engaged upon a first symphony. How truly original or how broad in scope his music may turn out to be is a question for the future. But already it is clear from works like his two string quartets that Bergsma represents one of the solid values of the younger generation.

**L**eonard Bernstein's composing gift has been overshadowed by his brilliance as conductor and pianist. In a sense it would be strange if he could not compose, for his ability in that direction is only one of the various facets of an extraordinarily versatile musical personality. For us Bernstein represents a new type of musician—one who is equally at home in the world of jazz and in the world of serious music. George Gershwin made something of an attempt to fill that role, but Bernstein really fills it—and with ease.

Although his composing time is severely restricted by his activities as conductor, Bernstein has to his credit a symphony, "Jeremiah," two ballets, "Fancy Free" and "Facsimile," a clarinet and piano "Sonata," songs, and piano pieces.

The most striking feature of Bernstein's music is its immediacy of emotional appeal. Melodically and harmonically it has a spontaneity and warmth that speak directly to an audience. (After so much dissonant counterpoint and neo-classic severity, this was a new note for a young composer to strike.) At its worst Bernstein's music is conductor's music—eclectic in style and facile in inspiration. But at its best it is music of vibrant rhythmic invention, of irresistible élan, often carrying with it a terrific dramatic punch.

It is possible that some form of stage music will prove to be Bernstein's finest achievement. In general it is difficult to foretell the durability of music like Bernstein's which is so enormously effective on first hearing.

**I** HAVE saved for the last one of the curiosities of the younger generation: the music of John Cage. During the late Twenties the experimental percussion music of Edgar Varese and Henry Cowell made much noise among the musical avant-garde. Cage stems from there, much to the

surprise of many of us who thought the percussion period in modern music was definitely over.

Cage began in California with a percussion music of his own, obviously derived from that of his elders. But gradually he devolved the use of the so-called "prepared" piano as a percussive medium. A piano is "prepared" by inserting various metal and non-metal materials between the strings of the instrument. This produces a muted tone of delicately clangorous variety with no resemblance whatever to piano tone. It must be heard to be appreciated—and it must be heard close by, for the tone is tiny and of little duration, somewhat like that of the harpsichord. But even music for prepared pianos must, in the end, be judged like other music.

Fascinating as it is, I fear that Cage's music has more originality of sound than of substance. Stylistically it stems from Balinese and Hindu musics, and more recently from Arnold Schoenberg.

**S**ERIOUS music is thriving in the United States. One factor, not often noted, is the way our music schools and colleges are turning out composers in numbers unparalleled in our musical past. If we can gauge the musical future of a nation by the healthy activity of its younger generation of composers, then America is likely to do well.

The seven composers discussed in this article are near the top of the heap, but in many ways they are typical of their generation. They are all well trained musicians and, what is more, American-trained. Their works show influences, of course. But it is a sign of the times that those influences are no longer solely European, for the older generation of American composers has helped to orient them.

It is also typical that they can knock out all sorts of music: a successful ballet like Leonard Bernstein's "Fancy Free"; a big oratorio like Lukas Foss' "Prairie"; a real symphony like Harold Shapero's; expert string quartets like those of William Bergsma or Robert Palmer; unusual forms like the piano music of John Cage; delightful shorter pieces like those of Alexei Haieff.

These young men don't form a "school" in a stylistic sense. But they all write music that is rhythmically alive, richly melodic and clearly conceived. I believe that, taken altogether, these representative seven men and their throughout the country form an impressive group—one that need not fear comparison with the younger generation of any other country. That is something new for America.



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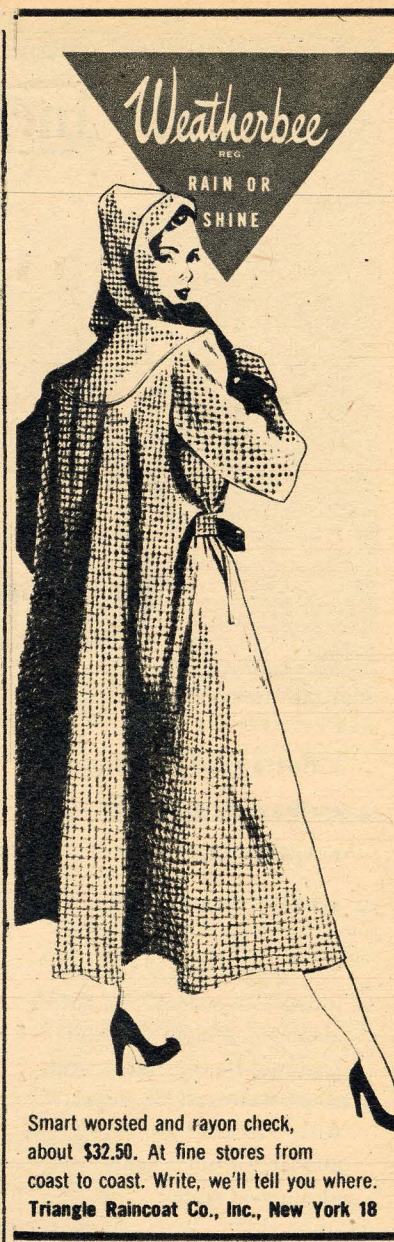
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