

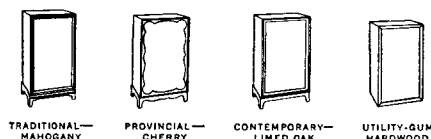
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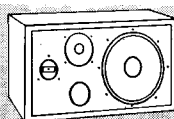
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Spoletto, 1960

By MARTIN BERNHEIMER

HANS WERNER HENZE's new opera, "The Prince of Hamburg," which was given its first performances outside Germany at this year's Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, is a difficult work. But Henze's stature as a composer is affirmed by the fact that the Spoleto performances were engrossing despite an uneven score, an imperfect production, and a cool public. In his third opera the composer flirts neither with conventionality nor with the easy dramatic effect, and for this reason he courts the musical intellectual rather than the masses. The Teatro Nuovo was half empty at the first repetition of "The Prince."

Henze's cause was not helped by his choice of libretto or by the physical production. The opera, based on Kleist's classic play of 1811, was perhaps doomed from the start by the non-operatic qualities of this Germanic, strictly philosophical drama. The plot deals with a prince, more dreamer than militarist, who eventually finds his salvation in recognition of the balance between law and freedom. The action is intentionally limited so that the listener may concentrate on the emotional conflicts within the hero. But the Hamburg Staatsoper's production (of the premiere in May) which was brought to Spoleto, leaves the Prince's plight an unconvincing one.

Alfred Siercke's sparse sets and costumes disclose many of the drawbacks of postwar German abstract décor, but few of the advantages. The scenery is visually ungainly, and the departure from realism only a compromise. The staging of film director Helmut Kaeutner is frequently awkward in its semi-stylization and is equally antidramatic. Only the battle scene, with scattered lightning flashes illuminating figures behind a cloudy screen, indicated unusual imagination.

The singers maintained adequacy where inspiration would have been in order. The leading roles call for artists capable of sustaining a frequently florid vocal line in a high tessitura. Vladimir Ruzdak's baritone was equal to the vocal requirements of the title role, but he lacked the necessary sensitivity of acting and inflection to make the Prince a sympathetic character. Liselotte Foelser was only slightly more effective in

the feminine lead, and Helmut Melchert as the Elector of Brandenburg produced more of the prescribed heldentenor sound than the appropriate noble bearing. With Henze himself as conductor the Trieste Philharmonic coped amazingly well with the unfamiliar work.

Upon first hearing, one is most impressed with the expansive lyricism of the love scene and the big ensembles. The complex formal designs, as in "Wozzeck," provide analytical interest but limited esthetic pleasure to one not intimately acquainted with the score. Harmonically there is much atonality and a little twelvetonality; but only seldom does one feel that the composer is following a system at the expense of expression.

Spoletto's other operatic offering was "La Bohème" as staged by the festival's director, Gian-Carlo Menotti. A beautifully prepared performance, conducted by Thomas Schippers, went far in bringing vitality to a work encumbered with sloppiness and convention. "La Bohème" makes sense in Menotti's version; Mimi is a really sick girl, not a coughing prima donna, and the four Bohemians are genuinely spirited and youthful. The period is set ahead to the time of Puccini's youth, and the atmosphere of the 1890s is appropriate to the music. The appearance of Spoleto natives as supers gives the crowd scenes a delightful touch of reality. There are still a few points that might be improved. Musetta, for instance, remains a stereotyped soubrette most of the time, and the onlookers at the Café Momus behave like almost any other operatic chorus. Outstanding in the generally competent cast was young Mietta Sighele as Mimi, a true lirico spinto. Lila de Nobili's spacious sets were traditional, and perhaps more successful than those for her overly elaborate production of "Carmen" in Paris.

The most surprising success of the Spoleto season has been a series of informal concerts presented daily at noon at the old Teatro Melisso. These events are supervised by pianist Charles Wadsworth, whose imaginative program one recent Sunday included Haydn played by the Kroll Quartet, a Respighi cantata, and a Mendelssohn trio with Schippers at the piano. It was a typically lively afternoon, appreciated by a large delegation of enthusiastic *Spoletini* as well as an unusually discerning tourist audience.

LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR

FOR A COMPLETE "D.G."

FOREVER INDEBTED for a complete "Nozze," this Mozartean makes a plea for truly complete versions of "Don Giovanni" and "Così" by the companies planning to release them in the near future. To ask the same for "Entführung," "Zauberflöte," and "Idomeneo" is, I assume, too much to hope for!

GEORGE F. SMOLINSKI.

Dayton, O.

EDITOR'S NOTE: RCA Victor has just such a "Don Giovanni" pending, with Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, Cesare Siepi, and Cesare Valletti.

MORE ON DUO-POULENC

REGARDING Robert A. Cullin's wish in the May 28 issue of SR for Poulenc's Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos, it is available in a superb recording on French Columbia FCX 677 played by Poulenc and Jacques Février with the Conservatoire Orchestra under Dervaux. It is coupled with the equally delightful "Concert Champêtre" for harpsichord and orchestra with Aimée van de Weile as soloist. So far as I know, the "Concert Champêtre" has been heard in America only in the 1947 performance by Landowska and the New York Philharmonic under Stokowski.

HARRY L. HORNBACK.

Paris, France

TEXTS, NOTES, LINERS, ETC.

MANY THANKS for your discussion "Notes, Texts, and Liners" [SR June 11]. You have expressed so much of my own disgruntlement on this point.

To me, the most exasperating sin of all is the failure of the manufacturers to include full texts and translations of all recorded vocal material. In the instance of operatic excerpts it is a bother to have to dig out the libretti, perhaps eight or ten of them, to listen intelligently to an LP of

arias. And so often one does not have the libretti of some of the uncommon material.

As for what might be lumped together as "art songs," do the record people suppose that every purchaser will have available the complete vocal output of Schubert, Brahms, Debussy, Fauré, Scarlatti, Sarti, Falla, and Obradors, not to mention Mousorgsky and Dargomyzhsky?

Angel has been consistently the best in this, but I recently acquired Fischer-Dieskau's Schubert Songs (35624), which was lined with the usual paraphrase but included no booklet of texts. With London, Victor, and Columbia, it appears to be a sometime thing.

Why doesn't Philip L. Miller, or somebody, edit a collection of texts for the frustrated record collector?

RICHARD SUTER.

Parkersburg, W. Va.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Good idea, if P. L. Miller is amenable.

NOTE ON GUILLEAUME

YOUR READER who asks about Margot Guillaume [SR, June 25] will be happy to know that, aside from some Buxtehude cantatas issued by Vox in 1952, Miss Guillaume has participated in several beautiful recordings in the German Archive series, among which my favorites are the German Arias of Handel, Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, and two pieces by the sixteenth-century Spaniard Diego Ortiz.

I know of no current singer who sings so appealingly as M.G., except, of course, Victoria de los Angeles.

RODERICK S. QUIROZ.

Arlington, Va.

MGM CUTOUTS

ROBERT BLAKE's letter in the June 25 issue of SR on "Cancelled Contemporaries" has cleared up an eight-month mystery. A local record store has been offering a large stock of MGM records at 98 cents and \$1.98 (depending on whether or not it's having a sale) and I could never find out from the clerks why they were selling such choice

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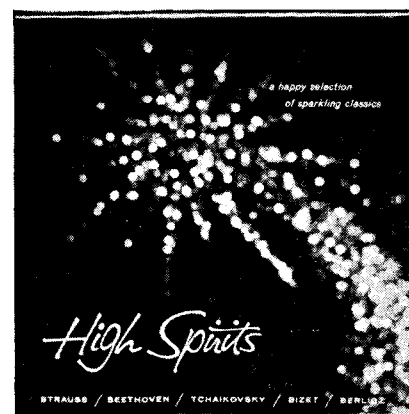
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