



Second Half "Figaro" and Non-Progressive "Rake"

AS IS generally known but too often forgotten, the Metropolitan "season" is actually two seasons, with a basic company that plays throughout, plus an overlay of personnel that comes and goes. Thus, the mid-point of late January finds the promise of such works as "Norma," "Il Barbiere," and "Walküre" to come, and such early-season experiences as "Faust," "Pelléas," and "Tannhäuser" all but forgotten. The "first-half" importations have departed, and their replacements have now arrived, with inevitable effects on the repertory.

There are, however, some borderline cases which begin early and continue late. Mozart's "Figaro" is such a case, and it gained vastly from the alteration of personnel which subtracted the Germanic Figaro of Erich Kunz in favor of Cesare Siepi, while replacing Lisa della Casa as the Countess by Eleanor Steber. Some other changes were more or less debatable in emphasis as regards present quality, however promising for the future.

Whether these changes were responsible, or whether he is now more at home with the whole production than previously, Fritz Stiedry's direction was much more impulsive and dramatically positive than previously. Conceivably Siepi's hearty voice and George London's forceful one (in the Count's music) gave the conductor a new basis for his dynamic values. But the total effect was much more animated than it had been, even though Roberta Peters performed another of her specialties by taking the role of Susanna at short notice in place of Nadine Conner, and the scenic production remains as diffused and unfocused as before.

Save for her chirpy production in singing the music, Miss Peters took over the role of Susanna in a way that will make it difficult to dislodge her. Her feeling for the part is apt and her appearance highly suitable. However, she has not yet learned to keep a maid's place in her relationship to those about her, and she has to lose the Gilda mannerisms if she is to be the kind of Susanna she can be.

London's voice is decidedly agreeable in this music, his feeling for the role of the Count otherwise. He seemed to be pushing for volume most of the evening, without having settled in his own mind just what sort

of character this is. Miss Steber did some of her most beautiful singing in "Porgi amor," and Siepi produced sonorous tones, both high and low, with impressive abandon, while accomplishing more of a characterization than ever before.

The second-half period also brought Igor Stravinsky's "The Rake's Progress," amid occurrences almost unknown among the ultra-polite audience of the Metropolitan. The Tuesday night series (in which it was given) being the newest in the Met sequence, it was appreciably less pre-sold than some of the others, meaning there were more seats available for box-office sale—which didn't materialize in suitable abundance. In addition, some of those present started to leave in the middle of Act I, and by the end of Act II the barren spots were widespread.

I cannot quarrel with the ticket buyer's judgment in this case, for Stravinsky's creation grows less rather than more interesting as time passes, and its quirks and idiosyncrasies do not suit it to a repertory theatre. At the same time it must be mentioned that the 'prentice hand among such experienced, Stravinsky singers as Hilde Gueden (Ann), Blanche Thebom (Baba), Mack Harrell (Nick Shadow), and Eugene Conley (Tom) belonged to Alberto Erede, who conducted. His preoccupation with the orchestral score left little time or energy for the stage values, which hardly provides what Stravinsky requires.

PRECEDED by a bus commercial and followed by one for tissue paper (with Jinx Falkenburg selling refrigerators along the way), Ottorino Respighi's "Sleeping Beauty in the Enchanted Forest" had its first American hearing recently on the TV program properly called "Omnibus"—since it includes everything including a bus sponsor (on this program they are referred to by Alistair Cooke as "underwriters"). For the most part it seemed to me a rather tedious exercise in fairytale music-writing which had gotten on the air because of a legend that it had been "lost" or "forgotten" since its premiere in Rome in 1922. (Its existence was well known to musicologists, also the reasons for its neglect.)

However, Respighi could hardly have written a three-act work (the

TV condensation by George Bassmann, who conducted, was in two acts totaling not much more than an hour) without striking a fanciful vein somewhere along the way. This occurred at the point where the witches' prophecy is about to come true, as the Princess plays with a forbidden spinning wheel and suffers the near-fatal wound. All of this episode, including the evocation of the spinning wheel and the tragedy that befalls the Princess, through the scene in which the whole court falls under the spell of sleep that is to endure until she is awakened by the Prince, is highly creditable to Respighi. However, what precedes and follows—so far as this version may be trusted—is rather weak and pointless.

In terms of television craft this was ingeniously planned and successfully executed. However, both the Prince and the Princess were too fresh (in appearance) from the contemporary comic strip to suit Respighi's highly stylized music, and neither had more than promising voices (Jo Sullivan and Jim Hawthorne were the names). Nadia Witkowska sang the Ariadne-like part of the First Fairy well, and Gloria Lane, Leon Lishner, and Rosemary Kuhlmann made one wish this were a new Menotti score rather than an old Respighi one. The orchestra sounded small, and was poorly microphoned.

Quite the most stylish new violinist to be heard here recently, Alfredo Campoli, of Italian parentage and English residence, showed a way of playing the instrument at his Town Hall debut recently that any young performer might well emulate. (He appeared, quietly, with the Philharmonic-Symphony during the newspaper strike in December.) He is always in the right part of the bow for any effect he chooses to make, his tone is rarely ruffled, and he even managed to play the Bach "Chaconne" mostly in tune on an instrument obviously out of tune (the E and A strings).

Here, as in the Tartini G minor and the Beethoven F major ("Spring") sonatas, Campoli was a performer with a lively sense of style, though it is mostly violinistic style. He knows all the right moves, and makes them surely, unerringly; but the final impression is that they are moves in a chesslike pattern designed to produce "checkmate" as the solution. However, music of this order is incomplete without emotional involvement of the performer, and this Campoli did not provide. Artur Balsam provided the kind of pianistic support Campoli wanted—facile, unobtrusive, and essentially superficial.

—IRVING KOLODIN

It's been a notable year, gastronomically speaking, with a sizable shelf-ful of fine new cookbooks claiming places in the already large library of culinary classics. The newcomers of the past twelvemonth are sized up in the articles on this and the following pages. A. I. M. S. Street (Mrs. Julian Street), whose essay appears below, is celebrated as a cook in gourmet circles and has contributed recipes to many standard cookbooks. The article starting on page 38 is the work of Lawton Mackall, restaurant editor of Gourmet Magazine and author of "Knife and Fork in New York."



The Gastronomical Year

By A. I. M. S. STREET

IN these days when scientific experiment is reported so fully in the press we are forever being asked to cope with figures running into an all but incomprehensible infinity. Now we have the atom, but before it snatched the headlines we were kept in proper mood by talk of such phenomena as speed beyond sound, and the curious habits of light-years.

Recently I have been forced to wonder if perhaps the preparation of food, as detailed in the seemingly endless stream of cookery books coming off the presses, wasn't fixing to edge into the infinity class. Looking over the shelf upon shelf of books now in print, remembering that each page contains at least one recipe, I found myself inarticulate and in a kind of awe. It is difficult to realize that the end is not yet, that if I had a list of every foodstuff and multiplied all possibilities the figures would trail an untold number of digits. The thought grew, during a look-see through the past year's cookbook output, that we have moved such a long way into variety cooking, that perhaps it is time to pause to take stock and consolidate our position.

Most—though by no means all—of this year's new books deal with a single subject or a special field—as compared, for example, with such hardy-perennial omnibuses as "The Fannie Farmer Boston Cooking-School Cook Book" or Irma Rombauer's "Joy of Cooking." With only a few exceptions the books seem to

have been written by people with a message: some entirely serious, some apparently with the feeling that various subjects need more particular attention, others with no more compelling a reason than belief in their own concoctions. One has the sense that for the most part they are *working* books.

For instance, cooks with the anxious job of catering for heart patients can turn now to two very serious efforts to help: "**Low Sodium Cook Book**," by Alma Smith Payne and Dorothy Callahan (Little, Brown \$4); and "**Gourmet Cooking for Cardiac Diets**," by Florence Field (World, \$3.50). The books differ in make-up, only the former mentioning the problem of weight reduction; otherwise, the writers proceed with the utmost in conscientiousness and with the appearance also of having whatever of special knowledge is necessary.

For householders bringing questions as to the working habits of a freezer Ann Seranne in "**Your Home Freezer**" (Doubleday, \$3.75) and Hazel Meyer in "**The Complete Book of Home Freezing**" (Lippincott, \$4.95) produce all the answers. Both books have their noses to the grindstone in proper working posture, and explanation, advice, charts, and a myriad of new ideas come sparking off.

Occupation for the serious-minded child, newly emerged from the mud-pie stage, demanding to eat what next she cooks is provided by "**Let's Have Fun Cooking**," by Frances Youngren (Moody Press, Chicago, \$1.00). The book contains a sprinkling of clearly defined recipes designed to appeal to

children and, being a publication of the Moody Bible Institute, the pages are embellished by Bible verses, graces, and prayers. It was rather disheartening to see that bridge-club pest of yesteryear turning up again—a fantasy consisting of lettuce leaf, one slice of canned pineapple with a half banana standing upright at its center, the whole dripping with mayonnaise and topped by a red cherry. But perhaps—pity the poor young palates!—it has found its niche, a birthday party attended by be-frilled small girls.

Another whose problems are dealt with is the distracted owner of all the latest in electrical gadgets who has not got around to exercising sufficient ingenuity to learn how to use them properly. His book is "**Complete Small Appliance Cook Book**," by John and Marie Roberson (A. A. Wyn, \$2.95). To me the book was rather a surprise, as the manufacturers and sellers of the new toys have managed to create the impression that each will do the work of every other, and of almost every type of cooker. The reverse surely is true, and the confusion in this case regrettable, as it tends to limit one's interest in some very pleasant recipes. I bow in gratitude to the Robersons for Cantonese Egg Rolls, which seemed not to mind being cooked on a griddle which is well nigh prehistoric; and when next I meet up with a mess of soft-shell crabs I shan't pause in their preparation to worry over the absence, in the kitchen, of an infra-red broiler. Well anyway, it's that kind of book, tailored for the young liberal in the field of cookery, not the middle-aged reactionary.

THE trouble with dealing with a round-up of cookery books such as