

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Trends in New Music on Disks

Critics of the contemporary arts who talk about "eclecticism" and "flux" should always be regarded with suspicion. New music has often been referred to as "eclectic," yet in 50 or 100 years it will all be neatly categorized by music historians.

If our age appears to us as musically eclectic, however, there are good reasons for that. One is the apparent lack of dominant figures around whom movements can coalesce—the present-day equivalents of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bartók and the like. Another is the dizzying plethora of new ideas that bombard the composer; with options more open than ever before, it is increasingly difficult to feel securely part of an ongoing tradition.

These ideas, all of which crop up on an assortment of recent records, arrive from a variety of directions and come at a time when the serial principle has lost any of its pretensions to hegemony. There are technical possibilities opened up by electronics and computer technology. There are third-world cultures. There is a new respect for popular-music traditions and folk music. There is the increased historical consciousness brought about by musicological re-

search and recordings. There is a fascination with meditation and the Orient, hardly confined to music and abetted by the widespread use of such drugs as marijuana.

Much of the resulting music dates back to American composers in previous decades who could be called loners—in fact this country has such a number of interesting eccentrics (Ives, Ruggles, Partch, et al.) that they almost constitute a school by themselves. Dane Rudhyar is such a figure, a man who is now almost 83 years old and who has turned out strange and unclassifiable music for much of his lifetime. Born in France (he was in the audience for the first performance of "The Rite of Spring" in 1913) he came to this country in 1916 and settled in California in 1920. (The two parts of this country most congenial for the cultivation of fiercely independent composers have been California and New England.) Aside from music Rudhyar has long been concerned with the Orient, philosophy, religion and astrology, and has written much about those subjects. The latest disk of his music is a piano record on CRI, nicely played by

Marcia Mikulak, which offers works from the 1920's and from 1976. They sound remarkably alike—dreamy, fragmented rhapsodies, chromatic yet comforting.

John Cage might seem an odd figure to place in the "loner" category, since no one has been more assiduous about propagating both his music and his theories, or about gathering a school with disciples. Still, Cage's considerable influence has been more pervasive as theory and as a paternal presence; his music itself, with its sometimes deliberately ephemeral impact, is more confined to him. The new recording of Sonatas and Interludes and "A Book of Music," both from the 1940's and both for prepared pianos, suggests the extent and limits of his work: fascinating to

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consider; less fascinating to listen to for extended periods of time.

Lou Harrison had his alliances 40 years ago both to Cage and to Virgil Thomson, the Francophilic, sturdily independent American composer whose folk-rooted, consolingly simple operas and instrumental works disguised a considerable musical erudition. Mr. Harrison has retreated in recent decades to California, where he writes music mostly for conventional Western instrumental combinations in a mode that is often quasi-Oriental, and sometimes mixes in actual Oriental instruments. The "Elegiac" Symphony dates back to 1942 for its first sketches (it was commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation) but only completed in 1975. It is a large-scale, gently contemplative work,

as befits its title, and most attractive. The other side offers a piece called "Cadences" by Robert Hughes, another San Francisco Bay Area composer, which is interesting in its elaborate juxtapositions of scraps of material and quotations from hither and yon, but not really directly akin to the kind of music being considered here.

It might seem odd to include Alan Hovhaness in this discussion, particularly a pops record by Andre Kostelanetz. But Mr. Hovhaness fits in, nonetheless, as a composer of mostly mournful, modal music with hypnotic undertones and a continued fascination for the coloristic possibilities of the modern orchestra. The fact that Mr. Kostelanetz has recognized in him a possible provider of fodder for his pop repertory is not surprising. One thing this new music represents is an implicit rejection of the extreme elitism that has characterized so much modern music, and if a composer actually chooses now to court an audience's favor, he can do so without a complete loss of his "serious" credentials.

Loren Rush is a San Francisco composer who, like Mr. Harrison, has writ-

ten music that is sometimes conventionally chromatic and abstract and sometimes more meditative and openly experimental. The piano music on Dwight Peltzer's record devoted exclusively to Mr. Rush's work is of the second type, and mightily appealing. "Oh, Susanna" begins with a dreamily chromatic cloud of seemingly random notes, and out of that cloud, gradually and mysteriously, emerge first fragments and eventually the whole of the wedding march from Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro." It's a lovely idea, and one that doesn't lose its charm on repeated hearings. "A Little Traveling Music" blends piano figurations and computer-generated sounds in a most effective manner, and "soft music, HARD MUSIC" juxtaposes soft, distantly quiet sounds for three ampli-

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