



MUSIC TO MY EARS

"Murder" Will Not Out

W HEN duly constituted authority prevents "Murder in a Cathedral" from happening then it is evident there are higher powers than those wielded by a mere critic. The long arm of coincidence has rarely reached further than on the occasion when the tragic outcome of T. S. Eliot's play, as transferred to the musical stage by Italy's venerable Ildebrando Pizzetti, was prevented before it occurred through the decision of the local State Police that the tent provided by the Empire State Festival was no longer usable. The storm which caused the damage also washed out two alternate performances of "La Boheme."

Thus, inadvertently, a visitor who attended the baptism of the tent four years ago was also present at its interment. Actually, the shelter had been scheduled for discard at the week's end, but the squally winds which arose at the end of a sultry August day put it to a test it could not withstand. Worst of all, the damage was heaviest over an auxiliary structure covering the stage and orchestra, exposing the singers and players to a steady downpour. Had the audience alone been subject to this discomfort, some makeshift arrangement could have been contrived. But the decision of the next day, to call the whole thing off (even though the sun was shining brightly) was probably the wisest in the circumstances. The hill-top site is exposed to any passing storm, and another violent one might have caused real mayhem rather than the staged sort.

The sorriest sufferers, undoubtedly (next to the composer, who was far away in Italy) were conductor Laszlo Halasz and Nicola Rossi-Lemeni who

had come from Europe to acquaint Americans with the impersonation of Thomas à Becket which he had introduced to Italy at the Scala premiere last winter. It would be a pity to forfeit so much devoted work by the Symphony of the Air, the chorus and associated principals, without a public hearing. Plans are now going forward for a Carnegie Hall performance early in the winter, though Rossi-Lemeni's participation (due to continuing commitments) is questionable. Another first line singing actor, such as Giorgio Tozzi or Jerome Hines, might take his place.

When a sizable audience, unaware of the early evening damage, assembled toward curtain time, managing director Frank Forest took the view that every effort should be made to give a performance. In the half hour that followed, during which the moon shone and disappeared, puddles on the stage were mopped up, and everything made ready for a performance. Lightning flashes were visible through the rents in the canvas when Halasz came into the pit, but he went ahead in sound theatrical tradition until Forest sized up the worsening situation as dangerous and announced a suspension.

In the fifteen or so minutes of Pizzetti's score that were heard, there were indications that a work of quality was unfolding. The opening choral passages preceding the return of Thomas from his exile suggested an orientation to Mussorgsky colored by the kind of Italianate choral writing associated with Puccini and "Turan-dot." Whatever the weakness of this kind of simile-seeking, it was in the mood of the play, making a further encounter with it, somewhere, somehow, something to be anticipated.

One aesthetic point about "Assassino nella Cattedrale" was apparent even in the circumstances. No English text was available because the Italian version credited to Monsignor Alberto Castelli was put into singable Italian verse by the composer (who also wrote his own text for "Fra Gherardo" when it was done at the Metropolitan thirty years ago) and Eliot refused to permit any other English version than his own to be published. As he has no present intention of putting Eliot-Pizzetti into Pizzetti-Eliot English, a libretto will probably be lacking wherever and whenever a performance is finally given. —IRVING KOLODIN.

Episcopal Confession

(Circa 1500 A.D.)

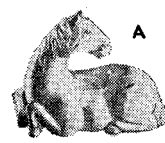
By Ben Ray Redman

A FALCON mewed, and feath'ly manned,
I trafficked for a jeweled morse:
She quickly stooped to snipe and lark,
And I to simony, of course;
For hawk and bishop were as one
Naked beneath the seeing sun.

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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Spanish Neo-Realist

ONE of the newest directorial talents to appear on the European scene is Spain's Juan Bardem. His film "The Lovemaker," with Betsy Blair, was shown here last year, a picture that plunged beneath the placid surface of a sleepy Spanish town to expose the boredom, frustration and cruelty of its stagnant middle class. "Age of Infidelity" (Janus), which has just opened here, is actually an earlier work, dating from 1955; but it reveals even more strongly Bardem's bitter awareness of the corrupting forces in society, the power of privilege, wealth and position to destroy moral values and humanitarian instincts. Bardem is fundamentally a moralist, a critic of the social scene. Not surprisingly, he has had numerous scrapes with his government—including a term in prison.

Bardem's self-appointed role, it would seem, is at once his main source of strength and weakness. Because of his concern for the social effects of every action, the social implications of every attitude, his films have breadth and depth, the sort of "slice of life" that hitherto we had associated primarily with the Italians. Like De Sica or Fellini, he can compress into a single shot the echoing overtones of a busy street, a crowded tenement or a smart cocktail party and suggest the class antagonisms and tensions lingering there. Unlike De Sica and Fellini, however, he has not yet mastered the art of making his people full-bodied and real. They exist because he has willed them into being, because they are necessary to illustrate his thesis. One senses that their motives and reactions have been supplied by Bardem (who not only directs but writes and edits his pictures), to meet his own needs rather than theirs.

"Age of Infidelity" begins magnificently. A young married woman and her lover, speeding back to Madrid after a rendezvous, accidentally hit a bicyclist on a lonely road. The man's instinct is to help, but that might mean exposure, scandal, the loss of position for him, loss of a wealthy husband for her. They leave the cyclist on the road to die. But conscience gnaws at the man, while the woman falls into the clutches of a sadistic *roué*, an art critic who suspects at least part of her guilty secret. Her lover, a university professor who

has obtained his position through influence, is unable to concentrate on his work; he tries to make contact with the working-class family of the dead man. The woman is pursued through her round of parties, weddings and receptions by the critic, a bitter court jester in the homes of the wealthy.

In short, the death of the cyclist becomes a knife with which Bardem cuts across all strata of society. To accomplish his purpose, he employs an editing technique that switches abruptly from one locale to another, from one set of characters to another. The linkages, psychological rather than literal, have the effect of throwing the spectator momentarily off balance. One cannot help feeling, however, that this is precisely what Bardem intended, just as his huge close-ups, unconventional groupings and unexpected details—a priest wearing dark glasses at a funeral, for example—have obviously been chosen for their power to shock and disturb. "Age of Infidelity," while not an altogether successful film, is one of the most original, earnest and fascinating imports in a long time.

* * *

Earnestness alone, alas, does not make a fine picture, else "Wind Across the Everglades" (Warners) would be a masterpiece. Ten years in the making, this saga of the Audubon Society's efforts to preserve the bird life of Florida at the turn of the century is clearly a labor of love—carefully researched, authentically mounted, photographed in swamps and marshes under conditions that could only have been harrowing. It is difficult to see exactly what went wrong, but apparently just about everything did. The script, written by veteran Budd Schulberg, moves in fits and starts. Characters are introduced, then forgotten—or worse yet, do the inexplicable without a word of explanation from the author. Christopher Plummer, reliable actor that he is, strives manfully to make cohesive a character that is constantly flying apart at the seams, while Burl Ives, sporting a fiery-red beard, has a fine time blustering away like a Gilbert and Sullivan pirate until he too is floored by the script's inconsistencies. One can only be grateful for occasional stunning shots of birds, jungles and glowing sunsets. —ARTHUR KNIGHT.