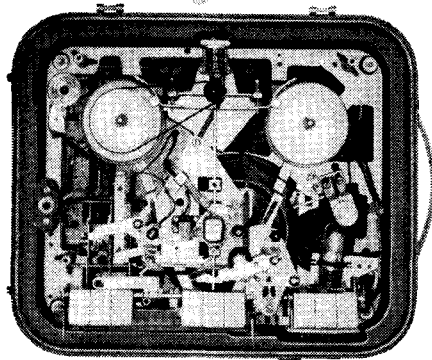


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A Schoenberg Disc-Course—I

By KURT LIST

IF ONE were to compare the important musical influences of this century—Ravel-Debussy, Stravinsky, Schoenberg—he would without question have to acknowledge that of Arnold Schoenberg as the most notable because the most radical and far reaching. Yet he would also have to admit that outside those circles whose business it is to study and experience the significant musical trends of our time Schoenberg's music, with the exception of perhaps the "Verklaerte Nacht," is still virtually unknown. Recordings of recent vintage have helped to alleviate this situation but because of the lesser accessibility of this music to the lay ear, and because of a sort of academic approach to performance by musicians scared out of their wits by the learned "theoretical" discussions of atonality, twelvetoners, and a thematic content, Schoenberg's music has had little chance to come to life as an art work of flesh and blood. It is as if everybody knew its place but only a few of its existence.

A recent recording release will do much to lay the ghost of its allegedly academic nature. Columbia Records which for a long time has stood in the forefront of disseminating contemporary music—of the two dozen Schoenberg works available on LP more than half have appeared on the Columbia label—has again done some yeoman's work by releasing Schoenberg's "Complete Piano Music," played by his disciple and keyboard apostle Edward Steuermann (ML 5216); the Quintet for Wind Instruments, Op. 26, played by the Philadelphia Woodwind Quintet (ML 5216); and the opera "Moses and Aaron," performed by soloists, chorus and orchestra of the Norddeutscher Rundfunk—the North German Radio in Hamburg—under the direction of Hans Rosbaud.

Of the three releases that of the "Complete Piano Music," consisting of five different opus numbers, is the most meritorious. The titles, with the exception of the Suite, Op. 25, are always "Klavierstücke" (piano pieces), three in Op. 11, six in Op. 19, five in Op. 23, and one each in Op. 33a and b. They afford the listener a view of Schoenberg's creative development

not only in terms of his piano music but in those of his approach to creative composition in general. Steuermann once remarked, quite correctly, that "Schoenberg has most frequently written for the piano when a particularly important step had to be taken in the development that so thoroughly changed the very foundations of musical structure. Almost all of his compositions for the piano are milestones in the development of modern music." In Op. 11 we have the first work that dissolves traditional tonality and introduces a new kind of thematic treatment which departs radically from the repetitive system of thematic development in the classical norm. It is expressionism in extensiveness as opposed to the concentrated density of the short six pieces of Op. 19. In the latter the spirit of variation, as Leibowitz calls it, is reduced to its most intensive form, requiring the utmost attention on the part of the listener who is confronted (as he will be later in an even more radical way in the works of Webern) with the tightest structure that results in utmost brevity without ever becoming aphoristic.

Op. 23 introduces the deliberate use of the twelvitone technique for the first time. Texturally these pieces are perhaps a return to the world of Op. 11, but the thematic development is far more akin to a vocal than a purely pianistic line. In Op. 25 this newly gained insight is applied to earlier, preclassical forms making the structure far more accessible to the lay ear. The individual pieces of the Suite are called: Prelude, Gavotte, Musette, Intermezzo, Menuet, and Gigue, and bear formally a close resemblance to their preclassical prototypes.

Op. 33 reverts once more to the earlier extensive expressionism but in a less hectic fashion; it is as if Schoenberg's previous occupation with baroque forms had led him to a greater degree of mellowness. Each of these groups introduces a new and important piano style which exploits the resources of the instrument to the utmost but remains within the sound propensities of the piano.

Of the five groups the listener will find the Suite Op. 25 with its infectious rhythms, charming melodic inventions and the abandonment of the sombreness and introspection of Op. 11 the most engaging.

All pieces have found an ideal in-

terpreter in Mr. Steuermann who, having premiered all of them under the composer's guidance, brings to them full authority and authenticity. Mr. Steuermann is a pianist of great technical prowess and deep musical insight; he performs the music with a warmth and clarity of expression that in the course of the years have even grown deeper and make the music come alive aside from all theoretical considerations precisely in the manner in which music should be presented.

The recorded sound of the piano is excellent with perhaps only one minor fault—the wide dynamic nuances are occasionally narrowed down on the disc and do not allow the full sway of expression that this music needs. Despite this, there is no other recording that affords the listener a more moving musical experience of or a better introduction to the world of Schoenberg.

The Wind Quintet Op. 26, whose composition falls in the time of the Suite Op. 25, is a work of quite different nature. Here for the first time Schoenberg uses the twelvetone technique in a more complicated manner—transpositions of the tone-row are now regular devices, an application that becomes the essence of his composing with twelve tones in all future works. As he reverted in the Suite to preclassical forms he now utilizes the garb of classical structure—the four movements are in sonata, scherzo, lied and rondo form respectively. Of all of Schoenberg's works this is the least accessible to the lay listener and only repeated hearings will identify to him the thematic progress that weaves in and out, going from instrument to instrument.

The Philadelphia players master the technical aspects of the intricate score superbly. Yet, they cannot always convey the continuity of the thematic material. The problem is that the necessary internal balance is not consistently maintained, so that certain passages remain obscure. The performance is most effective in the second and fourth movements where the tempi move briskly and the players manage to conjure up a plastic musical picture by juxtaposing the motility of the music with an occasional sound of wistfulness. The third movement, though clear, lacks the singing quality required to bring into focus the magnificent large span of the melodic line. But it is mainly in the first movement, assuredly the most difficult of all, that one feels a lack of coherence. The instruments are miked rather close, which allows maximum clarity, and the occasional imbalance is more a fault of the players than that of the recording engineers.

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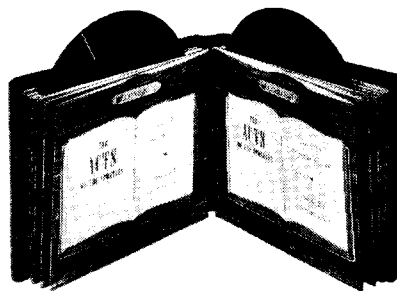


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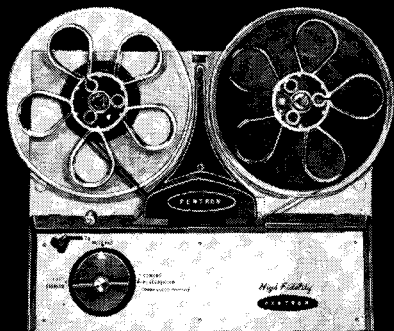
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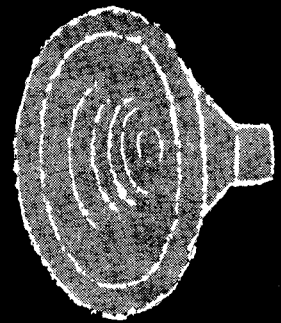
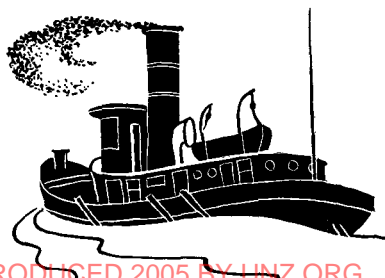
Continued from page 41

Guttenberg, Hirschberg, *und so weiter*.

When I first heard a Hallé concert, fifty years ago, Hans Richter conducted. On the basic German culture of Hallé and Richter was added in time the seeds of developing Lancashire character in music. When Richter left Manchester, after having dominated not only the Hallé Orchestra but all England's musical activities for sixteen years, Manchester for more than half a century had learned its music from German sources. And yet another German succeeded to the Hallé conductorship after the passing of Richter—Michael Balling, from Bayreuth, who held office until 1914.

It was now that the Hallé Orchestra came under the influence of Sir Thomas Beecham, himself a Lancastrian. To the solid fundamental tone established by Richter, Beecham brought the necessary lightness of touch, a Latin poise. And Beecham was followed by an Irishman, Hamilton Harty, a conductor of rare talent who mingled wit and sentiment. And today the Hallé Orchestra is enjoying a new lease of life because into a fairly cosmopolitan bloodstream Sir John Barbirolli has injected warm red corpuscles of the Italy to which he so considerably belongs, in spite of an English birthplace.

From a unique admixture of cultures, the Hallé Orchestra has in 100 years come by its present character. It is unmistakably an orchestra of blunt, uninhibited North of England character, yet at the same time long and varied traditions prevent any suspicion of provincialism. The secret of the Hallé Orchestra's individuality, and its quickness to respond to any environment it happens to find itself in, is no doubt partly guessed if we remember that in all its long history a permanent conductor has been in undisputed, not to say, absolute, control. Hallé's reign extended from 1857 to 1895; Richter's from 1895 to 1911; Balling's from 1911 to 1914; Beecham's from 1914 to the 1920s (with intervals



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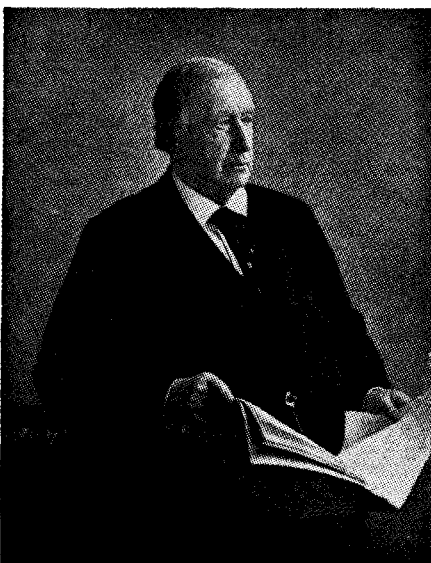
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during which he was engaged elsewhere). Harty ruled supreme some dozen years. Beecham returned for a brief space until the crisis of the war, which inspired the SOS to Barbirolli in New York.

In the years of my own first acquaintance with the Hallé Orchestra, the Hallé Concerts were the exclusive privilege of the upper middle classes (as they were known then, the merchants and their families). On the printed program of the Hallé concerts was a note drawing attention to the fact that there would be "Carriages at 9:30." And carriages would proceed along Oxford Street, past the University, to the suburban pastures of Didsbury and Victoria Park. I have heard coachmen urging the horses onward in German.

The average citizen of Manchester then regarded the Hallé Concerts as an event or phenomenon far removed from the day-by-day traffic of the city's life. There was accommodation at the Hallé Concerts at this period for only a few of the *hoi polloi*—a congested space at the back of the Free Trade Hall, over what was known as the "Grid." The "Grid" was a heating apparatus of iron bars fixed in the floor whence hot air floated upward unesthetically. Subscribers to the Hallé Orchestra in the Hallé-Richter years religiously dressed every Thursday night for the concerts. Seldom was a Manchester man of that epoch, who wasn't a dweller in Victoria Park, Didsbury or Eccles, seen in evening dress. Today all Lancashire attends the Hallé Concerts; you will find in a modern Hallé audience men and women you have seen last Saturday afternoon watching the Manchester United Football Club. If a man were to go into evening dress for a Hallé Concert in 1957 he would



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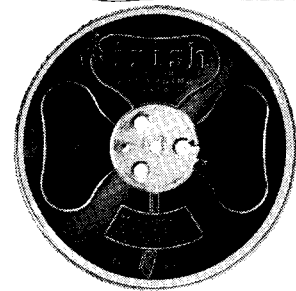
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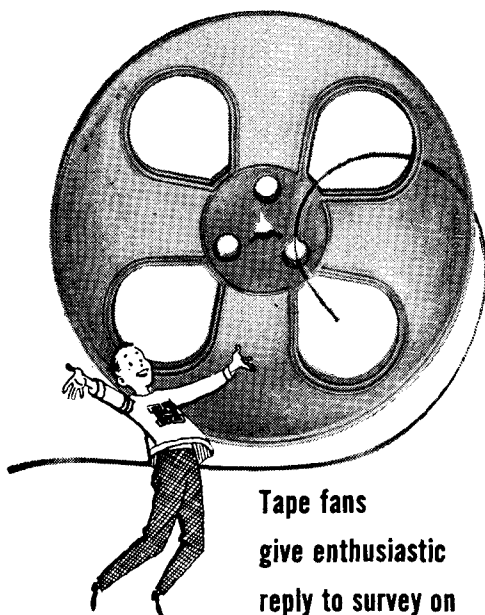
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Until recently the Hallé Orchestra existed on the strength of private donations. There have been the crises inseparable to all large bodies devoting themselves to music. During the 1914-1918 war Sir Thomas Beecham stepped in at the danger point and prevented disintegration. He was president of the Hallé Concerts Society until towards the end of the Second War; but in his absence in Australia and USA, another president was appointed in his place, none other than Philip Godlee, who was the cause of the call to Sir John. Beecham insisted on retaining the title of president of the Hallé; and when it was pointed out to him that two presidents, one living peripatetically here and there, were not practical, he drew attention to the fact that once on a time there were two Popes, one at Avignon.

Under Hallé, Richter, Balling, Beecham, and Harty, the Hallé Orchestra was in permanent being only for some twenty-five weeks in the year. In the summer months the players more or less lived on air, in the bands on the piers of seaside resorts. The rank and file of the Hallé Orchestra, in Hamilton Harty's years, were paid round about twenty-nine shillings a week between October and March. At the present time the Hallé Orchestra performs at more than 250 concerts a year, and their music is addressed to a public ranging from factory workers to University professors. Manchester usually hears two concerts weekly, the same program on successive evenings. The orchestra tours all Great Britain from time to time. There are ample rehearsals now. Under the old regime, one rehearsal every Thursday morning was as much as could be afforded, and the concert would be given on the evening of the rehearsal day. Under Harty the Hallé Orchestra, with one rehearsal a program, played all the Sibelius symphonies in one season, at a time when the greater Sibelius was not well known, and gave the first performances in England of the Ninth Symphony and "Das Lied von der Erde" of Mahler.

It is because the Hallé Orchestra has grown up the hard way, by adaptation to change and challenge of different cultures and economic circumstances, that it is representative of Lancashire and Northern England life and character. It is not the product of a luxurious musical pose. It is not a streamlined orchestra. Probably it might sound rather rough or even dowdy in, say, Philadelphia, where, I am prepared to believe, a cloth is thrown over the orchestra on cold nights to protect the engine I have

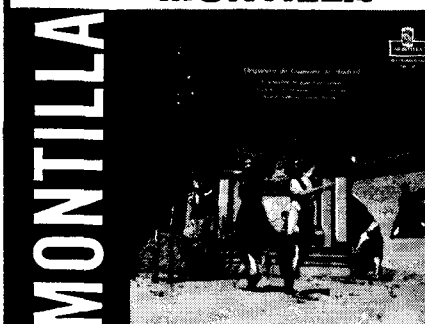
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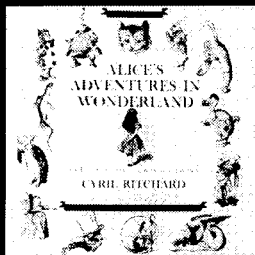
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—GEORGE JELLINEK.

Philharmonic Orchestra under Beecham. One impression effaces another. In Manchester audience and orchestra are on the same wavelength; they know each other. There is no need for the orchestra to show-off technically; the audience in Manchester can take for granted the fact that the Hallé Orchestra is made up of expert instrumentalists. Sir John Barbirolli and his players are free to concentrate on the music, on its power to reveal the composer's identity and to present the style that is the man Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, or whatever the name may be. Best of all, the Hallé Orchestra, living month by month in more or less the same environment, rich in 100 years' history, is free to express the spirit of a North of England community that is perhaps the most responsive musical public in Great Britain.

I am now exiled in London, visited by the Hallé once or twice each year. But whenever the orchestra does come to town Lancastrians in London feel a proud throb of the heart as tumultuous applause hails a performance that is alive, direct, pulsating. The Hallé Orchestra is as true to the traditions of Charles Hallé and to the spirit of Manchester as the Vienna Philharmonic is to Mahler and Vienna. I can say no more than that, being as I am, a Manchester-born man, modest and of few words.

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Victoria de las Españas

THANKS to the enthusiasm of Victoria de los Angeles for the music of her native country, the record public has the opportunity to further its acquaintance with two diverse aspects of Spanish music, one wholly new to discs, the other a considerable improvement on its previous interpretation. The diversity of the material also puts the problem of adaptability to the performer, who responds with admirable resources.

Of the two discs, the more unusual is the one (RCA Victor LM 2144) devoted to what the interpreter, in her foreword, terms representative of "the ancient Spanish musical tradition." Included, in a span from 1300-1800, are fifteen examples of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque songs, the first of religious character, the second and third of a secular sort associated with the court and the theatre. The vocal range is rather short throughout, as the music was not meant for display purposes. It lies beautifully for the richest part of the singer's middle register.

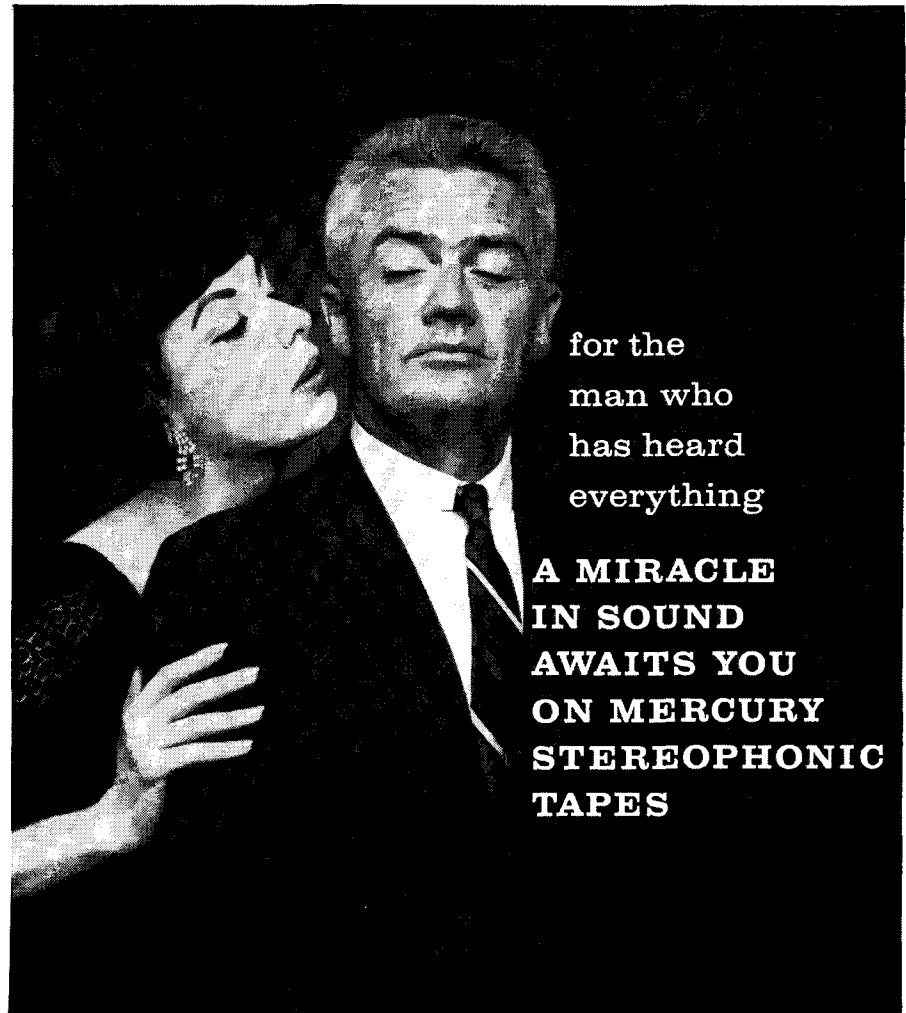
The lack of full texts is a detriment to thoroughgoing appreciation of the material, though the notes of José María Lamaña are illuminating, as far as they go. The accompaniments have been modernized to the extent of using a harpsichord rather than the forerunner of the guitar to which the material of the Renaissance period was sung, and small instrumental combinations elsewhere. None but the archeologically-minded could protest seriously, for the totality is artistically valid and esthetically coordinated.

Concurrently Miss de los Angeles may be heard in an Angel recording (35440) of the Turina "Canto a Sevilla," which were little known here prior to their partial appearance in a miscellany of the composer's works with Pedro de Freitas Branco conducting and Lola de Aragon as vo-

calist (originally issued by Westminster, it is now 93015 on the Ducretet-Thomson label). Turina's scheme provides for three orchestral interludes in addition to the four texts which are sung; the Branco version provided only the sung portions. Here

we have the complete cycle, with Anatole Fistoulari directing the London Symphony Orchestra with excellent discrimination throughout, and Miss de los Angeles's art at its most sympathetic in the lovely contours and atmospheric phrases with which Turina evokes the spirit of his beloved city. Among the best of these is "La Giralda," which de los Angeles sings beautifully if not with as much fervor as the version in a Nan Merriman recital with Gerald Moore (also, as it happens, on Angel).

—I. K.



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By JOSEPH WECHSBERG

MUNICH.

FOR incorrigible festival fans who have stamina, enthusiasm, and money left after Bayreuth, Ansbach, Salzburg, Aix-en-Provence, Glyndebourne, Verona, Lucerne, Edinburgh, Berlin, and many other, less commendable enterprises, there is always the Munich Festival. It lasts into September after the summer festivals have closed shop. The Munich Festival doesn't commercialize the memory of a dead composer and isn't built around three or four stagione presentations. It is simply a resume of the year's repertory of the Munich State Opera. Originally only the works of Mozart were given, in the lovely, intimate Residenztheater; and the works of Wagner, in the Prinzregententheater, a somewhat smaller and acoustically unsuccessful replica of the Bayreuth house. Later the works of Richard Strauss were added. Strauss was born in Munich and died in Garmisch, near Munich. Again later, when something had to be done to compete with all the neighboring festivals, some modern works were added, that had proved their value as festival fare.

This year the month-long Festival offered six Strauss works ("Die Aegyptische Helena," "Ariadne," "Capriccio," "Elektra," "Frau ohne Schatten," "Rosenkavalier," "Salome"), three by Mozart ("Cosi," "Entführung," "Figaro"), three by Wagner ("Lohengrin," "Meistersinger," "Parsifal"), Handel's "Julius Caesar," Verdi's "Otello," Pfitzner's "Palestrina," Berg's "Wozzeck," and the world premiere of Hindemith's "Harmonie der Welt." It is an ambitious, earnest, large-scale effort; it takes almost four hours to perform the massive work that deals with the life, the ideas, and the struggles of Johannes Kepler, the astronomer. There are moments of fine music in it, but also moments of boredom. Hindemith wanted to show the pains of the creative mind, a difficult undertaking on the operatic stage which needs drama, not explanation. The only two composers who tried and succeeded to do it were Wagner in the third act of "Meistersinger"—the creation of Stolzing's prize lied—and Hans Pfitzner in the magnificent first act of "Palestrina" in which the audience participates in the poetic creation of Palestrina's great Mass. Few com-

posers were ever able to explain how they did their composing, and Pfitzner's achievement is a *tour de force* of great musical beauty.

The finest evening of this year's Munich Festival was the performance of Richard Strauss's "Die Aegyptische Helena." So far as I can ascertain no other opera house on earth plays this opera, which was written between "Intermezzo" and "Arabella" and first performed twenty-nine years ago in Dresden and Vienna. You wouldn't have thought so a few weeks ago in Munich when there was the sort of discussion during the intermission that goes on during interesting world premieres. The verdict was probably mixed. The music books agree that the work, despite great musical beauty, never was entirely successful, owing to the difficult libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This is perhaps an oversimplification. Hofmannsthal, more poet than dramatist, never made it easy for Strauss, and sometimes—in "Ariadne" and "Frau ohne Schatten"—he made it pretty difficult for him; but Ariadne has long become a standard repertory work and, judging by its success everywhere during the past three years, "Frau ohne Schatten" is on its way to being recognized as Strauss's and Hofmannsthal's masterpiece, despite its deeply mystical story.

THE EGYPTIAN HELENA is a very modern work in classic costume. The Trojan War is over, Menelaus has killed Paris, the lover of his wife, and now Menelaus and Helena arrive as shipwrecks on an Egyptian island that belongs to Aithra, the girl friend of Poseidon and a lady of considerable magic powers in her own right. Unlike the Amme, the evil sorceress in "Frau ohne Schatten," Aithra is a benevolent one. She notices at once that Menelaus wants to kill his unfaithful wife; and Aithra, Strauss, and Hofmannsthal spend two entertaining hours to straighten out the aftermath of this deplorable love affair. It's a psychologically deft comedy, and Aithra is probably the most accomplished psychiatrist on the entire operatic stage. She quickly convinces Menelaus that the woman who betrayed him wasn't his wife; the real Helena, the Egyptian Helena, was peacefully asleep in Aithra's palace all these years, waiting for her husband. So far, so good; a clever woman never had much trouble with a gen-