



Opera Roundup

"LAKME" will be seventy next April. Thanks to LP, she is now completely available to devotees, new and old. The services of the Opéra-Comique, where Delibes' opera bowed in, have been enlisted for a version which will probably stand forever as the most that anyone can do with and for the touching Hindu girl (London LLA 12, \$17.85).

The *raison d'être* for any performance of "Lakmé" is the presence of a coloratura soprano able to work her way through the leaps and bounds of the second act. The Metropolitan has given the opera for such stars as Marie Van Zandt, Marcella Sembrich, Maria Barrientos, and Lily Pons. For Pons, rather than for "Lakmé" *per se*, was the opera elevated in 1946 to the privileged honor of an Opening Night. And for those who have enjoyed watching as well as listening to the Pons manipulations of voice and body, it has been a pleasure not often found in the opera house.

London has given its recording into the hands of a soprano new to us, Mado Robin. They have done well. There is a combination of naiveté and of fine vocal art in her singing. Just as one thinks she is about to overdo the *jeune fille* angle, along comes a solid, rich sound that shows this Robin knows not only her notes but her story as well. The voice is larger than those we sometimes hear in the part, but it has an agility and legato thoroughly delightful for the role. What's more, if you want higher and higher notes in your coloratura roles, Mlle. Robin mounts directly to a top G sharp in the "Bell Song." She makes an exciting thing of the upward octave leap to the high E at the end of the first part of the "Bell Song." This is the spot where most sopranos stop and take a big breath before attacking the upper tone. The difference is right and startling.

But a good "Lakmé," like any other proper opera, needs a balanced cast. And London introduces more than one new voice on this set. The Nilakantha is handsomely sung by a French bass of real depth. This is a sound we have missed in recent French operatic sets, such as London's "Pelléas," where the Arkel has a baritone timbre. But in

this new release Jean Borthayre is a singer to admire in every phrase. He is in the Journet-Plançon line.

Libero de Luca, the Italian tenor who has been working in the French capital for several seasons, is vocally admirable in the Gerald role. But he is still some distance from the elegance of phrasing the part needs. He breaks phrases where it is hard to believe he needs a breath, yet for no other apparent reason. The voice is virile, but the part calls for soft singing which he does not supply.

Claudine Collart is a sturdy Mallika, though occasionally inaccurate in rapid motion. Minor parts are particularly well sung, and the chorus is brilliant. George Sebastian is the conductor, to whom Act I seems to hold charms that escape me. Had he moved in with more of the directness of tempo he gives in the second act, it would be a better show. As it is, the fans who have kept "Lakmé" going for forty-five performances at the Met, and those who have waited for it to achieve permanent status on records, can now be completely happy in a performance not likely to be surpassed.

One would have thought the market for "Tales of Hoffmann" had been satisfied. Nevertheless, the new, abridged version on Urania discs (Urania 224, \$11.90) will and should find happy homes among collectors. The recording is in German. But for various reasons the language seems relatively appropriate. The setting of the Prologue and Epilogue is Nuremberg, while the last act takes place in Munich. And Hoffmann's famous narrative in the Prologue is the legend of Kleinzach, which sounds perfectly at home in German. It may be that E.T.A. Hoffmann's original tongue is merely finding its way back in some devious way through the libretto of Barbier.

Another reason for welcoming this set is that in its abbreviation it gives the greater part of the best music without omitting too much of the opera's essence. This is, of course, heresy to those for whom "Hoffmann" is an untouchable masterpiece.

Add, finally, the voices of Erna Berger as Antonia and Peter Anders as Hoffmann, plus an excellent Olym-

pia sung by Rita Streich, and the vocal side of things equals those of either of the two complete versions. More heresy can creep in here, for to at least one pair of ears the great closing trio between Antonia, the voice of her mother, and Dr. Miracle has an excitement of pacing and of climax that neither Beecham nor the Opéra-Comique recording gives. Arthur Rother conducts the chorus and orchestra of Radio Berlin in a well-engineered production.

Where German does not too greatly hamper the "Tales of Hoffmann," it—and a heavy-handed performance—proves fatal for excerpts from "Giroflé-Girofla," an operetta from France. The work of Alexandre Charles Lécocq, who once won an Offenbach prize for a setting of "Le Docteur Miracle," "Giroflé-Girofla" (Urania URLP 7054, \$5.95) is an all too foreseeable hassle centering around twin sisters who are engaged, one to her papa's creditor's son, the other to a Moorish chief. The kidnaping of one sister on the day of the intended double wedding provides the suspense of the piece. The music, as here abridged, is slow, heavy, and lacking in any Parisian flavor. It is aided in its torpor by as lustreless singing and playing as we have heard in long months of listening. Too bad.

—PAUL HUME.

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SO far as I know, the Polymusic recording of Mozart's "Zaide" (PRLP 901/2, \$11.90) provides the first hearing the present generation has had of this score, which was discovered among the composer's properties after his death. It lacks an overture, connecting dialogue, and the third act implied by the two finished ones. In every other respect, it is a musical achievement even superior to "Die Entführung aus dem Serail," which it resembles in content, surpasses in interest, and precedes in time.

As in the later work, the earlier one is concerned with the love of a Turk's captive (here Zaide) for one who would liberate her (Gomatz). They are aided to escape by Allazim, a friendly servant of the Turk Soliman. As the two acts come to an end, the fugitives have been brought back and sentenced to death. By contrast with "Die Entführung," where much the same kind of dramatic scheme is cushioned by laughter, not to say buffoonery, the atmosphere here is prevailingly serious.

Considering the lovely melodic freshness of this score, its purity and purposefulness, one can only assume that it was left unfinished because

Mozart could find no producer who considered it marketable. When he returned to the same general theme in "Die Entführung," it was with a *buffa* coloration that almost but not quite dimmed the charms of the remarkable airs for Constanza and Belmonte. The "Turkish" atmosphere (bass drum and triangle) which frequently makes "Die Entführung" a trial are absent from "Zaide," but also, unfortunately, are the elements to round it out for stage presentation.

However, this need not deter any phonophile from the rich pleasure in the endearing matter that exists, especially as presented here under the sympathetic direction of René Leibowitz. Hugues Cuenod's fine artistry is as effective in the German text as it has been in other languages, and the unheralded Mattawilda Dobbs is a soprano of Berger-like purity with—if the praise is not insupportable—more vocal quality. The others are all acceptable. The orchestra (Paris Philharmonic) is a bit smaller than it should be, but the recording is spacious, clear, and beautifully balanced.

Two conflicting trends of Cetra-Soria may be noted in the concurrent appearance of a "Bohème," of which Ferruccio Tagliavini is the particular star (Cetra-Soria LP set 1237, \$11.90), and a nineteenth-century *buffa* by Valentino Fioravanti entitled "La Cantatrice Villane," involving a number of excellent singers of which no single one is particularly prominent (Cetra-Soria LP 50102, \$5.95). In the "Bohème," Tagliavini enthusiasts will hear their favorite in good if rather light voice, with a charming Mimi by Rosanna Carteri, an excellent Marcello by the gifted Giuseppe Taddei, and a resonant Colline by Cesare Siepi. Regarded in the round, this "Bohème" must take third place behind the vastly more stimulating one conducted by Toscanini for RCA Victor, in which Jan Peerce and Licia Albanese outdo their counterparts of this issue, or the suaver, more aurally satisfying London version with Tebaldi.

On the other hand, the revision of Fioravanti's score of 1806 prepared by Renato Parodi for an Italian production of October 1951 acquaints us with a light-footed entertainment (akin to certain earlier issues on Cetra-Soria) of which we cannot hear too much these days. Whatever the original form, the present one is animated, compact, and consistently amusing. Nor need one take the dramatic scheme, involving three sisters who aspire to be *prima donna*, the amorous maestro who has his eye on one of them, or the soldier-husband of another who returns unexpectedly, too seriously.

The artifices of the framework are amply justified by the decorations imposed upon it, especially as supervised by the able Mario Rossi. Sesto Bruscantini adds to his repute as a ranking operatic singing-actor with his fine work as the singing teacher, and Alda Noni, Ester Orell, and Ferdnanda Gadoni collaborate admirably as the sisters. Of the others, Agostino Lazzari is outstanding for the flexible way in which he sings the tenor music of the returned husband. The unusual attention to dramatic plausibility (conveyed by sound effects, applause, etc.) adds to the interest of the whole. Excellent enunciation and well-balanced recording are further assets of this welcome enterprise, which is typical of a Cetra resource no other company can match.

A complete version of Gluck's "Orfeo," especially one sung in the appropriate Italian text, was obviously a predestined addition to the rapidly expanding catalogue of opera on LP. Urania's issue on URLP 223 (\$18.50) provides the physical fulfilment of this desirable issue, but under conditions of Germanic inspiration that fall considerably short of bringing to life (that is to say, "animating") the fervor and expressiveness of Gluck's great score.

The dominant elements are the conducting of Arthur Rother and the singing by Margarete Klose of the music for Orfeo. The former is serious and well-intentioned, but lacking in the flexibility, sense of pace, or mere intensity to comprehend the ebb and flow of Gluck's purpose. Miss Klose is a sumptuous voice for some aspects of the music, but without the variety of utterance or the technical resource to deliver

its numerous nuances. Erna Berger is identified as the Euridice, but the likeness of her vocal quality provided in Act II is hardly convincing. The average of the recording is acceptable, but the chorus is too far from the microphone for proper balance.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

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WE call it "Pique Dame" (which is German for "Queen of Spades") and we know its principal arias—if we are familiar with them at all—by such names as "Es geht auf Mitternacht" and "Als du zum Gatten mich erkoren." But Tchaikovsky entitled his opera "Pikovaya Dama," and the words to which he set his music were not German words. I, for one, have never felt very comfortable hearing Tchaikovsky's music sung in the usual German translation, sensing a basic and pervading contradiction between the shape of the melody and the sound of the text. Now comes a performance of "Pique Dame" by an all-Russian cast, recorded in Moscow and sponsored here by Colosseum (CRLP 130-133, \$23.80), which convinces me that my reservations were well founded. Though I know not a word of Russian, I sense an unmistakable and irresistible "rightness" in its mating of text and music. Add this recording to the case for opera in the original propounded by Dale Warren elsewhere in this issue.

"Pique Dame" comes from Tchaikovsky's most fertile period, composed just after "The Sleeping Beauty" and of the same fabric—if not so consistently inspired—as that wondrous ballet score. The opera's focal point, the

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Mattawilda Dobbs—"Berger-like purity."



Hugues Cuenod—"fine artistry."

—Sabine Weiss.