

Music to My Ears

STRAVINSKY'S "RAKE"—CANTELLI & BSO

THE oldest story in the operatic lexicon is the one about the inspired composer, sure of what he wants to do, held down and impeded by the text of theatrical neophytes. It is also the newest story in the operatic lexicon, to judge from first impressions of Igor Stravinsky's "The Rake's Progress," which had an impressive Metropolitan premiere under Fritz Reiner's direction in mid-February as organized and supervised by R. Bing.

From the opening vibrations of the brief prelude (a kind of Handelian fanfare remarkably evoking the English setting) to the last deftly voiced chord for the five principals in the epilogue, Stravinsky marshals sound materials remarkable for timbre, clarity, newness. Mozart is the admitted and evident model, but only structurally, in the solos and ensembles joined by recitative subtly modernized. The Tchaikovskian cantilena, over an almost hypnotically recurrent ostinato, is Stravinsky's own contribution to the musical vocabulary, and one destined to have a wide influence. This blending of formalism with romanticism gives the score of "The Rake's Progress" a special place in Stravinsky's output. It is also an industriously, elegantly alive piece of music with the rare attribute of style.

It remains a rather constrained, incomplete stage work for the classic reasons: the incompetence of the librettists measured against the competence of the composer. W. H. Auden is an eminent name in contemporary letters and Chester Kallmann a respected one, but letters have nothing (or little) to do with theatre. Words meant to be set to music should serve that function first, any other afterwards. Measuring what can be read against what can be heard, in the setting, I'd say it was too often unclear and highflown for easy comprehension. "O clement love" is a nice poetic phrase; but the music should tell us that this is untroubled, happy love, rather than the archaic, expensive word "clement."

As a dramatic structure, the Auden-Kallmann elaboration of the theme of the Hogarth engravings seems to me halting and disjointed. Rakewell and his Mephistophelian nemesis, Shadow, are sound enough characters, but the notion of a bearded lady as a brightly unconventional wife for Tom is a precious bit of vulgarity we could well

do without. As the work stands, Baba does serve a purpose of rather perverted gaiety and humor, but only for want of sounder gaiety and more attractive humor in the script. As a foil for the innocuous Micaëla-ish Anne, Baba is almost heroic; but two less likely ladies rarely shared a rake's fancy.

However, it takes a great deal to discourage a master bent on expressing his immortal urge (as the Mozart of "Zauberflöte" or the Verdi of "Trovatore"). Given access to some extraordinary springs of musical impulse, Stravinsky drenched the arid soil of the Auden-Kallmann text with an amount of freshly felt, cunningly contrived music remarkable for any day, and for our own close to exceptional. Every phrase—especially those which sound most familiar—mean something different at second hearing than at first; and we hope the box-office prospers sufficiently for us to hear it and study it half a dozen times more.

As a turnout of musical effort, plus staging resourcefulness and general esthetic energy, "The Rake's Progress" is as finished a creation—considering its unconventional demands—as the Met has offered in years. Reiner's experience with scores of similar chores made him an ideal clarifier of the many musical difficulties, especially the tricky problem of balancing the intricate values of the orchestral score against those in the voice parts. No doubt these will flow even more smoothly a few weeks hence, but to surmount the obstacles of a premiere so cleanly was a major accomplishment.

Considering that this preparation was done in the midst of normal obligations to Puccini and Wagner, Bizet and Verdi, the results spoke volumes for the artistry and good will of Mack Harrell (Shadow), Eugene Conley (Rakewell), Blanche Thebom (a gayly spirited Baba where a merely acceptable one would have been fatal), and Hilde Gueden, a beautiful sounding Anne for all the Germanicisms of her enunciation. Whether for the lacks of the text as noted, or Stravinsky's limited sense of English prosody, or the faulty enunciation of the performers other than Harrell and Thebom,

the "English" text made careful reading of the synopsis imperative—assuming one wanted to know as much of what was being said and sung as, for example, in "Rosenkavalier."

Horace Armistead's scenic designs were suitable if undistinguished, George Balanchine's direction so ascetic, in movement and gesture, as to make one suspect over-understatement. But in the end it was the bowing, vivid figure of Stravinsky which reminded one where the virtue and the vitality in this enterprise lay. Rudolf Bing could do much worse than commission him to write a work specifically for the Metropolitan, if only to give both La Scala and Covent Garden a score as suitable for their frames as well as its.

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THE Italian symphonic conductor—and the way this starts out it could end as one of the greatest generalizations of all time—remains a phenomena outside the direct line of symphonic music, for all that the arch-example of the school enjoys unparalleled esteem in many schools. In many ways Guido Cantelli—whose latest appearance in New York was in the privileged role of guest conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra—recalls rather vividly such older compatriots as the late Bernardino Molinari and the early Victor de Sabata (nobody, but nobody, but De Sabata could recall the late De Sabata) in his absorption with substance rather than with idea, with sound rather than with the impulse that motivates sound.

This is admittedly a difficult kind of point to substantiate, for one has to assess intent in terms of result, thereafter choosing the evidence that supports the case, ignoring the contrary kind (if it exists). In this latest contact with Cantelli, my impressions were founded on his evaluation of Haydn's Symphony in D, No. 93, and Stravinsky's "Jeu de Cartes." Even in the finale of the Haydn, I did not hear an *esprit* to make one aware that as well as writing a lot of notes *Presto ma non troppo* Haydn was also expressing a state of mind. The Stravinsky ballet suite was vigorously led, with a piercing insight of the matter in the score; but it was much glossier, more cushioned with tonal fat than the composer's own lean treatment. The orchestra played very well for him, which argues persuasiveness in rehearsal; but the engagingly picturesque gesture with which each movement ended made one wonder whether the audience was applauding the tonal show (commendable) or the visual exhibition (spectacular).

—IRVING KOLODIN.



THE WORLD

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sensational anti-Communist books and pamphlets. Nor is it akin to the specialized studies by American scholars which have emanated from the Harvard Russian Research Center, the Rand Corporation, and now Columbia's Russian Institute. Rather, the book is an often thoughtful primer on the Soviet system—and on what is wrong with it.

The over-all result, however, is a very slim and largely unoriginal book. And this reviewer, for one, is profoundly puzzled why Mr. Sternberg, of all people, should have written it. Taken together, his ambitious works on international politics and economics, his broad interests, and his training in scholarly research warranted the kind of general synthesis and summing-up about the Soviet system which the outside world would welcome warmly. But what we have here is a thin volume which will offer little new to the American "general reader."

Pushed by the Future

WORLD WITHOUT END. By Emil Lengyel. New York: The John Day Co. 374 pp. \$4.50.

By HAL LEHRMAN

THE Middle East is a terribly important place. I use the adverb in its literal meaning, because it is quite conceivable that Western errors in the dangerous area bounded by Egypt and Iran could prepare a holocaust which might spread through

Just Published

Many of the books described below are reviewed in this issue or will be in coming numbers. New works of fiction are listed elsewhere in this issue.

ALICIA MARKOVA. By Anton Dolin. New York: Hermitage House. \$3.95. One noted dancer talks about another in detailing the career of the fabulous ballerina Markova from the vantage of years of association.

ALL ABOUT HOLLAND. By W. de Groot van Embden. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. \$3.50. A methodical information-guide to what the demanding traveler will want to know about the Dutch.

ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY. Edited By A. L. Kroeber. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. \$9. Leading anthropologists the world over take inventory of the progress made in anthropological research in modern times.

THE ATOM STORY. By J. G. Feinberg. New York: Philosophical Library. \$4.75. The history of the atom from speculation in ancient Greece to application in contemporary Hiroshima. Intended for the layman.

A BACKGROUND FOR BEAUTY. By Arnold Silcock. New York: Beechurst Press. \$10. Man's pursuit of beauty in the arts is discussed by an art historian who takes the period from stoneman to Dali as his province.

BEYOND HORIZONS. By Carleton Mitchell. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. \$3.95. The author roams the centuries to piece together scattered information on the voyages of courageous men who braved the seas in a variety of ships.

BRITISH GOVERNMENT. By Hiram Miller Stout. New York: Oxford University Press. \$7. The cogs in the complex machinery of the present British political system are described by a former assistant military attache to the U.S. Embassy in London.

THE BUFFALO WALLOW. By Charles Tenney Jackson. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. \$3. Nostalgic recollections of boyhood in the 1880's on Nebraska's prairies.

BUILDERS OF THE QUAKER ROAD. By Caroline N. Jacob. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co. \$3.50. Sketches of the men and women who made Quaker history.

THE CLOWN'S GRAIL. By Wallace Fowlie. Denver: Alan Swallow. \$2.50. A critic well-versed in the European tradition ranges the field from Plotinus to Joyce, using as his leitmotif love as it is expressed in literature.

THE CONQUEST OF DEATH. By J. Middleton Murry. New York: British Book Centre. \$3.50. A translation of Benjamin Constant's "Adolphe," a masterpiece of the French Romantic Period, and a critical evaluation.

CONTAINMENT OR LIBERATION? By James Burnham. New York: The John Day Co. \$3.50. The author of "The Coming Defeat of Communism" suggests that since the Kennan policy of containment has failed we should announce to the world our resolve to free all Russian-dominated peoples.

THE DEEP BLUE SEA. By Terence Rattigan. New York: British Book Centre. \$1.75. Text of the play now running in New York about an older, married woman who ruins her future by falling for an ex-airman with a past.

THE END OF A REVOLUTION. By Fritz Sternberg. Translated by Edward Fitzgerald. New York: John Day Co. \$3. The transition from the ideals of 1917 to the most reactionary dictatorship in the world is painstakingly detailed by a noted political observer.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY. By Philip Young. New York: Rinehart & Co. \$3. A New York University English teacher undertakes to determine the patterns of his work.

FLYING SAUCERS. By Donald H. Menzel. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. \$4.75. Natural atmospheric occurrences and chemical reactions account for what people believe to be missiles or spaceships in this author's opinion.

THE FOURTH KING. By LeRoy Smith, Jr. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$2.75. A series of poems on themes of faith, skepticism, truth, and survival.

I FLY AS I PLEASE. By Marion Rice Hart. New York: Vanguard Press. \$3. Details of the pleasures of flying as experienced in the cockpit of Mrs. Hart's planes are told from the ground up.

I JOINED THE RUSSIANS: A German Flier's Diary of the Communist Temptation. By Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. \$4. Bismarck's great-grandson tells of his capture by the Russians during World War II after bagging thirty-five planes. His conversion to Communism and eventual disenchantment form the bulk of this autobiography.

INDIAN TALES. By Jaime de Angulo. New York: A. A. Wyn. \$3.75. Traditional campfire stories and songs collected by the author who lived some forty years with the Indians of the Pacific Coast.

I, WILLIE SUTTON. As told to Quentin Reynolds. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young. \$3.50. Willie the Actor lays bare his safe-cracking and jail-breaking career, but protests innocence in the bank robbery that netted his last conviction.

KEYS THAT UNLOCK THE SCRIPTURES. By James E. Dean. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$3. An expert in the field of religious history explains in simple terms the background of the Scriptures and analyzes textual problems for the layman.

MOZART IN SALZBURG. By Max Kenyon. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$4.50. A biographical study and discussion of Mozart's music during his Salzburg period.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD. By Patricia Petzoldt. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co. \$3.50. A husband-wife mountain-climbing team tell of their adventures in Europe and the Orient.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL REVOLUTION. By Kenneth E. Boulding. New York: Harper & Bros. \$3.50. In this second volume in the National Council of the Churches series on the Ethics and Eco-

nomics of Society, a professor of economics at the University of Michigan deals with large American organizations and their effect on the individual.

PRINCE OF PLAYERS: Edwin Booth. By Eleanor Ruggles. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. \$4.50. A member of one of the most noted theatrical families in Thespian annals receives rounded biographical treatment.

THE RETURN OF GERMANY. By Norbert Muhlen. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co. \$4.50. A review of East and West Germany's present governmental, political, and social orientation.

SHAKESPEARE'S IDENTITY. By A. W. Titherly. New York: British Book Centre. \$6. Clearing up centuries of confusion, Mr. Titherly informs us that the uncultured actor William Shakspeare did not write William Shakespeare's plays. The latter was really the pen name used by William Stanley, Sixth Earl of Derby.

SHAME AND GLORY OF THE INTELLECTUALS. By Peter Viereck. Boston: Beacon Press. \$4. An attack on "mushy liberalism" by a spokesman for "the New Conservatism."

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. By Christopher Burney. New York: Coward-McCann. \$2.75. Eighteen months of solitary confinement and interrogation by the Germans in France during World War II required rigorous psychological efforts to survive. The author, now a member of the British Royal Institute of International Affairs, describes the ordeal.

SPRING BIRTH AND OTHER POEMS. By Mark Van Doren. New York: Henry Holt & Co. \$3. New poems by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet.

SUCH, SUCH WERE THE JOYS. By George Orwell. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$3.50. A collection of searching essays on vital contemporary questions by the late author of "Nineteen Eighty-Four" fame.

SYMBOLISM AND AMERICAN LITERATURE. By Charles Feidelson, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. \$6.50. A Yale professor traverses familiar old and modern roads and points to strains of flowering symbolism that previous guide books have not emphasized.

WALLS OF THE LABYRINTH. By Morris Weisenthal. Denver: Alan Swallow. \$2. A first collection of poems on the theme of contemporary spiritual poverty.

WHO SPEAKS FOR MAN? By Norman Cousins. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$3.50. After describing journeys to Europe and the Far East, the editor of *The Saturday Review* blueprints proposals for global understanding and citizenship.

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF INSECTS. By Albro Gaul. New York: Rinehart. \$4. A non-technical worms-eye-view of the social relationship and facts of life related to the insect kingdom.

WORLD WITHOUT END. By Emil Lengyel. New York: The John Day Co. \$4.50. A well-known historian presents a factual and interpretive picture of the Middle East and its problems, with background notes.

—S. M.