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ELTON Trueblood

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TV AND RADIO

ALL right—slow down—cut your motor—that does it, fellows! Television is supposed to be living-room entertainment. You're not going to make a freeway out of this living room with that endless stream of the new 1955 models.

Pull over to that coffee table! Didn't you see the red light in that bridge lamp? Let me see your driver's license. And your National Association of Radio and TV Broadcasters' card. You were going way over the limit. The NARTB allows you six minutes of commercial in a sixty-minute show. You were going over twelve minutes an hour. Chrysler came through here the other night going nearly sixty minutes an hour with a show called, I believe, "Shower of Cars."

Look at this carpet. It used to be a springy, three-ply twist at \$13.95 a square yard. We're down to one ply, no spring, and all twist. It was bad enough when they just came driving through, but with these unveilings the new models do a slow, complete U-turn. The sweep-out front fenders of the three-tone Oldsmobile knocked the tone completely out of this piano, and in the bookshelf that set of Carl Sandburg was practically torn to shreds by the longer silhouette of a Lincoln.

Once upon a time when a man built a better mousetrap the world beat a path to his door. Today the automotive manufacturer has reversed that traffic. He builds a better car, buys an hour on television, and drives the car right through the door into our living rooms. And while the cars slowly revolve voices exhort us to take note that the horsepower of the Buick has gone up from 220 to 236, the Cadillac from 230 to 250, the DeSoto from 170 to 185, and on and on.

It's understandable that a man in the flush of excitement at the unveiling of his newest achievement may be a little drunk with horsepower. But this is autointoxication!

Of course, the commercials on these shows were not blandly presented for the full hour as commercials. They were, as the saying goes, integrated into the story-line. The stars of the shows somehow got involved with the new model cars, which were seen and mentioned throughout the program.

The entertainment value of the hour depended upon how cleverly the commercials were integrated. Being somewhat narcissistic I thought the

Buick-Berle show was the least irritating when it had Molly Goldberg, a guest on the show, ask Milton Berle to donate a Buick to the raffle which her ladies' auxiliary was holding. He donated one, and rather cannily, I thought, arranged to make it one of the new models. Before the hour was over all the new models had been unveiled.

But if this device to beat the NARTB ruling of no more than six minutes of commercialism to an hour of television is so easily sidestepped by merely announcing that it is the unveiling of a new model, what's to prevent some perspicacious manufacturer of another product to beat the rap the same way?

What's to prevent a sponsor next season from unveiling a square aspirin tablet? Or a long, low, circular refrigerator with a new horizontal grille? Or a rectangular cigarette in nineteen color-combinations? Or a laxative tablet that tastes like a laxative for people who don't like chocolate?

And why only the unveiling of new products? What about ideas? What's to prevent somebody from sponsoring an hour of television time to integrate the unveiling of some crackpot un-American ideas?

I hope this doesn't suggest anything to some politician who doesn't know his patriotism from his elbow.

—GOODMAN ACE.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 599

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 599 will be found in the next issue.

WETNGWBNPK AHLNKF

DCHGH WOMRWNBWKOH

OHWFHF.

—ZPCKFPK.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 598

A bigot delights in public ridicule, for he begins to think he is a martyr.—Sydney Smith.



MUSIC TO MY EARS

Walter, Kostelanetz, and Rossini's "Otello"

BRUNO WALTER'S second week with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall provided a program that was a model of what such an evening should be—varied in styles, contrasting in moods, yet homogeneous in basic character. As may be related to the judgment that it was one of Walter's best programs here in recent years, it was all music stemming from Central Europe—Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht," the "Prague" (No. 38) symphony of Mozart, and the No. 4 of Dvorak.

It was a pleasure to see this venerable musician looking so well (I did not see him the week before) and even more a pleasure to hear the cohesive esthetic, the seasoned certainty of his conceptions formulating Schoenberg, Mozart, and Dvorak with authority, eloquence, and mastership. Whether it means something for conductors in general that for the first time in twenty-five years New York does not mean the towering presence of Toscanini, I wouldn't know; but this was certainly a happy occasion for the orchestra and the conductor—necessarily, thereby, for the audience also.

What related the works to each other—and thus to a common mood—was a certain lyric line that Walter developed from the beginning of the Schoenberg to the end of the Dvorak. One might have wished for a more pointed incisiveness in the Mozart, a more relaxed flow in some aspects of the Dvorak, but it was without question music played with affection and understanding. I especially relished the Dvorak, a work of character and great skill, perhaps the most Dvorak of his five published symphonies. As in Walter's well-remembered direction of Smetana's "Bartered Bride" at the Metropolitan a dozen years ago, there was an inclination to smooth out some of the rough edges of the composer's folk impulse, to make the angular contours round, but who else plays the music at all (in this country), not to say as well?

The chameleon personnel of the Philharmonic—whose other conductors, in a ten-day period surrounding this concert were Richard Rodgers and Andre Kostelanetz—reacted to this interlude of artistic affinity with appreciation and pride. Without

attempting to subject an entity of nearly a hundred men to mass psychoanalysis, it is evident that they respond to Walter as a spiritual symbol of what the orchestra could, at all times, be (and might have been had Walter felt able to assume a larger share of directional responsibility when it was offered to him several years ago). The consequence is maximum utilization of the abundant skills available; in which the strings and woodwind, brass and percussion have a sheen and eloquence with which only the hypercritical could find fault.

* * *

The excursions of TV's "Omnibus" into the realm of musical information continued recently with a dissertation on the French horn in which the Berv brothers—Arthur, Jack, and Harry—were the principal performers. As practised professionals of long years in the NBC Symphony, there was little question of their ability to meet all the challenges posed; the trouble was, however, that the challenges were not nearly what they might have been, whether or not the element of entertainment was paramount. Practically nothing was said about the performers themselves, though their common background is a considerable part of why they are preferred as a "section"; and the total function of the instrument in the orchestra was no more than suggested. Altogether, it seemed to me, the producers of "Omnibus" did something the Bervs did not: namely, they fluffed an opportunity for musical drama by reducing the values involved to something almost trivial. There's gold in them thar horns—but it didn't come out this time.

* * *

Beckmesser in "Die Meistersinger" is much the biggest part Lawrence Davidson has yet undertaken at the Metropolitan, and it would be unfair to more than raise an eyebrow at the result of his first effort. He has reasonable vocal resources for the part, and a plausible physique; but his present notions about the character need drastic revision if it is to become acceptably Wagnerian. Beckmesser is curt, obtuse, and more than a little vain, but hardly as bumptiously beligerent as Davidson made him out to

be. I don't know, really, whether it would be possible for him to sing Beckmesser with one hand tied behind his back, but it might be a good idea . . . preferably the right one, with which he gestured so much. This was otherwise a performance in the firm mold, enhanced by the masterful Sachs of Paul Schoeffler.

* * *

The American Opera Society began another season in Town Hall recently with a concert version of what was represented as Rossini's "Otello," but which lacked some salient values required for a total judgment of the composer's accomplishment. With or without fidelity to the original text (deviations were related to the bypassing of some treacherously difficult passages, the transposition of others, and the omission of certain sections), it did not strike me that great violence was done to Rossini's rendering of Shakespeare for the simple reason that the inherent relationship was not too great. True, there are some interesting suggestions (especially in a duet of Otello and Iago, and some music for Desdemona) that Verdi and Boito might have been mindful of Rossini's ground-clearing venture before they embarked on their triumphant collaboration, but an awful lot of underbrush remained, nevertheless.

For a generation denied acquaintance with the whole canon of Rossini's non-*buffo* output, what was offered in this "Otello" was inevitably informative. The difficulty was, however, that as often as one became absorbed in some aspect of his serious development of plot a typical Rossinian crescendo would commence in the orchestra, and one would look about to see from which side Rosina or the Barber would appear.

At that, the cast of Jennie Tourel, Thomas Hayward (Otello), Thomas Lo Monaco (Iago), and Rodrigo (Albert Da Costa) might have been better off with the *buffo* work. I cannot subscribe to a cultish esteem for Miss Tourel as a tragedian, since the quality exists neither in her voice nor in her action, and Hayward was obviously overburdened by the range of his part (calling for several top C's) and its dramatic accent. Lo Monaco has a promising, virile baritone if it is not misused, and Da Costa has flashy brilliance at the top of his tenor—for the while. Carol Brice did well what was required of Emilia. Most admirable of all the effort expended was Arnold U. Gamson's energetic conducting, though some of the sound that taxed the singers probably was a misconception of drama.

—IRVING KOLODIN.