



Arthur Berger

"New York-born composer whom a good many of his American colleagues regard as the best musical stylist among them," is *High Fidelity's* description of Arthur Berger (Feb., 1957). His stylism is marked by a highly personal stamp and capacity for precise shape. *Time Magazine* (April 27, 1953) stated "it was clear that Berger had a style of his own."

"Clarity, refinement, perfect timing and impeccably clean workmanship are the keynotes to his style," wrote Alfred Frankenstein (*San Francisco Chronicle*, June 6, 1948). He "is the sort of musician who thinks twice before he reaches for the staff-paper." In the same vein Darius Milhaud remarked on his "loving attention to minute detail" (*Modern Music*, 1944).

The *Time* article already quoted points out that after a work "is technically finished, Berger often continues to polish up details. Says he: 'I am my own severest critic.'" The same critical faculty has made him, in Joseph Kerman's words, "one of the best American music critics" (*Hudson Review*). Since 1953, when he left the *Herald Tribune* for Brandeis University (where he is Walter W. Naumburg, Professor of Music), he has enjoyed the time released for composing. His earlier critical activities, which included editorship of *Listen Magazine* and the *Musical Mercury*, and reviewer for the *Boston Transcript*, *New York Sun*, and *Saturday Review*, are now limited to occasional contributions to the *New*

York Times and leading magazines.

Arthur Berger was born in New York City on May 15, 1912. When his family acquired a piano in 1921, his older sister received piano lessons which he learned before she did, and he played by ear. Between eleven and sixteen, aside from piano lessons, he was musically self-taught, and by 1928 when he entered New York City College he was writing traditional sonatas. Since the College offered little in music he later transferred to New York University, working mainly in the education division with Vincent Jones. There, along with two fellow students, he extolled Charles Ives as early as 1930, entered the vital set that Henry Cowell attracted, and also became part of the Young Composers Group that formed around Aaron Copland as guardian.

Berger was drawn to atonality, but feeling his personality obscured by Schoenberg's shadow, he destroyed his music of that period except for *Two Episodes: 1933* for piano. He welcomed fellowships he received to the Longy School of Music and to Harvard University for graduate work in musicology as a chance for a sabbatical from composing during which to reconsider style and tradition. Harvard granted him an M.A. and, in 1937, the Paine Fellowship to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. On his return in 1939 he taught at Mills College.