



Yesterday in Salzburg— “Tomorrow” in Munich

SALZBURG.

SALZBURG as a musical center is a lovely legend kept alive by those who cherish it for what it was. That could mean either its luster as the birthplace of Mozart or, in a more contemporary sense, as the scene of some unforgettable performances pitched to a standard of perfection. There has long been a suspicion that Salzburg will not produce another Mozart; one wonders, in view of some recent experiences, whether the likelihood of re-establishing the standards of the late Twenties and early Thirties is not quite as remote.

One finds a certain consciousness of old-time standards in the organization of this year's festival, but also a large disposition to compromise and concession. We all know about the worldwide poverty in fine opera singers; but does this justify the use of a German text for “Figaro” in the very town that produced the genius who labored to produce the kind of music suitable to the Italian original? Or indulgence for the lamest kind of “Figaro” imaginable and a “Don Giovanni” strung out to unheavenly lengths? The official reason for the German “Figaro” is the cast of Paul Schoeffler, Erich Kunz, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Irmgard Seefried, and Hilde Gueden, whose Italian, we are informed, is too inept. However, no one can cite a justification for the nonvolatile conducting, even if the name to which it is attributed is Wilhelm Furtwängler's.

The nature of this phenomenon invites more than passing attention: for the Vienna Philharmonic produces a consistently superb sound for Furtwängler; the musical detail could only be produced by ardent and intensive rehearsal; the blend of voices—especially in “Don Giovanni”—was often exceptional. One could only conclude that the lack of animation, drama, or mere forward motion was related to some physical factors that made Furtwängler believe the music was going faster than it was. However, the plain evidence is that the legend is more powerful than the reality, for Furtwängler was braved for everything he did.

Both works were staged by Herbert Graf, the “Figaro” very much as it is seen at the Metropolitan—acceptable there, but a little dull and routinized

for Salzburg. “Don Giovanni” is given in the outdoor amphitheatre known as the Felsenreitschule. This involves the use of a stage area several hundred feet wide, but very shallow. Planted in full view from start to finish are skeleton buildings to suggest the residences of Donna Anna, Elvira, and the Don. In these big divisions the action is believable enough; but when it comes down to swifter transitions and smaller details of action it has to be a compromise—and it is. However, it was good to see that Graf does not endorse here the clowning that has sometimes been perpetrated over his name at the Metropolitan.

Cesare Siepi (who could sing a fine Italian Figaro if the management asked) has improved his Don substantially since it was seen in New York last winter. He has progressed from high school to college in the arts of *amour*, and may confidently be expected to achieve post-graduate status eventually. He hasn't found a way yet of always keeping his heavy voice as pliant as it should, but that too shows progress. Perhaps a conductor with a more spirited concept of “Don Giovanni” than Furtwängler would have made a difference, also.

Quite the best singing heard in Salzburg—or anywhere in Europe lately—was Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's excellent Elvira. This is perhaps the most difficult of all of Mozart's female roles to cast successfully, but Miss Schwarzkopf has both the impact and the finesse the part requires, plus a flourish of bravura that enables her to sing the oft-omitted “*Mi tradi*” with style and assurance. The result, unfortunately, was to dwarf the neat but diminutive Donna Anna of Elisabeth Grümmer, a conscientious singer whose middle range is much superior to the top. Otherwise there was charming voice and little dramatic illusion from Erna Berger as Zerlina, a rather nondescript Leporello by Otto Edelmann, and a peculiarly variable Ottavio by Anton Dermota.

Salzburg's frame for “Der Rosenkavalier” is still the famous original set designed by Alfred Roller forty years ago, and the action is equally true to tradition. Clemens Krauss conducts, as he did when I heard the work here twenty years ago, and the Vienna Philharmonic plays the score

Octavian and Hilde Gueden's Sophie are sufficiently dimensional to suit the frame, but Maria Reining is a pale personality for the Marschallin—though she acts well enough and sings the music cleanly—and even those loyal to the Salzburg effort complained of the heavy, Germanic character of Kurt Böhme's Ochs.

Over in Munich the Mozart can be an even more doleful “Figaro” (also in German, with the veteran Willy Domgraf-Fassbender still singing Figaro, Hans Hotter as a Wotanish Almaviva, and Hertha Tröpper promising well for the future as Cherubino). However, there was a well-organized “Arabella” with Della Casa as Arabella and the attractive Gerda Sommerschuh as her pantalooned sister, Zdenka. The plan to make Munich a permanent exhibition place for the Strauss literature obviously promises more than a concentration on Mozart would.

THE DYNAMIC quality of Munich's musical life is best exemplified by Carl Orff, a Bavarian turned fifty in 1945, whose work is still to be heard in America. However, if Dimitri Mitropoulos's careful attention to his “Antigone” may be read at its full value, that situation will soon be remedied—if not at the Munich length of an uninterrupted two-and-a-half hours from eight to ten-thirty. At the end, one has something of the sense of exhaustion that goes with “Elektra,” but hardly the exaltation of Strauss's climax. Orff's score utilizes four pianos (the strings are struck with hammers as often as they are played in the conventional way), xylophone, celesta, drums in abundance, and cymbals. After an hour or so Orff recalls that he has a pitfull of wind instruments, double basses, and harps (the other strings were invisible, and certainly inaudible) to vary the aural assault. The Hölderlin translation* of Sophocles is used, and it may be described as far from conversational German.

However, for all its sputtering declamation, exacerbatng shrieks, and discontinuous line, this writing is attention-compelling—till nervous exhaustion sets in. Orff has absorbed his Stravinsky, certainly, and derived from it a tonal fabric which is neither mildly diatonic nor impossibly chromatic. To be sure, it requires such a masterful singing actress as Christel Goltz to make Antigone acceptable—one can hardly say believable—but she would be well worth bringing to America for this as well as other purposes. Gerhard Lenssen conducted the difficult score impressively.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

Murder in the Measure

"Lexicon of Musical Invective," by **Nicolas Slonimsky** (Coleman-Ross. 296 pp. \$6) documents what composers and writers have long suspected—it's a rare creative artist whose genius is promptly recognized by the critics. Mr. Edman, who reviews it here, is professor of philosophy at Columbia University.

By Irwin Edman

NICOLAS SLONIMSKY'S "Lexicon of Musical Invective" entertainingly confirms one's worst suspicions about critics, not only of music but of all the arts and of philosophers, historians, and scientists as well. The point made and illustrated by the book is simple, important, at moments astonishing. It is a familiar fact that new works in any art have repeatedly been an offense to eminent and established critics. The good in art comes to be identified with the familiar. The admirable is what we came to love early in our lives. "Our tastes," says Santayana, "are formed by our first masters and our first loves." To paraphrase the old Army dictum, the new is difficult, the original is impossible.

All this is obvious enough. Nonetheless, it is surprising the extent to which what now is such standard beauty in music could ever have brought down upon the heads of its composers such vilifications as are industriously and aptly cited in these pages. The editor has a moral to draw and, not waiting to the end, he draws it in the first page of the preface: "The present collection is a *Schimpflexicon*. Its animating purpose is to demonstrate that music is an art in progress, and that objections leveled at every musical innovator are all derived from the same musical inhibition, which may be described as Non-Acceptance of the Unfamiliar." It is not perhaps as simple as all that, even if Mr. Slonimsky, by adroit choice, seems to prove that it is. Certainly one can scarcely believe one's eyes on reading what now seems such a misuse of the critic's ears.

Beethoven's Second Symphony is a crass monster, a hideously writhing, wounded dragon that refuses to expire, and though bleeding in the finale, furiously bleats about with its tail erect. In 1893 Philip Hale, writing in

the *Boston Journal*, said of Brahms's C Minor Symphony: "I do not like and I cannot like the C Minor Symphony of Brahms . . . I am willing to admit without argument that the Symphony is grand and impressive and all that. So is a Channel fog." And so on through Prokofiel, Strauss, Stravinsky, Debussy, Bartók.

What was said about Wagner is notorious, and also what was written of Berlioz. One has the impression that every great composer was greeted with malignant hoots of derision. There seem to be certain exceptions. Unless it is an oversight on the part of the editor, Mozart never, even at the beginning, provoked the spleen that the musical cognoscenti displayed against some of the now revered names. Nor Handel, nor Haydn, nor Purcell, nor Couperin.

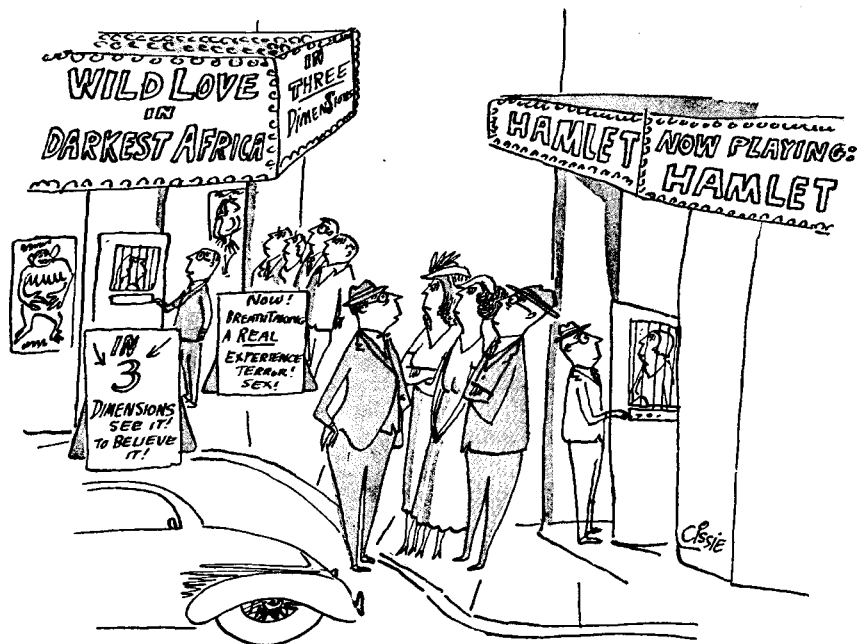
BUT THERE is certainly evidence in Satan's plenty that the best of critics, learned, informed, and at their best highly perceptive, could be strangely opaque. Hanslick, the very distinguished Viennese critic, writing on Wagner, is a famed instance. And several critics in several towns went to town to slaughter Debussy; among them were London, Paris, and New York.

As Mr. Slonimsky points out, some

wrote well as a matter of routine, rose to imaginative heights when they let themselves go in invective. One of the literary morals to be drawn is that it is apparently easier to be vivacious in blame rather than in praise. The vocabulary of approval sounds vanilla-flavored compared with the lexicon of rage.

But one cannot help wondering about the general moral Mr. Slonimsky draws. He cites, for instance, Shaw in an outburst against Brahms. Shaw may not have recognized Brahms's virtues, but he had an eye to his limitations and his excesses, some of which are still condemned by shrewd judges even though Brahms is by now not a novelty. Said Shaw in 1893: "Brahms is a sentimental voluptuary. . . . He is the most wanton of composers; only his wantonness is not vicious; it is that of a great baby, rather tiresomely addicted to dressing himself up as Handel or Beethoven." It was rather shrewd of Shaw to have said early what others have perceived since.

It is a familiar fact that people are in all matters frequently exasperated by the unfamiliar. They are also taken in by novelties. A lexicon of false praise might well be put together, filled with hasty approval of what for the moment seemed the real thing. Meanwhile, this dictionary of musical abuse reads very well and we can all smugly feel how much wiser we are than the critics of yesterday, a condition which posterity will doubtless prove contrary to fact. Where are the Varèses of yesteryear, and where, one may soon be saying, is Sibelius?



"Well, which shall it be—a three-dimensional plot in a two-dimensional movie or a one-dimensional plot in a three-dimensional movie?"