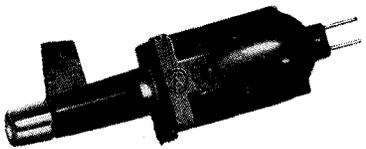


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"Ariadne" and "Turandot"

By HERBERT WEINSTOCK

HERE ARE two operas composed during this century by renowned and successful composers. Neither is heard often in the United States. Both contain characters derived directly from the improvising "masks" of the *commedia dell'arte*; both have been recorded well and textually complete. They are the Hugo von Hofmannsthal-Richard Strauss "Ariadne auf Naxos" (1916 revised version) in an Angel recording (3532 C, \$15.98) and the Giuseppe Adami-Renato Simoni-Giacomo Puccini "Turandot" (1926, completed by Franco Alfano after Puccini's death) in a London set (XLLA-36, \$14.94).

The recording process, and this recording in particular, brilliantly serve "Ariadne auf Naxos," a chamber opera calling for an orchestra of thirty-six players ("Elektra" asks for more than three times that number), for the intimacy of a small theatre, for little stage action beyond some romping—and for no chorus. Herbert von Karajan conducts wittily and with force, differentiating expertly the *opera seria* music of the heroine from the *opera buffa* music of Zerbinetta and her companions. In the "Vorspiel," Irmgard Seefried as The Composer, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as The Prima Donna, and Rita Streich as Zerbinetta are just right. All the minor roles, both spoken and sung, are delivered by experts familiar with the manner.

In the body of the opera itself—that odd reversion to the pre-Mozartian way of interlarding *opera seria* with *buffa* intermezzos (Strauss, of course, having produced an emulsion rather than a *pousse-café*)—Rudolf Schock is convincingly godlike as Bacchus. But Hofmannsthal and Strauss focused chief attention on Ariadne and Zerbinetta; indeed, Strauss came close to making this a Zerbinetta opera. And Elisabeth Schwarzkopf must be the finest practising singer of this music: she invests Ariadne's static role with so much musical beauty while intensifying the stasis that it is as though a classic statue should begin to sing. As Zerbinetta, Rita Streich has the plum, the wonderful obstacle course aria beginning "Grossmächtige Prinzessin." She produces its skittering, devilish coloratura as though this were her ordinary speech, making naturalness and ease more exciting

than any whipped-up excitement could be. As the four "masks," Hermann Prey (Arlecchino), Gerhard Unger (Scaramuccio), Fritz Ollendorff (Truffaldino), and Helmut Krebs (Brighella) strike up almost enough amorous humor to make us forget how uncomfortably close Strauss drives them to barbershop harmony. Echo, The Naiad, and the Dryad (respectively Anny Felbermayer, Lisa Otto, and Grace Hoffman) keep within the frame. Leaving aside some inevitable doubts about the score itself, I should call this recording an undulterated success.

TURANDOT," on the other hand, is very grand opera. It must have scenery and costumes, courtiers and hubbub spread across a large stage. I saw it thus in Rome in 1954, presented in hot blood and full cry, and it easily absorbed the ten thousand spectators in the Terme di Caracalla, the huge crowds on the stage, and even the stentorian voice of Giacomo Lauri-Volpi. The new recording is, however, far and away the best recorded approximation to date of a real live "Turandot." Alberto Erede conducts. Knowing what they are about, the Chorus and Orchestra of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia of Rome prove that Italians singing Puccini are not Chinese, but can vastly entertain both themselves and us while *pretending* to be Chinese. Inge Borkh sings accurately the terrifyingly high lines assigned to the icy Turandot, but does not make all of them beautiful. As the child Liù, Renata Tebaldi, in excellent voice, sounds far too mature. Mario del Monaco gives his very impressive Italianate best as Calaf. The three "masks"—whom Puccini unfortunately permitted to overstay their welcome—are alternately jaunty, nostalgic, and bloodthirsty as incarnated by Fernando Corena (Ping), Renato Ercolani (Pong), and Mario Carlin (Pang); minor roles are projected by Ezio Giordano (A Mandarin), Nicola Zaccaria (Timur), and Gaetano Faneli (The Emperor Altoum). All is in good order, but "Turandot" invisible is less than half itself. It is time now for the Metropolitan Opera, at which it was last sung in 1930, to allow its present-day audience the opportunity to see this eye-filling spectacle and to hear what is musically the most interesting and adventurous of Puccini's scores.

Letters to the *RECORDINGS* Editor

RCA UNFAIR TO MONTEUX?

WHY IS PIERRE Monteux given such petty recording assignments? We deserve to have a representative sample of this great man's modern recordings before he really retires. Let's start off with a new recording of "Rite of Spring" as only Monteux can do it. From there on have him record the big works for which he is renowned. RCA Victor is not treating Pierre Monteux fairly!

ROBERT STARRETT.

Astoria, N.Y.

READY CUSTOMER

THIS IS TO inform RCA Victor and any others concerned that there is at least one eager customer for at least three of the items recently mentioned in SR columns. First, the wonderful records by Axsel Schiøtz. Also the Gerhard Hüsch records, available elsewhere in the world, and the Boulanger-Monteverdi album.

G. KLINGER.

Columbus, O.

SEIF AMENDED

IN "ALTA FIDELIDAD South of the Border" [SR Nov 26], Morton Seif wrote that he heard very little "typical Mexican music" at the audio fair in Mexico City, such as "mariachis like 'Las Mananitas Tapatias' or 'Las Bicicletas' of Gilberto Parro." The man's name is Parra, not Parro, and the word *mariachi* does not refer to a type of music but to an ensemble of strolling musicians. The typical *mariachi* is composed of two violins, a guitar, a *guitarron* (bass guitar), a *vihuela* (small guitar), and a trumpet. Seif also mentioned "rancheros like 'Siete Leguas' and 'Cu-Cu-Rru-Cu-Cu Paloma'." The correct word is "rancheras" (from *cañones rancheras*, or country songs). "Siete Leguas," which means "Seven Leagues" and was the name of Pancho Villa's favorite horse, is not a *ranchera* but a *corrido* or folk-ballad. Actually it was composed by Graciela Olmos, not the "folk," but it is in the true *corrido* tradition.

LYSANDER KEMP.

Jocotepec, Jalisco, Mex.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Gracias.*

ANTHEMS ON THE WAY

RE THE LETTER of Alfred F. Ladendorff [SR Nov. 26] requesting information on recordings of national anthems: I believe that such a record is available or will soon be available.

JEAN H. KEELEY.

Yonkers, N. Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Folkways is right on the spot (see page 51).*

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DECCA RECORDS deserve a vote of thanks for their use of the polyethylene inner sleeve. Theirs are (with the occasional exception of Angel Records) the only

ones which may be played upon receipt without first having to wash them. Most other records arrive from the factory sprinkled with dust.

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NORRIS M. DAVIDSON.

Bryn Mawr, Pa.

TWO-BASS HIT?

AS A CHARTER member of the "wait and see" group regarding operatic recordings, I am interested in knowing whether London has any plans stirring to record "Don Carlo." Certainly London has in Cesare Siepi one of the greatest interpreters of King Philip, and in Jerome Hines an impressive Grand Inquisitor.

Both the Cetra and Victor set of this greatest of all Verdi operas has its good points, but I'd be willing to wait for London's version with Siepi and Hines.

MARIE PONZO.

Leonia, N.J.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *So would we. London says it will do it when feasible.*

"FLUTE" WITHOUT WORDS

IT IS MOST infuriating to learn that London has just gone to considerable pains to record a new version of "The Magic Flute" and has resolutely perpetuated the error made by Columbia in their set. I can not understand why at least some of the dialogue could not have been in-

cluded. To my mind the principal quality to be looked for in an operatic recording is a suggestion of theatrical performance. Perhaps the old Entre "Manon" is particularly low fidelity but its inclusion of dialogue and its genuine style makes it an all-time great. The London "Seraglio" and the Vox "Fidelio" are not as well sung perhaps, but their inclusion of a good bit of what one hears when one encounters these works in the theatre makes them exciting recordings in the same way.

EARL ANDERSON.

San Francisco, Calif.

TEBALDI'S AIDA

AT LAST a critic who dares to puncture the balloon of "greatness" that surrounds Renata Tebaldi! As an avid operagoer (sixty-nine times last year), I have endured Signorina Tebaldi's posturings many times, and have shuddered every time I read the glowing reviews obviously written by men blinded by her press releases. Granted that she has a beautiful voice . . . but her abominable interpretation of musical scores has done much to wipe away the fruits of the fifty-year crusade waged by a truly great musician—Arturo Toscanini.

The time has come, I feel, to put Signorina Tebaldi in proper perspective, and to realize that she needs more than a thrilling pianissimo to achieve greatness in the field of opera. Until Tebaldi grows enough in humility to admit that Verdi and Puccini knew what they were doing when they composed their operas, and allows herself to be disciplined by the score, she will continue to tax the patience of music-lovers who demand artistry in a singer.

BARBARA COLLINS.

New York, N.Y.

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