



## Stravinsky in the "King's" English

EDINBURGH. **A** MUSIC festival may generally speaking be described as an island of harmony surrounded by a sea of discontent, with barely visible rocks marked "Prices during high season—" "No lodgings available," and "Have you booked?" Rather than being the exception, Edinburgh sums up both the amenities and the annoyances to be encountered in Salzburg, Munich, Bayreuth, etc., compounded by adding a theatre crowd and a ballet crowd to the musical crowd, all with the giddy expectation that a city of its numerous thousands (455,770 by a count of 1950) will show comfortable accommodations for all.

Well, that is a fiction far from pleasant and hardly amusing to those who are discovering for the first time that a "hotel" in Scotland (or, at least, in Edinburgh) may be anything from a converted two-family house with eight rooms to an ancient hostelry with several hundred. Those who accept the tender of "lodgings with a private family" may find themselves not only on the other side of all the tracks that lead in and out of Edinburgh, but with a five-flight walk-up between themselves and their rooms. (I know. I counted.)

It's not considered polite hereabouts to mention the American so-

prano Genevieve Warner, who was beaten up while going home from a festival performance in 1951. When I first heard about it the fact that it was described as happening a short distance from her hotel seemed contradictory. Now that I have seen where some of the "hotels" are located I wonder that it hasn't happened more often.

This is my small way of sounding a warning on behalf of the eight thousand or more Americans who will—if past precedents are reliable—come to Edinburgh next year. They should assure *themselves* just where and how they will be housed before accepting local word of mouth that "all will be well." A stiff upper lip has its place, but not when one has journeyed far for a pleasant, if costly, interlude of music, drama, and ballet, only to find that he is housed in a "temperance" dwelling where smoking is frowned upon and the only admissible bottles are those containing milk.

The American identity with this year's festival has extended beyond the expectable number of paying customers to a salient group of artists. There have been the usual itinerants, such as Isaac Stern and Eleanor Steber, who have appeared in concert. But there have also been Alfred Wallenstein, Nan Merriman, and Jerome

Hines, who have devoted all of August and part of September to preparing the best possible impression for the first viewing in England of Igor Stravinsky's "The Rake's Progress."

There would have been still another had not David Lloyd given up his role of Tom Rakewell to the English tenor Richard Lewis.)

For one with a considerable experience of the Metropolitan's "Rake" the one produced by the Glyndebourne team of Carl Ebert and Osbert Lancaster held a series of stimulating possibilities. Would the more suitable frame—the King's Theatre in Edinburgh is a normal-sized house, the Metropolitan decidedly abnormal—enhance the values of the picture? Could the work be "played" as well as performed? Would the directorial skill of Ebert (whose experience with the work dates to its premiere in Venice a year ago) animate what George Balanchine had left static? Was there a continuity in the score that Wallenstein might track down more persistently than Fritz Reiner had?

**A**LL these questions were answered in the course of attending rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and first performance, but some other facts unexpectedly manifested themselves. The whole work seemed more right and real for an English audience than it had for a miscellaneous one in America. The more suitable theatre helped considerably, but it was plain that all the folksy allusions (synthetic though they might have been) registered much more here than in New York. Ebert's sensitivity to musical as well as dramatic values kept the action fluid throughout, while making the most of the limited opportunities for action provided by the brothel scene, the auction episode, and the doleful climax in Bedlam.

Purely as sound, Wallenstein's exposition of the score didn't match Reiner's for precision or pointillistic values, but the steady quest for a lyric line brought about a sense of contact between performers and listeners one had never felt in New York. And, if the "King's" English was flavored by the native inclinations of Elsie Morison, an Australian soprano who sang Anne, Nan Merriman (Baba the Turk) and Jerome Hines (Nick Shadow), both Americans, and most particularly by the Scotch tenor Murray Dickie, who played the Auctioneer, they matched the English English of tenor Richard Lewis in total intelligibility. The real, if intermittent, beauty in the score was decidedly enhanced by the sensation that this was a play meant to be understood.

How well the principals might have



Scene from the Edinburgh "The Rake's Progress"—"a sense of contact."

sounded throughout was evident in the jocular epilogue, in which Hines's substantial bass and Miss Merriman's luscious mezzo were beautifully blended with the serviceable tenor of Lewis and the clean, though hardly robust, soprano of Miss Morrison (Hervey Alan provided the lines for Truelove, senior). But Stravinsky hardly took such pains with his vocal writing elsewhere, with the familiar consequences—a constant scramble by the singers for a vocal toehold on which to poise on the jagged accent to a climax.

How you proceed to build a characterization on such precarious footing is hard to say, though the lofty shadow of Hines and the picturesque Baba of Miss Merriman provided physical assets Stravinsky could hardly have counted on. The latter's rich low register brought out details in the score one had not heard before, and struck a note of genuine sympathy in the one moment—when she turns Tom back to Anne's custody—of real humanity in this character. Hines was a much more believable actor, under Ebert's influence, than he had been previously, despite the disadvantage of a role that is as high for him as he is for it.

**F**or all these variations in nuance and emphasis—and taking into account the suggestive decor of Lancaster—the "Rake's Progress" remains an awkward, imperfect work, with too much that is superficial and too much that is artificial to be carried by the strong threads of musical interest that show themselves now and then. It will be studied for years by musicians who appreciate skilful joinery, especially in orchestral writing, but the total effect is of craftsmanship rather than creation.

Having seen the work now as much as any living man may be expected ever to see it, I feel that the surge of interest Stravinsky arouses in the closely scored first act becomes decidedly recessive at the point where Auden and Kallman produce the bearded Turk, Baba, for Tom to marry. This would be a smart stroke in an operetta, but one has to mark it down as a decidedly Minskyish touch in a work that pretends to be literate, but is only literary. Perhaps it serves a purpose in attracting attention to the whole subject, but one hardly expects such practicality of the composer of "Sacre du Printemps" and "Petrouchka," not to mention the "Symphonie des Psaumes."

Nothing can convince me that Stravinsky really believed in this subject, least of all the music which he wrote for it.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

## Russia

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plays were labeled "tragi-comedies." This, the second tragedy of Chekhov's life, was the more poignant in that he knew himself that it was the last work he would be able to produce.

Incidentally, Leo Tolstoy faced a similar situation in regard to his play, "The Power of Darkness." To Tolstoy, who intended the inarticulate Akim to be the soul of the play, it was a comedy. But to critics, who regarded Nikita as the leading character, it became a tragedy.

We also learn from this biography that the struggle between Chekhov the medical doctor and Chekhov the writer has been greatly exaggerated—that in Chekhov's own opinion one profession was complementary to the other. "Medicine," Chekhov wrote to Suvorin, "is my lawful wife and literature my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend a night with the other. That may not be quite respectable, but at any rate it isn't boring, and besides, neither of them loses anything by my unfaithfulness."

It will be interesting to see if Magarshack's thesis leads to a reinterpretation of Chekhov's plays on the American stage, so that they conform to the original intentions of the author.

## Notes

**UKRAINE NATIONALISM:** According to the card catalogue at Columbia University, "Ukraine Under the Soviets" (Bookman, \$3.50) is Clarence A. Manning's forty-fifth publication. It is a hurried, 219-page account of the last thirty-five years of Ukrainian history, adding up to damning testimony of the growing bankruptcy of the Kremlin's nationality policy. This policy, still being proselytized as the final solution to the national minority problem, a rather chronic one in Eastern Europe, pretends to offer Moscow's subject peoples complete freedom in developing their national and cultural heritage. Professor Manning, of Columbia's Slavic Languages Department, underscores the hollowness of this propaganda by describing the guerrilla operations of Ukrainian nationalists against their Communist "benefactors."

These fighters are members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a comparatively small military band formed in 1943 of splinter Ukrainian nationalist factions. Its short-range goal: to repel the Nazis and, having achieved

that, to expel the Communists; its long-range goal: an independent Ukraine. It still hasn't achieved its short-range goal *in toto*.

Though Professor Manning's effort helps illuminate the relatively unexplored corners of Soviet nationality historiography (an unjustifiably bypassed field until recently), it is nonetheless slightly disappointing. By the author's own admission, the book depends "primarily" on the research and experiences of "a distinguished group of Ukrainian DP professors." As a consequence, it is occasionally hampered by a Ukrainian bias which seems to place the cause of independence before the cause of scholarship.

—MARVIN L. KALB.

**COMMUNISM AROUND THE WORLD:** Anthony T. Bouscaren, who is associate professor of political science at the University of San Francisco, offers in "Imperial Communism" (Public Affairs Press, \$3.75) an up-to-date summary of Communist Parties and activities in most parts of the world. After reviewing the Soviet world outlook and the policies of world Communism he presents a global survey of Party activities. Quite properly, I believe, he begins this survey with China and other Eastern countries; after covering the Near East, Europe, and Latin America he concludes with a chapter on the Communist Party of the United States. The book's final essay is devoted to Soviet military strength; the author believes that Russia's "build-up is quite clearly not for defensive reasons." Professor Bouscaren writes: "It remains to be seen which of two courses is to be followed: a policy of continued policy of expansion and conquests by the Soviets or a policy of liberation by the free world led by the United States." The book demonstrates both thoroughness and diligence. Its most unique chapter is an analysis of the phony Soviet "peace" offensive, which has timely importance in this Malenkov era.

—MARTIN EBON.

**USSR POLICY DOCUMENTED:** Leo Gruliov's "Current Soviet Policies" (Praeger, \$6), a volume designed for the specialist on the Soviet Union, is a comprehensive series of translations of major Soviet documents—from Stalin's farewell "Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR" (October 1952) to the

