



## Bruckner by Walter, Operas Live and TV

**I**F BRUNO WALTER's present intentions remain unchanged, his current series of concerts with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra is the last he will undertake here as a guest conductor, committed to being in a specific place, at a specific time, a year ahead. Walter has not precluded an "exceptional engagement," for which he will be at the Philharmonic's disposal, but he feels the time has come for an end to the regular round of guest conducting.

In the circumstances, it was illuminating to find him devoting these final weeks to matters nearest and closest to him: Schubert (the "Unfinished"), Bruckner (the Ninth Symphony, also unfinished), Wagner ("Siegfried Idyll"), with Mahler (Symphony No. 2) and a Beethoven program for the Pension Fund of the Philharmonic still to come. Among other things illuminated was how well this orchestra can play when it has leadership in which it has confidence and belief.

Of particular sounding splendor in the first week's sequence was the Bruckner No. 9, which has many traits in common with its best predecessors and a few singular to itself. To some extent in it Bruckner curbed those inclinations to repetitions and sequences, of mighty tonal doors swinging open on empty vistas which some (myself included) find tiresome.

### LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. "Duke," by Hall Ellson. 2. "The Barons," by Charles Wertenbaker. 3. "Count Bruga," by Ben Hecht. 4. "Shah Namah," by Firdausi. 5. "Lord Raingo," by Arnold Bennett. 6. "Prince of Foxes," by Samuel Shellenbarger. 7. "The Ugly Duchess," by Lion Feuchtwanger. 8. "The Emperor Jones," by Eugene O'Neill. 9. "The Empress's Ring," by Nancy Hale. 10. "The Little Prince," by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. 11. "Queen New Orleans," by Harnett T. Kane. 12. "The Marquis De Sade," by Simone de Beauvoir. 13. "The Duchess of Wrexhe," by Hugh Walpole. 14. "The Rotisserie of the Queen Pédauque," by Anatole France. 15. "Lady Windemere's Fan," by Oscar Wilde. 16. "King Solomon's Mines," by H. Rider Haggard. 17. "Theodora and the Emperor," by Harold Lamb. 18. "The Vicomte de Bragelonne," by Alexandre Dumas. 19. "The Education of a Princess," by Grand Duchess Marie. 20. "Windows for the Crown Prince," by Elizabeth Gray Vining.

Even more important, the adagio is certainly a great movement, and as performed by the orchestra under Walter's knowing direction, it justifies everything the Brucknerites feel about his music. In refinement of detail and sweetness of statement, the "Siegfried Idyll" too, was truly idyllic.

The week's visit of the Boston Symphony Orchestra directed by Charles Munch provided a first hearing of Leo Smit's energetic, well-written First Symphony, and two performances of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2 with Nicole Henriot as soloist. Recalling the effect made with this infrequently played work two years ago by Pietro Scarpini, one could admire Miss Henriot's effort for the energy disposed, and for keyboard agility, but not for more than superficial statement of the music it contains.

Rudolf Bing's review course in the present state of the Wagnerian art reached the end of the first complete "Ring" cycle in six years with a "Götterdämmerung" which was, altogether, of a higher musical level than its predecessors. Perhaps it is easier for present performers to act like the humans of "Götterdämmerung" than the gods and goddesses of "Rheingold" and "Walküre," but it relates to more basic facts such as Kurt Böhme's excellent Hagen, the workmanlike Brünnhilde of Martha Mödl, and the surehanded leadership of Fritz Stiedry.

In voice and bearing, Böhme bears more than a little resemblance to Ludwig Weber, a fine artist who has, unfortunately, never been tempted to visit America. He has the dark-bearded voice to go with the dark-bearded character, a striding command of the stage when necessary, and a real talent for standing still. A worthy son of a dastardly father (Alberich, let us remember, begot not only Hagen but all the troubles of which the "Ring" is the outcome), Böhme is a good successor to such Hagens of the past as Kipnis, Ludwig Hofmann, Emanuel List, and Michael Bohnen.

Mme. Mödl also ranks high for conscientious artistry, sound knowledge of her part, and devotion to the high Wagnerian ideals. However, she does not have the kind of vocal endowment (in the words of a famous source) "to make the rough places smooth." The voice never quite fits the music, but always seems to be

grappling for a closer conformity, an easier way of surrounding the required notes. Recurrently she carves out phrases of impact and meaning, amid others of fuzzy outline and labored vocal production. Of her female associates, Blanche Thebom impresses for the athletic qualities of movement she brings to Waltraute, less for vocal agility; while Marianne Schech's Gutrune is modestly middle-class, as might have been expected from her Sieglinde.

The qualities of reliability (if not brilliance) common to the foregoing were present in lesser measure, at briefer length, in the other principals. Ramon Vinay makes every serious effort to match the needs of the elder Siegfried, but it is a tortured, ill-focused, and largely unmusical sound he projects. We are accustomed to equally earnest, even more ill-fitting voices for Siegfried; may we ask for a little more care in costuming to avoid the wrinkled knees of his especially ill-fitting tights? As Gunther, Hermann Uhde is vocally above average, dramatically unstabilized as yet. At the start, he is more cheerful than the usual Gunther, digressing sharply to a mood of inconsolable anguish when he realizes he has been duped. A smoother integration of dramatic extremes, a more subtle transition from one attitude to the other, would make it all a good deal more convincing. Lawrence Davidson's Alberich was unusually effective, the Norns—Belen Amparan, Margaret Roggero, and Gloria Lind—and Rhine Maidens (Heidi Krall, Rosalind Elias, and Sandra Warfield)—well-prepared for their duties.

A more than passing word of appreciation should be directed to Herbert Graf's stage direction, which—within the framework provided by the surroundings—is consistently purposeful, well-organized, and non eccentric. These may seem modest virtues, but they are major accomplishments in terms of the problem presented. Among the latter are such whims as Mme. Mödl's in finding a travel costume in her mountain cave (a change from gold in Act I to grey-with-cape in Act II) when she is abducted by Siegfried-Gunther, and Uhde's preference for hard-soled, built-up sandals which clumped audibly on the stage floor. There are times when singers should be grateful for

(Continued on page 59)





## BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

## Saucerian Humor

**I**N "Visit to a Small Planet" Broadway has a comedy that for a full evening runs the risk of satire. From the moment Eddie Mayehoff opens the play with a broad caricature of smug, Pentagonian, high-brass alphabetese we realize that playwright Gore Vidal is not showing us whole people, but rather the cores of their occupational fetishes. While modern major-generalship is the most fun, there are several other good targets, too. Commentatorship is represented by a self-centered TV opinion-caster in whom is combined pompous omniscience, presumptuous self-appointment as Americanism's spokesman, distorted personal politics that override honest reporting, and corrupt segues from world crisis to commercial with no decrease in urgency of tone. The position of the modern young girl trained at progressive colleges is amusingly pinpointed in the commentator's daughter, who feels the conflicting responsibilities of being profound, marrying a man with "drive," having lots of children, and following her natural healthy instinct to accompany a personable young lover to a motel. This impulsive boyfriend, who is a pacifist, is satirized least of all. Instead, a young Army captain is picked to stand for the typical American boy. This captain is absurdly vulnerable to any sentimental or patriotic cliché, has lusty notions patterned on Hollywood and Mickey Spillane, and brings the house down with his naive apology, "We're kind of hotblooded people where I come from . . . Marietta, Ohio!" The last in Mr. Vidal's gallery is the commentator's wife, who is practical enough to hope her daughter will not marry her impoverished admirer just because she's sleeping with him, and also practical enough to be concerned with the immediate housekeeping problems imposed by any old unexpected guest rather than with the awesome fact that for the first time in history man is receiving a visitor from outer space.

This visitor, who when questioned on his embarkation point snobbishly replies "Oh, *nobody* lives on Mars," goes on to explain that he dwells "in the suburbs of time." While science-fiction addicts may find this a stimulating address, theatre-goers are more apt to recognize a man in whom over-civilization's dilemma has been stated.

On the one hand, he is able to use 100 per cent of his brain instead of the 5 per cent modern man is capable of; on the other, he has lost all sense of morality and purpose in an existence where one no longer dies or suffers strong passions. His landing on earth and his subsequent desire to watch the barbaric and nonsensical vitality of our young civilization, is responsible for a whimsical plot in which he casually attempts to start a cataclysmic World War. ("Isn't hydrogen fun!" he jokes.)

**M**R. KRETON, for that is the name the author has selected for his fourth-dimensional dilettante, is played by Cyril Ritchard. The brilliant comedian realigns his famous foppish mannerisms into proportion with the mental strength of this character. Thus, while Mr. Kreton's overcivilization may have the same base as Sir Fopling Flutter's, it is a tougher alloy. Eddie Mayehoff's General is a solo bit that somehow triumphs over the law of diminishing returns. Unlike Orson Bean or Jack Gilford, this entertainer has not yet learned to blend his technique completely into the needs of a play, but his buffoonery fits the VIP prototype perfectly. When he gives a military order we feel both the seriousness and the absurdity of army ways.

When he tries to muddle his way out of a predicament his unfinished sentences and forced futile gestures are uproarious indictments of executives who live in a world of bluff and high-pressure gobbledegook. Sybil Bowan catches nicely the absurdity of maternal protectiveness and homemaking in a world that moves too fast for most effective permanent human relationships. Conrad Janis and Sarah Marshall admirably achieve the confusion natural to honest members of the younger generation.

There are times when "Visit to a Small Planet" becomes tedious, because there is little progress that is not merely a further demonstration of the one same joke. But under Cyril Ritchard's direction the fun keeps simmering, and, happily, the thirty-two-year-old novelist-playwright has seen to it that his play is usually at least one dimension beyond mere stage foolery. —HENRY HEWES.

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