

FISCHER-DIESKAU AND GERALD MOORE

INASMUCH as Gerald Moore, the British specialist in the art of accompaniment, had shown his ability to fill Town Hall on his own last fall, it was hardly surprising to find a houseful of listeners on hand when he returned to participate in the first New York appearance of baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. When they appeared together the tallish, good-looking Fischer-Dieskau and the shortish, amply-proportioned Moore reminded one of another tall and short partnership—Heinrich Schlusnus and Franz Rupp.

However, Fischer-Dieskau has not yet attained the artistic elevation of a Schlusnus, and the smaller physical gap between the new partners was in a way a measurement of their respective artistic abilities. Presumably it was the baritone's decision to devote the whole of this introductory program to Schubert's "Die Winterreise"; but it was a decision that spoke more for his courage than his wisdom. As in his well-regarded but hardly overwhelming recording of the sister cycle by Schubert ("Die Schoene Muellerin") there remains a short but measurable span between intent and accomplishment, a sense of striving without entire fulfillment.

The two performers were, understandably, somewhat tense and emotionally dry in the opening "Gute Nacht," which has to be sung as if the performer were looking back on a long day of sorrow rather than facing an evening of exhilaration and tension. Fischer-Dieskau has, in abundant measure, the professionalism to cover the more palpable agitations and tremors of such an event in such surroundings; but hardly as yet the implacable inner control to seize the mood and communicate the expression of such music from the moment he first draws a paid breath.

Mention might also be made of the limitations in the voice itself, which is supple and more than pleasant-sounding in the softer passages, occasionally full and vibrant in forte (depending on the comfort the singer feels in a given range), almost consistently strained and without impact in fortissimo. The scale is very well smoothed out, without unpleasant breaks of timbre, and the pitch is wonderfully secure at all times. It need hardly be added that Fischer-Dieskau is, at thirty-two, a first-rate musician, and a singer of virtually infallible taste.

Taken together, these attributes are but the beginning of the requirements for such a trial of artistry as "Die Winterreise." His delivery of the texts drew admiring comments from various reviewers, and there were lavish compliments bearing on his ability to tell a story in song. It was here, however, that this performance seemed to me most at fault. There were, indeed, fine performances of individual songs—such as "Der Lindenbaum" or "Rueckblick," but no great sense of conviction in the sequence *between* embracing "Wasserflut" and "Auf dem Flusse." There was, also, a poetic aura in some of the bleaker songs later in the cycle ("Die Kraehe," "Im Dorfe," etc.) but not the contrast that would have been provided by effective performances of the more dramatic ones.

Fischer-Dieskau is a singer of much present capacity and considerable future promise who, for my taste, over-matched himself in choosing such an exacting test for his New York debut. A miscellaneous program would have conveyed less *eclat*, perhaps, but it would have touched on more facets of the gifted singer's capabilities. At the risk of seeming to be wholly out of tune with the values involved, I may add that Moore did not sound to be his usual self in this situation, performing with all competence but with not quite

Grief

By Doris Dana

GRIEF is a dry wind that blows from the stalk the humid flower; crumbles to dust and ash and rubble land the fragrant hour.

Grief is a hard wind that charges the proud green-bannered corn; strafes the dry husks that bend to the sky like a ragged battalion coming home.

Grief is a quiet wind that moves on the shore and in leafless land, mounting dune on dune, plants thistle and stone with patient hand.

the variety of sound, the flexibility of mood expected.

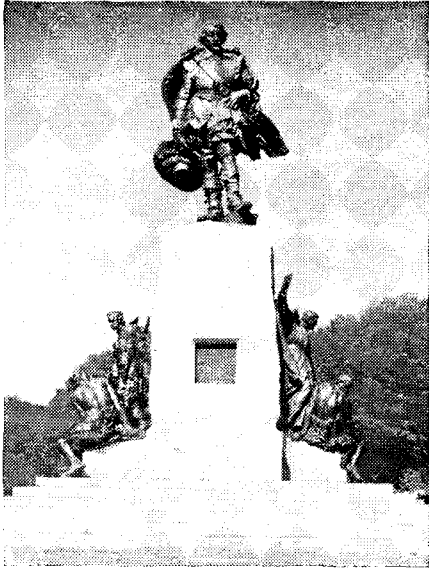
Somewhat belatedly, but yet within a time-space to make an expression of opinion welcome (I hope), congratulations may be extended to the Metropolitan Opera Association's board of directors for voting another three-year expression of confidence in its director, Rudolf Bing. This assures him a third span of three-years after next season, or—if the addition is correct—through the season of 1958.

New York has learned a good deal about Rudolf Bing in the last five years, and it is not presumptuous to assume that Bing has learned a lot about New York and America in that time also. If our taste is not as good as he hoped, it is, perhaps, not as bad as he has, on some occasions, feared; and the least that can be assumed in this congratulatory mood is that the reaction to his good things has led him on to do better, and the rejection of some he thought good has not discouraged him from trying again.

As an administrator, Bing has been energetic, without stint of personal effort; as a producer, he has been adventurous and more often than not judicious. To make the unwieldy stage and the unsightly sight lines of the Metropolitan the scene of exciting theatricalism would try the ingenuity—and no doubt, the patience—of a Reinhardt. That Bing has, nevertheless, added to the theatrical experience of New Yorkers such admirable accomplishments as "Don Carlo," "Fledermaus," "Forza del Destino," "Il Barbiere," "Cosi fan tutte," the fine "Alceste" with Flagstad, the handsome "Rigoletto" designed by Berman, and the atmospheric "Arabella" is evidence of a willingness to work against odds which has produced good, if slightly less admirable, results in "Carmen," "Boheme," "Tannhäuser," the improvised "Boris," "Lohengrin," "Meistersinger," etc.

In almost all the traditional opera houses of the world—Covent Garden, La Scala, Paris—the odds are stacked in a staggering disadvantage against results impressive to an audience conditioned to three-D movies, the swift transition of effect on TV, the revolving stages, scrim, and projected scenery of the legitimate theatre. For it is, after all, with the same eyes that we, the contemporary audience, look at the Met's, or the City Center's, or the Chicago Lyric's, or the San Francisco's productions. To maintain, in the face of such uninviting prospects, an attitude of affirmative purpose and determined innovation is the mark of a man committed to the elusive ideal of believable, enjoyable opera.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



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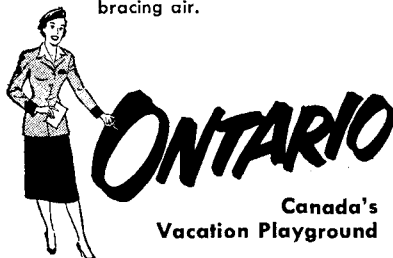
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Lives and Times

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entation of the mass of material—widely scattered in private and public archives of both hemispheres—is concerned, Terra has met the challenge in exemplary fashion.

Yet the book has a serious fault. I have never before read a biography which reveals so little of the author's feeling about his hero. A reader, it seems to me, ought to be able to see that the author has struggled with his subject as Jacob wrestled with the angel.

This biography is smooth, too smooth, overdressed, excessively polished—so highly polished that one fears to touch it. Perhaps an editorial pencil has contributed too much perfection, eliminating all that is human, all the emotional moments between author and subject, the heights and the depths, the convulsions and the struggles. The reader encounters no obstacles—he can skate through the book as over smooth ice. But can the life of an Alexander von Humboldt be portrayed as a straight line or a mathematically exact curve? The life of so astounding a man as Humboldt must be felt emerging from his biography, otherwise the biography is not a life but merely a case history. I wish I could have read the manuscript of this book just as the author wrote it after years of agonized struggle with the individuality and the intellectual adventures of his subject.

Despite this reservation Helmut de Terra's book must be welcomed as a highly informative and creative work.

Notes

WINSTON'S SHADOW: Back in 1921 Inspector Walter Henry Thompson of Scotland Yard was assigned to protect Winston Churchill, then England's forty-six-year-old First Lord of the Admiralty. Intermittently through the years, and during World War II when Churchill was in charge of a nation, Inspector Thompson was in charge of *him*. He tells of this exacting job in "Assignment: Churchill" (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, \$3.75). Several times the Scotland Yard man had to shout at the Prime Minister, on whom the nearness of danger acted like benzedrine. But in Thompson's mind at such moments (and presumably in Churchill's) was the knowledge that the only time he let his charge override his judgment the charge was hit by a taxi—in New York, in 1931. For the rest Churchill was "casually tyrannical, impatient

but never impolite." Collectors of Churchilliana will find much more here: that painting with Winston is "a disease, not a hobby" and that while painting he hums; that he loves ornate dressing gowns and during the war always wore one when he let off steam by marching around the main hall of Chequers barking military orders while martial music blared from the radio; and that "everyone shouts things at Winston Churchill. Bus drivers stop, lean from cars, and give him advice. Children pluck at his sleeve." Inspector Thompson stayed with Churchill until what is perhaps the latter's finest hour: when after addressing Parliament at war's end he refused to get in a closed car and first tried walking between two slowly moving cars as protection from the wildly enthusiastic crowds; finding this impossible, he clambered atop one car, to sit with legs dangling, a smiling, cigar-smoking cherub. At that point Inspector Thompson decided he'd had it all, and put in his papers. He writes in observant, matter-of-fact, police-officer fashion.

—ALLEN CHURCHILL.

G. WASHINGTON'S PORTRAITIST: The face of George Washington known best to most of the world is one of three executed by the leading portraitist of his day. The life of "Gilbert Stuart" is told by James Thomas Flexner in a new addition to Alfred A. Knopf's Great Lives in Brief Series (\$2.50). How well the Athenaeum portrait (the one on the postage stamp showing the left side of the face) resembled the President is a question, but it was immensely popular in its day. Stuart kept the canvas all his life and sold more than seventy copies of it (he could make a copy in two hours) to stave off his creditors. Stuart was a truly prodigious man: He lived extravagantly, drank inordinately, quarreled excessively, conversed outrageously (in puns when he could), and painted masterfully and prodigally.

His portraits—and he produced more than one thousand of them—are significant because they broke away from the tradition of gentility and idealization; Stuart, who suffered almost no one gladly, painted people as he saw them, warts and all, with skilled penetration to their inner characters. To compress so complex a person as Stuart into a short biography is no easy task, yet Mr. Flexner has done a good job. He captures the essence of the man, warts and all; indeed, the balance in this book is, if anything, a little too much on the side of the warts. But withal an excellent introduction to a justly celebrated American.

—ALDEN WHITMAN.