



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Where Art Thou, Juliet?

IN "Stage Struck" we are asked to believe that a girl the same age as Susan Strasberg, who looks like Susan Strasberg (and, in fact, is played by Miss Strasberg), can come to New York from Vermont and, within a year, replace the star of a show on opening night, thereupon becoming a star in her own right. One would have thought Miss Strasberg exactly right for this role. If anyone represents the dewy-eyed young conqueror of the theatre, she does. The movie, by the way, is not based on any other movie called "Stage Struck." It is based, in essence, on the early Katherine Hepburn movie "Morning Glory," and has been considerably renovated by Ruth and Augustus Goetz. The trouble is, that for a fable of this roseate type something known as a performance is necessary for its success. The lines, the basic material, have indeed been provided by the Goetzes. But Miss Strasberg, I must solemnly report, has failed us all dismally.

There is hardly a scene (and she has been provided some marvelous ones) in which she has not gone wrong somehow. I would be inclined to blame this happenstance on the director, Sidney Lumet, if all the other performances were not exactly right, if *their* lines were not said crisply and with great professionalism. There is the carefully-wrought producer (a basically nice guy, if hardhearted at times because of the nature of the business) by Henry Fonda, a delicious exaggeration by Joan Greenwood of the perennial temperamental lady star, Christopher Plummer's sympathetic playwright, and Herbert Marshall's warmhearted, mature leading player.

The lesson is clear. Becoming a star does not necessarily mean one has become an actress. Watch Miss Strasberg wandering through an opening-night party-scene at the producer's duplex apartment. She drinks too much champagne, and recites Juliet's balcony scene on the staircase, transfiguring the assembled guests with her talent and young beauty. At least, that's the intention of the script. Instead, Miss Strasberg's Juliet would have embarrassed the audience watching a senior-class play. It is a key scene. One must believe that the little Vermont girl who calls herself Eva Lovelace really has great talent. Since she doesn't

demonstrate it, we can only believe she is a very aggressive little girl (Miss Strasberg is better when portraying this side) who has just butted her way into the theatre.

There are several of these letdowns, and it is a shame, because Stuart Millar's production (shot entirely in New York) is handsome and surprisingly literate, veined with wit and barbs about the theatre and theatre people. The theatre, of course, is treated (as always, in movies) with high respect. The electrician giving instructions on opening night is photographed with ceremonial awe, and when Eva Lovelace does achieve her triumph it is made clear that all animate and inanimate things of the universe will shortly lie at her feet.

But this excessive glamorizing is a minor flaw in the movie. The major flaw is in the playing of the leading role. Can it be that success has spoiled Susan Strasberg?

* * *

The George Seaton-William Perlberg team has come out with "Teacher's Pet," a comedy about the journalistic profession. Comedies, of course, should be funny, and while "Teacher's Pet" is funny at times, it isn't at others. Perhaps this is because the stars, Doris Day and Clark Gable, aren't very good at comedy. Miss Day looks too businesslike, and Mr. Gable looks and sounds a little too much like President Eisenhower. At any rate—to get to the story—Mr. Gable, a tough, not-too-well-schooled managing editor, is inveigled into a visit to Miss Day's journalism class in a local college, and the two discover that their bodies, so to speak, are more attracted to each other than their minds. She goes weak every time he grabs her and kisses her, and he grows furious when she speaks of *teaching* journalism. They compromise their differences eventually, but not before Gig Young turns in a blessedly funny performance as a veritable Michelangelo of an egghead. The newspaper Mr. Gable represents, by the way, looks to be a curious cross between *The New York Times* and the *Journal-American*. And one of the movie's gimmicks has several of the nation's motion-picture reviewers acting as staff members on the paper. They're outright hams, one and all.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

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Borkh, Mitropoulos, and "Elektra"—Mennin by Szell

THANKS to the varied gifts of Inge Borkh—not to mention Dimitri Mitropoulos, the Philharmonic Orchestra, Blanche Thebom, Frances Yeend, Giorgio Tozzi, *et al.*—New Yorkers (and their radio relatives) had the opportunity, rare in any season, to hear Richard Strauss's "Elektra" in historical succession to his "Salome." The more the rarity, in that Miss Borkh herself performed the arduous solo part of Elektra in a concert version in Carnegie Hall, as she had the Salome on the opera stage earlier in the season at the Metropolitan. Such a "double" proclaims Miss Borkh as a singer Oscar Hammerstein would have valued for his Manhattan Opera House, where he once presented the Strauss works as matinee and evening attractions on the same Saturday.

The recent experience left little doubt that "Elektra" is the greater of the two, and that Miss Borkh's Elektra is equivalently greater than her Salome. Vocally, this is an astounding achievement for a woman who was singing Agathe in "Freischuetz" and Magda Sorel in "The Consul" not too long ago—true, clean, lustrous, and bright in sound. The broader line and less eccentric intervallic pattern of "Elektra" not only wear better than that of "Salome," but they also suit her weighty sound better than the more agile demands of the earlier work. Taken all together, it would have to be rated Strauss's masterpiece—allowing for our limited knowledge of "Frau ohne Schatten"—combining as it does, the full sweep of his symphonic style with vocal writing of a warmth and suppleness he rarely sustained over so long a period.

Dramatically, Miss Borkh was more successful in conveying the sisterly woe Elektra feels for the missing Orestes than she was with the daughterly hatred of Clytemnestra. She applied herself with equal intelligence to both problems, but the sounds she produced to recall her own beauty seemed to come from a source clearer to her heart than those in which she reviled her faithless Begetter. Let us add, however, that anyone who sings the music of Elektra with so much beauty and comprehension as Miss Borkh should have a long future with it, in which other desirable qualities may develop. At present it is an uplifting experience to hear any woman

sing this arduous music for an hour-plus, and still seem able to go on indefinitely.

How much, actually, of an hour-plus one heard of the score depended on a peculiar set of circumstances. At the midweek concerts an intermission was decreed (some say on behalf of a contract the hall has with the bar concessionaire) after fifty minutes, resulting in the deletion of the scene between Elektra and Chrysothemis in which they discuss the rumor that Orestes is dead. At the Sunday broadcast, the work was performed without interruption, but with *additional* cuts that shrank the playing time to less than the ninety minutes of the broadcast. In addition to the previous cut, the orchestral interlude was omitted, there was another deletion earlier in the part of Chrysothemis and a lengthier one when the six maids announce the appearance of Aegisthes, thus introducing his "Lichter, lichter" with no preparation at all. In a conventional opera this would be questionable; in a work of "Elektra's" intricate scheme, it is indefensible, whatever the practicalities.

Mitropoulos conducted not only the score, but also the cuts, from memory, his knowledge of this work apparently being of a portmanteau flexibility. His debatable judgment should not obscure the superior quality of the musical results he achieved throughout, not only in the highly charged climaxes, which have always engaged his keenest participation, but also in the quieter moments of relaxation and preparation. The orchestra played with a full realization of its participation in an occasion, to which Thebom made her strong contribution as Clytemnestra, Yeend excelled any previous accomplishment as Chrysothemis, and Tozzi sang Orestes with superb vocal poise. Little wonder that the Sunday audience erupted with the kind of applause which makes every listener a paying, unpaid claqueur.

THE good news of the last concert by the Cleveland Orchestra in a series of three in Carnegie Hall to celebrate the organization's fortieth birthday was contained not only in the playing of the program but also in the assurance that, with or without anniversary, the orchestra will visit New York for another three concerts next season. The qualities that make

it welcome were apparent not only in a svelte but spirited performance of Mozart's C major Symphony, No. 34 (known to its friends as "ohne Minuet"), but also in the driving measures of Peter Mennin's new piano concerto. George Szell's tutelage of this group provided an example of cultured string playing in the Mozart that has not been excelled in a New York concert hall this winter.

The Mennin concerto began with a promising kind of sonorous definition between piano and orchestra, but it soon turned out this was what was mostly on Mennin's mind in the creation of this work. The separation of function in which the pianistic figurations wound in and around the orchestral discussion like garlands on a Christmas tree was an absorbing point of departure, save that Mennin didn't depart very far from it. The simpler slow movement provided a welcome contrast, but the finale has more than a bearable resemblance to movement one. Eunice Podis provided an abundance of the precise finger fluency the work requires.

MARCELLA POBBE (pronounced Po-BAY) made an agreeable impression in her debut as Mimi in a Metropolitan "Boheme" early in March. A petite, or Bori-sized, Mimi, Pobbe left some doubt of her real vocal character: her voice has more weight than is customary in a lyric's lower register, and there is a little uncertainty between middle and top. However, she has a feeling for the Puccini idiom, she pays attention not only to her own words but those of her partner, and she showed promise as an actress. As conductor Kurt Adler was as much a stranger to the orchestra in this work as she was to him; the combination hardly made for impetuous results. It was unquestionably the best evening yet for Carlo Bergonzi at the Metropolitan, for his pliant, well-used voice is much more suitable to Rodolfo than it is to the Verdi parts—Radames and Alvaro ("Forza")—which have previously fallen his lot.

In his first Siegmund in "Walkure" Albert da Costa acquitted himself more than creditably, especially in vocal strength alone. He managed the demanding first act with body, flexibility, and warmth, though the limitations of his experience are such that he does something wrong, visually, for everything he does right, aurally. A Fulbright at Wagner U. (Bayreuth) would be very much to his advantage—and, eventually, ours. Marianne Schech came a long way (Munich) to sing a smallish Sieglinde. Irene Dalis was the able Fricka.

—IRVING KOLODIN.