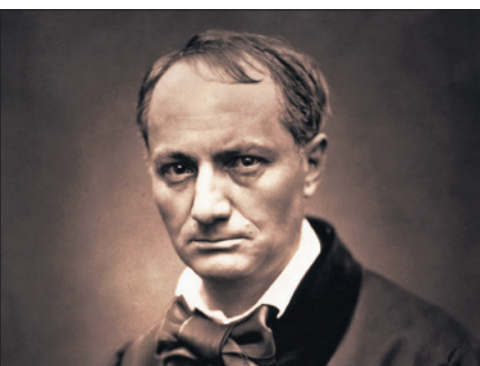


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THIS WEEK

The circumstances of Marc Blitzstein's murder at the hands of three merchant seamen in Martinique in 1964 remain mysterious, while his musical legacy remains in limbo, with much of the music he composed virtually forgotten, unpublished and unrecorded. Homosexual, charming and irascible, described by Orson Welles as "fine-tuned rather than highly strung", Blitzstein enjoyed the good life but devoted himself to employing "the sophisticated resources of modernist art music in the service of 'the People' – no easy task", writes David Schiff, reviewing a "massive new study" which fills in some of the gaps left by earlier scholars. Is Blitzstein still paying the price for his communist beliefs and adherence to the Party line, or do those beliefs "continue to give the music a critical aura it may not deserve"? Blitzstein, we are told, "suffered to some extent from depression and alcoholism, but then again so did Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald". And so did Charles Newman, the novelist, editor, essayist and dog-breeder whose magnum opus remained unfinished at his death in 2006. Douglas Field reviews a volume that offers "a tantalizing glimpse" of Newman's *folie de grandeur*.



The *folie* Sainte-Beuve attributed to Charles Baudelaire (above) was somewhat different: both an exotic folly, "highly decorated, highly tormented . . . where people recite exquisite sonnets [and] intoxicate themselves with hashish, where they take opium and thousands of other abominable drugs", and a form of madness. Lauren Elkin reviews a study of Baudelaire, the "ambivalent philosopher of modernity as well as its exemplar", by Roberto Calasso. Samuel Johnson, himself tormented by depression and fear of madness, found "through the balancing of alternative propositions in a single sentence" a pathway to sanity, writes Kate Chisholm, reviewing two new books – one of which offers a very twenty-first-century Johnson, much concerned with vegetarian diets and the benefits of exercise.

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