

A Miracle

By LYNN CLIFFORD GOLBERG

“THEY say miracles don’t happen today, but right there on stage a modern-day miracle is happening to me.” The stage manager looked out at the vast stage of the Metropolitan Opera House, with an astonished yet smiling face.

He recalled how he had felt only an hour before. It had been near curtain time, and all around him the performers and stagehands were scurrying about. All were, that is, but the baritone, from whom not a word had been heard.

“Where is he? Why doesn’t he come?” the stage manager mumbled over and over. “What to do? Let the show begin and hope he’ll be here in time for his entrance?”

He finally concluded, “We must begin. On stage everyone.”

Not even the brilliant performance of the tenor could take the stage manager’s mind from the realization that if the baritone did not show up, the opera would have to be stopped.

Suddenly, as he waited apprehensively in the wings, a messenger brought the news he had feared: the baritone, perfectly healthy the day before, was too sick to sing.

He looked up to see the tenor strolling off stage, his part of the first act completed. “Don’t bother

changing your costume. We can’t go on, because the baritone is sick.”

For a moment there was no answer, as the singer collected his thoughts. Then he looked up and replied in a confident voice, “Don’t worry, my friend. You have your baritone.” And before the stage manager could press for an explanation, had disappeared.

Moments later, he reappeared — in the baritone’s costume!

“But what are you doing?” protested the stage manager. “You are a tenor, not a baritone.” There was no reply. Striding on stage, with his back almost completely to the audience, the tenor-turned-baritone sang the complete baritone part beautifully, so beautifully that the audience thundered its appreciation, completely ignorant of the secondary drama being performed before them.

Then, offstage he dashed, again to the dressing room, back into the tenor’s costume, and onstage to resume the role of the tenor.

Watching him on that stage, the manager was just too amazed to say anything more than, “It’s a miracle.” Yes, it was a miracle. But in future years, the world would grow to associate even more miracles with the greatest tenor of them all, Enrico Caruso.

PABLO CASALS, the great Catalan cellist who led the Prades and Perpignan Festivals, described them as a "joining together of so many hearts." The Festivals were considerably more than that, for they brought together some of the world's greatest musicians in an outpouring of the uttered and devised note. Fortunately, Columbia recorded all the historic performances and has been issuing them a few albums at a time.

This month, for example, Bach's joyous *Cantata No. 189: Meine Seele Rumpft und Preist*, superbly sung by the tenor Aksel Schiøtz, appears in a coupling with Beethoven's song cycle, *An Die Ferne Geliebte*, which somehow escapes the studious melancholy of German lieder. The Bach cantata is a little gem — one voice against a deceptively simple background of flute, oboe, violin, cello, and harpsichord, whose infinite variety is internal and very rewarding (ML 4641).

Another Perpignan Festival recording brings Casals himself, and the pianist Rudolf Serkin, in Beethoven's *Twelve Variations in G Major on a Theme From Handel's Judas Macabaeus* — again first-

rate performances by first-rate musicians. On the reverse side, Jennie Tourel sings Bach and Mozart arias in a quiet, unpostured style. It is a little late in the day to remark on the restrained beauties of the Casals

cello, or the classic insight of his attack. But it is here in the Beethoven *Variations*, as it is in virtually all of his playing (ML 4640).

Those people who plague us with questions such as "If Booth had missed . . .?" can turn their attention to a more contemporary problem. If Prokofiev had shaken loose from the police-state in which he composed — a state in which Stalin's peasant taste dictated the form and content of all art — what then? His *Symphony No. 7*, finished not long before he died in 1953, bears the mark of genius — and its full qualities are brought out in an incisive, sympathetic, and full-throated performance on a Columbia record by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. But the melodic patterns of the piece are truncated by an outwardly imposed set of musical criteria. As a result, the Prokofiev who might have been a modern Berlioz never rises above ordinary depiction.

