



## Debuts of Tchaikowsky and Simionato—City Center

**A** GAINST all historic probability, Tchaikowsky played Prokofieff at the first broadcast of the New York Philharmonic's new season. That would be, of course, Andre Tchaikowsky, the young Polish-born, French-trained pianist who has won several challenging competitions abroad and otherwise made a start on fame in his twenty-two years. By plan, his debut was scheduled for the opening concerts of the season earlier in the week. These were cancelled when the musicians and the management failed to reach an agreement on the season's contract.

The young man gave an excellent account of himself, both as musician and technician, though it did not appear that the C major concerto of Prokofieff (No. 3) was the happiest choice for his introduction. His fleetness of finger sounded to me rather more *leggiere* than the steely bite this work's bravura demands, his maximum tone production not as deep nor as clangorous as the best results require. Rather more to the point, however, was the warmth and attractiveness of his musical personality (as conveyed in the slow movement), and a forthright demeanor that won repeated recalls from the audience.

In resuming its work under the direction of Dimitri Mitropoulos, the orchestra gave him the quality and quantity of sound he wanted in a G minor concerto of Vivaldi (written for the Dresden Orchestra) and the Fourth Symphony of Vaughan Williams. In cohesion and concern for detail, it was one of the better examples of this partnership, though the conductor's conception of the Vivaldi fast movements struck me as overweighted and heavily accented.

**N**EXT to the last place one would expect the Italian mezzo Giulietta Simionato to make her New York debut would be Town Hall (the last, clearly, would be the Metropolitan Opera, whose signed contract she neglected to honor a few years ago). However, this was an occasion when Town Hall and Miss Simionato met on equal terms, the common cause being probably the first New York performance (in concert form) of Donizetti's "Anna Bolena," with Arnold Gamson conducting the season's first offering of the American Opera Society.

Like more than a few of Donizetti's

other operas which we rarely hear (*Favorita* and *Lucrezia Borgia* among them), "Anna Bolena" has a tempting flow of the melodic fluency, the dramatic point, and the orchestral vagueness familiar from "Lucia." It lacks a sextet, of course, and no such showpiece as the "Mad Scene," but it is clearly the work of a master whose sense of the stage kept it filled with one or another of the female principals at all times—either Jane Seymour, sung by Miss Simionato, or the title character, by Gloria Davy.

The intimate contact of performers and listeners inescapable in Town Hall left little doubt that Miss Simionato is the best all-round mezzo now active in opera. She is a true example of her type, possessing both the bright upper range of the soprano and the darker lower register of the mezzo, not marred by a conspicuous break or alteration of timbre between. A tasteful singer, and an intelligent one too, she can whip off a florid phrase or bear down on a dramatic passage with equal facility and effect. The Metropolitan could certainly use her—and, one suspects, she could use the Metropolitan too, after a taste of the warm reception her devotees gave her.

The impression made by Miss Davy was more equivocal. Donizetti's style is far from simple, and she has much less indoctrination in it than Miss Simionato. However, one was struck more by her temperament in this role than by the richness or variety of her vocal equipment. It is a sound, dramatic voice, still incompletely developed, with a bright top. But the weight of the middle register was not impressive nor did she seem to be at ease in the ensembles. Richard Cassily, admired for his work in "The Saint of Bleeker Street," showed growth as a tenor in his delivery of the high-lying music for Lord Richard Percy: Kenneth Smith, conversely, seemed to be laboring his once impressive bass voice as a leaner, lankier Henry VIII than Holbein would have recognized.

Recognition, dramatically, was mostly of an approximate sort, for the ladies wore costume dresses, the men white ties, in a rather perplexing jumble of emphasis. Gamson's orchestra sounded better than it has on some past occasions, and he stints no vigor in his direction. It is questionable, however, how much leadership can be attributed to a conductor whose orchestra is on stage with the singers,

at an oblique angle where he can see them, but they cannot see him. He kept pace with them very well.

**A** MONG the reasons to admire the way Julius Rudel has begun his work as director of the City Center's operatic activities is his willingness to share the conductor's podium with such qualified men as Arturo Basile, Peter Harman Adler, Jose Iturbi, and Franz Allers. Rather than viewing their success as a possible threat to his own, Rudel apparently has a Wilsonian doctrine of his own: What is good for them is good for City Center, and what is good for City Center is very good for Rudel.

The first of the guests to come into view (following Rudel's direction of the opening "Turandot") was Basile, whose good reputation preceded him by way of some energetic, well-paced opera recordings from Italy (among them several of the earliest with Renata Tebaldi). It was good to find these qualities present also in his introductory "Traviata," for which Beverly Sills was a vivacious, vocally promising Violetta and John Alexander a plausible Alfredo. In this and the following "Boheme" his orchestra had a sound of warmth and character by no means inherent in the performers themselves. Given a reasonable (if not expectable) amount of rehearsal, Basile may give the younger singers of the company a desirable indoctrination in the better Italian practice.

Considering the extent to which last season's innovations under Erich Leinsdorf detoured the customary direction of this endeavor, Rudel did well to have it running smoothly at the opening. By the same token, "Turandot" is a vain and inevitably defeating project for a theatre with less than maximum resources, scenic as well as vocal. It is, after all, Puccini's most ambitious operatic venture, and a small chorus, over-taxed orchestra, and variable singers are not the stuff for which he wrote. Gaudy rather than colorful scenery and a large outpouring of vocal sound without much artistic quality must reduce the possibly creditable to the demonstrably indifferent. Giuseppe Gismondo, a young Italian tenor with a disposition to the *del Monaco* manner, taxed a potentially useful voice with the stern demands of the Calaf's music, as Frances Yeend ploughed through the part of Turandot with little regard for subtlety or color. Such of these as the occasion provided was heard from Adele Addison as Liu. Joshua Hecht performed artistically as Timur, and the new names included those of Ping (David Williams), Pang (Paul Huddleston), and Pong (Loren Driscoll).

—IRVING KOLODIN.

## Vigorous Vanguard

**"The Lunatic Fringe,"** by **Gerald Johnson** (Lippincott. 248 pp. \$3.95) and **"The Square Pegs,"** by **Irving Wallace** (Alfred A. Knopf. 328 pp. \$5) are two accounts of eccentric and/or bizarre people in American history, many of them comparatively obscure. Hal Bridges, who reviews the two books here, is professor of history at the University of Colorado.

By Hal Bridges

IN THEIR latest books, both Gerald W. Johnson and Irving Wallace have chosen to deal biographically with eccentric personages in American history. But their separate treatments of this common subject are markedly different. Mr. Johnson in "The Lunatic Fringe" is interested in politics; his fourteen eccentrics are mainly political leaders with ideas ahead of their times. Mr. Wallace in "The Square Pegs" focuses upon nine relatively obscure but flamboyantly bizarre personalities, much in the manner of his earlier book, "The Fabulous Originals."

Mr. Johnson's book is didactic. His sketches of the political careers of

men like Tom Paine, Henry George, John Peter Altgeld, and Tom Watson might be described as elongated editorials in which the author, drawing his facts from secondary sources, points out those aspects of his protagonists' lives which illustrate his dominant theme: freedom of thought is the strength of democracy, and yesterday's wild-eyed notion often becomes today's sound and solid governmental idea.

In arguing this admirable thesis, Mr. Johnson deals in vigorous generalizations that sometimes fall into oversimplification. The assertion that "Horace Greeley was just about the giddiest old goat that ever played a prominent role in public affairs" caricatures rather than characterizes the famous editor. The statement that in the 1830s "minds grew dull" in America, while it refers primarily to political thought, still seems to overlook Emerson and the transcendentalists. The remark that Theodore Roosevelt "never displayed racial or religious intolerance" hardly seems to take account of Roosevelt's Anglo-Saxonism and resultant contempt for the "Latin races."

At times, too, the historical events in the book seem so familiar that not even the author's sardonic humor and witty asides can impart much freshness to the retelling. Yet when the material is meaty, as in the story of Tom Watson, the Populist leader who turned cynically from liberalism to racism and religious bigotry, Mr. Johnson's forceful style is effective and his comments thought-provoking. He points out that although Watson was a man "who couldn't take it," he was nevertheless a sincere political protestant before he was unfairly beaten by the conservative Democratic machine in Georgia. It follows that "the forcible suppression of any protest is wrong in a democratic society. One of the penalties of that wrong is the release upon society of a Tom Watson, a man of ability converted into a scourge."

Mr. Wallace also has a philosophical word to say in behalf of the dissenter in the United States. At the outset of his book he deplors current American conformist attitudes and "the consequent fear of any challenging ideas or personalities," and states his own faith: "To be one's self, and



—From "The Square Pegs."

George Francis Train—"provided Jules Verne with a plot."

unafraid whether right or wrong, is more admirable than the easy cowardice of surrender to conformity." After this, he eschews overt argument, portrays his gallery of eccentrics, one after the other, with deft artistry, and allows the reader to discover whatever moral lessons he may in the flow of entertainment.

Probably the best known personage in his book is Victoria Woodhull, the spiritualist, free lover, and women's rights advocate who ran for President against Grant in 1872. Her sexual adventures and her role in the notorious Beecher-Tilton adultery case, make the exposés of modern scandal magazines seem insipid. (Mr. Johnson could not resist telling this lusty story either, though he has some difficulty justifying Mrs. Woodhull's presence among his good liberals.)

Mr. Wallace, who has done considerable research in the original sources, also introduces us to such square pegs as Wilbur Glenn Voliva, who believed the world is flat, George Francis Train, who claimed to have traveled around it in eighty days (thereby providing Jules Verne with a plot), Delia Bacon, who "moved Shakespeare's bones" literarily by originating the theory that Sir Francis Bacon and others wrote the Shakespearean plays, and Timothy Dexter, the semiliterate business genius and egomaniac whose unpunctuated book, "A Pickle for the Knowing Ones," takes front rank in *curiosa Americana*. As for Mr. Wallace's own book, it is, to use a non-eccentric phrase, highly readable.



—From "The Square Pegs."

Victoria Woodhull—"free lover and presidential candidate."