



## Liebermann's "Penelope" in Salzburg

—SALZBURG.

**R**OLF LIEBERMANN'S "Penelope," *opera semiseria* on a text by Heinrich Strobel, had a brilliant world premiere here as the novelty and only modern opera of this year's Festival. George Szell conducted the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and chorus, the staging was by Oscar Fritz Schuh, scenery and costumes by Caspar Neher, and the title role was sung by Christl Goltz.

This is the second opera in which Liebermann, musical director of Radio Zürich, and Strobel, who occupies the same position in the Südwestfunk in Baden-Baden, have cooperated. The first, "Leonore 40-45," dealt with the love between a German soldier and a French girl in World War II. The present work deals with another equally contemporary problem—the returning soldier. Strobel's contention is that the modern opera, to be valid, must concern itself with the problems of today's world. In the presentation of these problems, however, that kind of realism in which the film is supreme must be avoided. It is the mission of opera, Strobel says, "to raise reality to the status of a symbol by fashioning the raw material to a stylized form." The stylization of "Penelope" consists in the use of the classical Greek theme of Ulysses's return to the constant Penelope as a frame for the story of a present-day returning warrior. The reality is portrayed in this modern tragedy, a kind of play within a play. The symbolism is achieved through a synthesis of the ancient story with the modern, culminating in a finale in which the two stories, and the two planes on which they have been portrayed, are merged.

The authors call their work an *opera semiseria*, but it is in reality more "seria" than "semi," to coin a bad phrase. The "framing" action is laid in ancient Greece, with appropriate costumes and scenery. Penelope is beset by three unwelcome suitors who urge her to choose among them a new husband, since Ulysses's return can no longer be expected. The silly suitors, including one who stutters, provide the grotesque-comic element, which always remains subordinate to the main tragic action. The chorus, representing the assembled court, praises Penelope's steadfastness and her refusal to give up hope for Ulysses. She shows the suitors a tapestry she has

just finished after many years of weaving and which mercifully conceals the future. She offers, however, to reveal that future and herself to play the principal role in the ensuing tragedy. When the tapestry is drawn aside we see on the second plane the suggestion of an elegant drawing-room in an Italian villa. As Penelope and her husband Ercole sing of their supremely happy marriage a messenger enters with news that Ulysses, Penelope's first husband who had been reported missing in action and subsequently declared dead, is returning. In the subsequent action, interrupted by frequent returns to the classical Greek plane, Penelope learns that the faithful Ulysses has died on the return journey. When she returns home to tell Ercole that they have been saved by this macabre turn of fortune she finds that he has hanged himself. Crazy with grief she curses God and fate and sinks to the ground unconscious. Suddenly the Ulysses of Homer appears in classical Greek costume and here the allegorical synthesis of the two planes on which the opera has moved takes place. Ulysses, now a symbol for all warriors of all times and by extension for all humanity, sings that the miracle of his return was made possible through the genius of the great poet Homer and through the magic of art.

To this story Liebermann has composed music that is as varied and full of sudden changes as the world of today in which the tragedy takes place. The compact score, containing some ninety minutes of music, is characterized throughout by quick changes of pace, of mood, and of technique. Liebermann employs the twelve-tone system extensively but by no means exclusively, and he employs it as loosely as suits his dramatic purposes. He succeeds indeed in making the listener forget that he is hearing twelve-tone music. Yet the fact that the system—however loosely applied—is used gives the music a certain strength and power and acts as a cohesive factor. Apart from all devices of the system, and much more important than these, the score displays a richness of invention and a dramatic sense that carry it from beginning to end. The style varies and changes rapidly from lyrical to tragic to comic. During the "welcome home" scene for the returning POW's a twelve-tone boogie-woogie is introduced. The

arias, ranging from comic to heroic, are grateful for the voice and alternate with recitative passages notable for their fine declamation. The extended finale assumes the proportions of a symphonic apotheosis, verging on the style of oratorio. The formal structure is masterful; emotional and musical climaxes are built with telling effect.

**T**HE performance of "Penelope" came as near to being perfect as one can imagine. Szell conducted with absolute authority and with complete understanding of the score, maintaining the line and the unity from start to finish. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus responded to his leadership with an impeccable rendition of the difficult work. Christl Goltz's portrayal of Penelope was moving and convincing; with her extraordinarily beautiful voice she sang the demanding part as if she had known it for years, proving once again that she is one of the great sopranos of today. Ulysses was magnificently sung by Kurt Böhme, whose rich baritone voice was ideal for the part. In his long monologue at the end of the opera he was more than equal not only to the musical but also to the intellectual demands of the role. Rudolf Schock was an excellent Ercole and Anneliese Rothenberger sang splendidly the coloratura role of Tel-emachos, as did Max Lorenz that of the mayor. The scenery and costumes of Caspar Neher were superb, and Schuh's stage direction was full of imagination and fantasy. Most striking and gratifying were the perfection of the ensemble and the overall continuity that characterized the entire production, demonstrating what can be achieved with adequate preparation, cooperation, and rehearsal.

The problem with which "Penelope" is concerned is more than that of the returning POW; it is the problem of war as such. The authors ridicule the chauvinistic variety of patriotism in the person of the stuttering suitor-poet Demoptolemus, whom the other two suitors (a warrior and a financier) egg on to write jingoistic verse. In the scene of the returning POW's the mockery of war is brought out, as the mayor "forgives" the weakness of the returning soldiers for having been captured, while he and his colleague "held the lines" at home. And, in Ulysses's final aria, satire is dropped in favor of a thoroughly serious and moving appeal against the barbarity that is war: "I have been praised for inventing the Trojan horse. What this horse caused in Troy was murder and blood—no less dreadful than the murder and blood of your bombs. I have rued my Trojan horse."

—EVERETT HELM.



## Double Solitaire

**Y**EARS ago my grandparents played a curious version of solitaire in which, for purposes of companionship, they placed their cards on the same table but kept entirely separate scores. This summer such a game is being played with remarkable success at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, where the painters Yves Tanguy and his wife, Kay Sage, are having retrospective exhibitions. The two artists work in adjoining studios in the barn of their property at Woodbury, Conn. But their pictures make individual points. Their differences of vision and technique have never been more apparent than at Hartford.

Quite properly, the central walls in the Avery Memorial wing of the Wadsworth Atheneum are given over to Tanguy's paintings and drawings, for Tanguy has been a professional artist far longer than his wife. In the mid-1920s, riding on a Paris bus, Tanguy saw in a gallery window one of those early paintings by Giorgio de Chirico which have exerted a profound influence on a considerable number of the leading artists of our time. Tanguy jumped off the bus, stared at the De Chirico, and decided to become the particular kind of painter he has been ever since. In 1926 he joined Surrealism's inner circle. He promptly became one of that movement's most eloquent artists, respected at once by his confreres but only gradually winning the wider acclaim he merits.

Tanguy was born in 1900 on the Place de la Concorde at the Ministry of the Marine, where his father was a functionary. He was born in a bed that had belonged to Gustave Courbet, founder of Realism in French art. The fact seems ironical, considering that for almost thirty years Tanguy has disrupted in pictorial terms the surface reality which Courbet had championed as the proper concern of art. But the name "Gustave" has special meaning for Tanguy, as he will sometimes tell you quietly. If Courbet's art and theories have never appealed to him, he was nourished in youth by the fantastic imagery of two other Gustaves—Moreau and Doré.

Tanguy's principal creative stimulus, however, has not been the art of other men, but his childhood memories of Brittany's coastal area near Locronan, where ancient menhirs hush the fields and where the sea

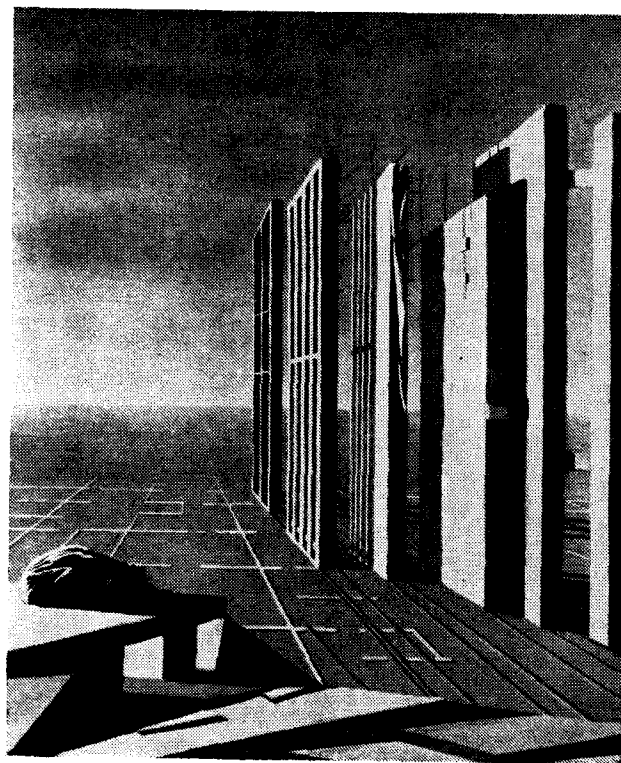
washes over curious stones, bringing objects from the deep. Tanguy speaks with awe of Brittany, and there can be little doubt that his imaginative vision was deeply affected by its landscape. But through a subtle process of transfiguration, he converts this landscape into a bizarre wasteland, peopled by organic or mineral shapes, alone or huddled, projected against infinite, ambiguous space. His skies are in strange communion with the earth, as when rainbows seem to flare upward from below the horizon's curve, and often it is difficult to say at precisely what point in his pictures the land gives way to air. Tanguy's clouds are provocative counterparts to his landscape forms, deftly lighted, swirling in delicate webs. Often his paintings are really skyscapes, with solid matter reduced to a narrow band at the base of the picture. But then again his undefinable still-life objects rear like monuments against a distant backdrop of sky. He likes extreme of scale and varies them constantly, small to large, far to near.

Since his arrival in America in 1939 (he is now an American citizen and plans to work here the rest of his life) Tanguy's color has become more brilliant and changeable, and he has left behind the fairly dark, almost romantic tonality which characterized his earlier works. He is less intent on atmospheric mystery than he was, and the lights have gone up a bit on his magician's stage. But his leg- erdemain remains as impressive—and inexplicable—as ever. It is enriched rather than diluted by new subtleties of tone, form, and light.

One of Tanguy's rarest virtues as an artist has been his extraordinary singlemindedness. The collapse of Surrealism as an active movement in esthetics (or counter-esthetics)

has had no real effect on his art or beliefs, and surely he would one day have arrived at his unmistakable iconography without that movement's support. In technical matters he began as a primitive and has become a superb craftsman. This sort of progress often entails a very high cost, as in the cases of De Chirico, Derain, Dali, and numerous other twentieth-century painters, who have lost conviction in the search for flourish. Tanguy will never be forced to pay this debilitating price, since his inspiration keeps pace with his cumulative mastery of medium. He works slowly and only when obsessed by something he wants to say. He is untroubled by the fact that his art as a whole shows none of those abrupt and drastic stylistic changes through which so many modern painters seek to refresh themselves and their public. The result is not monotony but richness. Tanguy's big show at Hartford reveals nuances far more profound than could have been foreseen except by those who know his work by heart.

**W**HEREAS Tanguy's painting is concerned with animistic forms, however transformed, that of Kay Sage is predominantly architectural in subject, as though through some unswervable instinct of femininity she felt impelled to create poetic shelters in the landscape of her reveries. Her first exhibition was held in Milan in 1936. She was then an abstract painter, but presently she came to know and admire the art of the Surrealists. The



Kay Sage's "Point of Intersection," 1951-52.