

tions. The most sensational covers are usually on jazz records, whose artists are depicted in ecstatic action, or "mood" music, where lush and romantic scenes woo the buyers.

Toulouse-Lautrec long ago proved that good design can be good advertising, and the art in "commercial art" is more and more recognised today. The Graphis International Advertising Art Award, for example, now has a Record Album Division, which last year was won by Bob Irwin's abstract painting of a trumpet, for a recording of Chet Baker. In both England and America, artists are signing their covers with pride, and already Burt Goldblatt has made a name for his atmospheric photographs and montages for jazz record covers. One new series, The Grand Award, claims to present "The World's Greatest Music—The World's Greatest Art," with a series of specially commissioned paintings. The lettering is kept to the frame, so that the owners may use the cover pictures, although there is no alternative cover to protect the record.

LP covers, in fact, are big business, and when *The Listener* called on Harold Isaacs and Fred Smith, of the Wellington office of H.M.V., Mr Isaacs quickly explained why.

"What we want in a cover," he said, "is brightness and a striking design to entice the customer to handle the record. After that the record must sell itself. We print all our covers in New Zealand now, which saves months of delivery time. We try to use the American designs as much as possible, for they are generally more exciting, but we do use English covers and some Australian ones, too. When we cannot get copyright of overseas covers, we have new ones designed here, and, of course, we need special covers for recordings made in New Zealand."

"We get a sample cover," Mr. Smith explained, "and make lithographic plates or letterpress blocks from that. The actual printing is done in different centres, and the flat covers come to Wellington for folding and pasting. All our new covers have the title, recording artist and serial number on the spine, and a curved cut-out on the lower fold, which helps take the weight of the record. This makes the covers harder

to paste, and we in New Zealand have had to design a new machine to cope with the varying thicknesses at the sides. This machine can paste just on 7000 covers a day, and we hope to raise that output.

"For our covers, we import over 100 tons of special clay-coated board a year. This board has the coating on each side to protect the records, since it is clean and smooth, with no fluff. And in addition the records are put in polythene or glassine bags."

The earliest LP covers were simple sleeves; later the discs were put in polythene bags or glassine envelopes for extra protection. Some companies use a double sleeve, and others an envelope binding, but all cater for the demand for the best protection available.

Sets used to be put out in identical but unattached covers. Now they are often put in plain covers in an attractive box, or bound in an album. Even the small 7½-inch discs are being sold in pairs in linked covers.

The backs of the covers have always had some information, and often some pictures. And the more important vocal records have had booklets with the words, whether of opera or musical comedy. These books are becoming progressively larger and more elaborate, and some new American records, even single discs of light music, are magnificently bound and illustrated. One magazine for jazz enthusiasts demands a high standard of information, and their reviewers downgrade any record which does not have adequate information on the cover about the performers, the time and place of recording, and the history of the music.

There is constant pressure to improve these extra services, and the companies cannot resist it and keep up their sales. Dorle Soria, of Angel Records, said in an article in *Theatre Arts* that his company is dressing their operas to bring the illusion of actual performance as far into the home as possible. The packaged opera has a cover, and a libretto, with texts in the original language and a precise non-singing translation. There is also a detailed synopsis of the plot, with analyses of the opera as musical and literary work. These are done by prominent critics or, where possible, by the

composer or author himself. *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* has an introduction by Poulenc, Gian-Carlo Menotti wrote comments for *Amelia al Ballo*, and the libretto of *Cavalleria Rusticana* contains D. H. Lawrence's translation of the original Sicilian story by Giovanni Verga which inspired Mascagni's opera.

Libretti for the Angel Company are enlivened with a wealth of pictures, drawings, and pertinent information from which the listener can form mental images of the performance. These may include reproductions of original coiffure and costume designs, photographs of the artists, excerpts from letters about the opera by the composer, and reproductions of the manuscript. Operas which take special significance from their locale may be accompanied by booklets up to 48 pages long, which describe the country in essays, photographs and maps. Sometimes it is possible to illustrate the actual scene of an opera, and this was done for *Tosca*, along with the designer's sketches for the opera setting.

But with all this other material, unfortunately not yet available here, we must not forget the cover, and Angel covers are planned to have a definite artistic merit, while reflecting the character of the work. These may be anything from drawings by Picasso and Cocteau (for *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*), to

a design based on a 17th century faience plate, for Falla's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, and an old Indian print for *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*.

From a retailer's viewpoint, these attractive covers are wonderful. "There is no doubt," said Roy Hill, "that these bright covers do help sell the records. The shops are so much more attractive now that we can put up a colourful display. In fact, many new shops are planned and old ones altered to display these records. This may help to explain the terrific boom in LP sales."

"Many more people come into the brighter shops to browse through the covers than ever came in to handle the old dull covers, which attracted only the enthusiast. Those who come to browse in this way often end up by buying something that has caught their eye. It is a tremendous help, too, to be able to locate a record quickly, simply by its cover picture."

So it would seem that a good cover does for a record what a pretty dress does for a girl. The connoisseur, whether of the classical or the modern style, will look at the cover but consider other qualities; by the less dedicated, the plainer covers are often unnoticed. But the recording companies are doing their best to see that no record goes unnoticed.

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VARIETY in cover style is important, but what the manufacturer wants is a striking design to entice the customer to handle the record
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