that many more of these slumbering masterpieces will be resuscitated. But Mr. Priestman should be given dictatorial powers to govern by decree until the recording industry learns to respect musical over engineering opinion.

P.H.L.

Morton Subotnick: *The Wild Bull* a composition for electronic-music synthesizer. Nonesuch H-71208 (LP)

John Pfieffer: *Electronomusic — Nine Images* RCA Victrola VICS 1371 (LP)

In 1967, Nonesuch commissioned *Silver Apples of the Moon* from Morton Subotnick and it was an unprecedented success: the reviews were almost unanimously good and the first pressing run sold out. *The Wild Bull,* the second commission, will do at least as well. Subotnick is one of the few people working in this field — and whose work has been published — with wit and style. His compositions have personality, and personality is hard to extract from a synthesizer. One of the elements of this style is what might be now called The Subotnick Beat: a very fast rhythm that swings strongly — or perhaps it should be called The Buchla Beat. And that is the only thing that bothers me about this work: how much is the Machine, how much is the Man?

Subotnick's synthesizer — his basic piano — is a Buchla system. Unlike the Moog system, which is designed to be *played,* the Buchla has a sequencer at its center, and this device can be set up to produce complex, automatic rhythms, like a syncopated motor you start up and let run, leaving your hands free for steering and horn-sounding. I have heard other works by other composers on this system and they had the same beat; in fact, they all had the *exact* same beat, and this seems to be the liability of the machine: it has only one throttle position — either that, or everyone is listening to the sound of the same drummer. This is a case of the machine influencing the music — a continuing problem in electronic music, which depends so heavily on machinery for its *composition* and performance. This sound first appeared on the second side of *Silver Apples of the Moon* (where it was badly needed) and doubtless helped the sale of these records. Knowing a good thing when they heard it (and it *is* a good thing), Nonesuch probably wanted more of the same, for the Buchla beat also appears several times in this work. When Subotnick has the sequencer really in hand — as he does during the great second

sequence on side two — it works wonderfully well, but at other times, it intrudes with its almost senseless patter, like a flock of heedless children running through a room. At present this may be only an uncorrected fault in the machine; if however, Subotnick continues to use it in everything he does, it will become *his* fault.

I first heard these rhythm tracks (pieces like this are built up in multiple tape-track layers, like rock recording) at The Electric Circus's Christmas celebration in Carnegie Hall in 1967. They were used to provide a pulse for a synapse-shattering multiple strobe-light extravaganza, and at high levels they were terrifyingly successful. Subotnick is, among other things, The Electric Circus's director of electronic music, and I suspect this job has influenced his work — and for the good. *The Wild Bull* makes use of several rock-sound techniques: rapid regenerative-filter sweeps (which, in rock, are produced by the homely Wah-wah pedal), heavy use of spring-reverberation sound (Hammond "echo"), and vibrato circuits. And, most obviously, the beat. But *The Wild Bull* is not rock — it is its own thing: a strange, powerful lament, at times full of grief, at times wildly rebellious; in short, classically tragic. Popular music has influenced Subotnick only in its basic rebellion and its sadness — its romanticism. *The Wild Bull* is serious music.

Its beat is not mindless; though it is liberating even when flying it still is heavy with an awareness of its inevitable fall. The piece moves from thrashing point to thrashing point with strong, direct, wailing cries, and it does *move*. Unlike many electronic works, which sound like "re-processed" stereo, Subotnick's work has an orchestral depth and spread; the sounds do not just ping-pong to and fro, but move in great arcs of antiphony between the speakers. In orchestral records, this is incidental to the work; in electronic music, it is a central part: the composer has to create his own space as well as his own sounds. This is not easy to do, but Subotnick does it so well it sounds effortless. *The Wild Bull* contains a very wide range of voices — not just the usual sirens and beeps — and some awesome bass surges usually lacking in most, shrill, electronic work. Usually purely synthesized sound becomes claustrophobic in a long piece, and one wishes for some unprogrammed sound to enter the piece and wrench it out of the windowless, soundproofed studio into the air. But air-moving sounds are hard to control: they are loaded with visual, social connotations, and do not sequence automatically; they do not "compute," and since the present effort in electronic music is for control, and not primarily discovery, successful composers shy away from such material. In this piece, however, there is no such discomfort. Subotnick uses the

synthesizer so widely and so well, it is enough to sustain the time.

The title of this work is taken from a Sumerian poem (1700 B.C.) which is presented on the back cover by the composer (I take it) in lieu of the usual electromysticism. For anyone in this field to acknowledge an extra-musical influence is rare; most electronic recording liner notes read like a handbook of computer programming. But all the influences — the poem, The Circus, even the machine, mean nothing. What counts is this lovely piece, quite different from *Silver Apples of the Moon* and a great advance over that work. *Silver Apples of the Moon* had a lot of pussyfoot serialism in it; it was a hedged, closed work. *The Wild Bull* takes in the world outside the insulated studio, the unprogrammed world of human predicament, in a clear and tragic vision not witnessed since Edgard Varese's brief *Poème électronique* of ten years ago. Because Subotnick made this record of struggle and loss, we all gain a little.

For the majority, who still consider *all* electronic music wild bull, there is John Pfieffer's *Nine Images* which might be called tame bull. The album notes (there are so many of them, they begin on the front cover) are awful; after reading them through it is difficult to imagine who they were written for. The author of the notes (and the music) seems to feel that what electronic music needs is some more terminology: "Electronomusic," "Inharmonic Side-Band," "Contraformer," "Parametric Blocks," "Metric Transperformer" — etc., etc., and etc. "Electronomusic," we are told, is "a new but obvious name for musically organized sound built from electronic technology." (What an Inharmonic Side-Band is, we are not told. It happens to be the tape-speed switch on a tape recorder.)

"Electronomusic" *is* obvious, despite the obfuscating titles; it certainly is not new. The techniques go back twenty years to the primitivism of the Toonerville Trolley compositions for toy-train-and-cows that came out of France after the war. But this is not because the author became deaf in 1950; it is because "in this age of radical avant-gardism . . . as experimentalists, we can't all follow the popular routes." So the author strikes out alone, trudging backwards into charted waters, until his lonely, unpopular figure disappears beneath a sea of tape-echo (or, as he prefers, Contraformer).

There are nine pieces, nine Images, on the record. The first, "Warm-Up, Canon and Peace" for Inharmonic Side-Band is Stella Dallas for sped-up piano. The sound throughout is marvelously irritating: shrill, tinny and fatiguing, and the piece seems to go on longer than the whole

of *The Wild Bull* — though it lasts, in fact, only a mere 7:28. The second piece (for Contraformer) is Laura In Space For Muffled Piano And Backward Violin With Tape-Echo. And so on. There are some more "moderne" beeps (Parametric Blocks), but they have a far more deadly effect than the most limited sequencer could produce. If you have to play it, I suggest the last cut on side two: "After Hours" (for Ordered Simpliformer). It, at least is intentionally funny; here the author does for the telephone what Leroy Anderson did for the typewriter — if you like what Leroy Anderson did for the typewriter.

Many years ago Victor brought out a record called "Classical Music For People Who Hate Classical Music." *Electronomusic* might be for People Who Hate Electronic Music. It illustrates the sort of one-finger exercises, smothered in terminology, that are being rushed into a suddenly expanding market. The danger is that the dross of the Electronomusics will hide the gold of the Wild Bulls.

TOD DOCKSTADER

ERRATA

The caption of the inset after p. 456 of our October, 1968 issue should read "Manuscript of Beauty Retire."

The musical example on p. 531 is erroneously credited to Allan Blank. The example is by Alvin Etler. Mr. Blank's music may be obtained from the American Composer's Alliance, 170 West 74th Street, N. Y. C.