



Schippers at the Philharmonic—Alwin Nikolais

THOMAS SCHIPPERS's musicality and sense of the orchestrally appropriate were employed to the best results yet in the latest of his seasonal visits to the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. This one included something of an exercise in adaptability, for the apex of the evening was occupied by the spacious "Alexander Nevsky" of Serge Prokofiev. Thus a large part of the stage space was given over to the stands for the choristers, never a favorable prognosis for good orchestral sound in Carnegie Hall.

Moreover, the stands themselves were occupied by a sizable part of the chorus during the first half of the concert, devoted to works of Schubert and Debussy. They had, of course, no participation in the C minor Symphony (No. 4) of Schubert, except as spectators. Schippers chose to use all the Philharmonic strings for this essentially intimate work of Schubert, and their presence did become a factor—the rather massive sound somewhat muffled by the forty or so singers on the stand.

With or without respect to this, it was excellent Schubert that Schippers and the orchestra provided in this too-seldom-heard work, a tribute to his basic musicality and the sense of the orchestrally appropriate noted above. Melodic lines flowered naturally, the pulse of the music beat regularly, it all developed within a scheme of values essentially Schubertian. Whatever the colorations in the work which have caused it be called "Tragic" (and I, for one, scarcely see the tint at all), Schippers delivered the note content justly.

There was also a good deal of suitability in his projection of Prokofiev's "Alexander Nevsky" music, possibly the best film music ever written—or, to put it another way, the best music for a film (and this happened to be a very good one by Eisenstein) ever written. At a distance of some twenty years, it is clear that this was one of the generative works of Prokofiev's career, for which he found new symbols to express long-standing emotions, and was impelled, by the deeply national elements involved, to search within himself for new balances and combinations of musical ideas. Some of them also fueled the fire of the big symphonies (Nos. 5, 6, and 7) of the Forties and Fifties.

The power and directness of the musical imagery are much in accord with Schippers's own propulsive approach to music and the directness of his attack on a given problem. He had conspicuously suitable assistance from the Symphonic Choir of the Westminster Choir College, which took the Russian text (or the phonetic equivalent thereof) in its stride. Lili Chookasian, a mezzo well known in the Chicago area, did even better in her Philharmonic debut in the solo passages of "The Field of the Dead." Her dark, rich sound, well used, gave this section just what was wanted.

Between these extremes was the mid-terrain of Debussy's "Nocturnes," always a challenging task for a conductor, especially with the orchestra spread out laterally across the stage (cymbal at the extreme left, harps at the far right). Doubtless the work was chosen because the presence of the choristers enabled Schippers to add "Sirènes" to the more usual sequence of "Nuages" and "Fêtes." However, as Debussy asked no more than eight female voices for this section (and some conductors have had them sing off-stage), it was hardly necessary to accept the handicaps imposed by the forty that were used. The result could be likened to a rough drawing of Debussy's purpose with not all the detail worked out.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

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FOR the jaded dancegoer who has seen it all, known it all, and felt it all, a trip downtown to the Henry Street Playhouse will, I guarantee, restore his zest. Alwin Nikolais, the choreographer-costumer *musique concrète*-musician, has whipped his eleven young and talented dancers into a pinpoint-precise evening of abstraction. The program, which ran for three weekends in late January and early February (and will, I hope, be repeated), premieres two new works, "Stratus" and "Nimbus." But the names are the merest of pegs on which Nikolais hangs his fertile imagination. "Stratus," for those who want a guide, introduces "layers" of color blocks and strips of cloth stretched across the stage, while "Nimbus" provides an excuse for "circles" of movements, hoops and halos. For this exhilarating trip to the outer space of the dance mind,

the spectator needs to know nothing more.

To the accompaniment of jangling, pulsating, sometimes shrieking and often terrifying sounds, any number of things happen: giant snowmen eight feet tall turn out to be clusters of spiderlike nests; a Greek frieze of bodies emerges into dancers with eerie suction cups for hands; a girl playing with a hoop suddenly changes into a pair of butterfly wings; the entire troupe, moving like the figures of a pinball machine—the French *futbol*—finally reveals a huge disc attached to one foot like a shoe, and this augments the music with its clangings against the floor. Mr. Nikolais has devised a series of concepts and uses of the human body that are not only esthetic and a delight visually but also quite new.

Perhaps the virtuosity of the evening is most clearly and humorously shown in "Skirts," one of the three numbers from "Kaleidoscope," which concludes the evening. In it virtually everything that can be done with a skirt is done—it is worn on the knees to make the dancer look enormous, or wrapped around the ears to reduce her to midget-size, or thrown over the head or shoulders, or tossed on a foot. Although, as with most abstractions in any form, the program could be more pointed, less aimlessly exhibitionistic, somehow I nevertheless think that in Mr. Nikolais there is definitely a genius at work—and at play.

—FAUBION BOWERS.

Three Moments of Truth

By Reeve Spencer Kelley

IT WAS up in the stacks,
In the racks of books,
That I saw the lovers pair,
Euclid a shape
On the accurate floor,
High in that rhythmic air;
The evening, the campus,
The distant town,
Burning with leaves
In the smoldering brown.

Syllogistic the hour:
Oh, Logic, thou flower,
Thou sun in the falling sky;
Two students I knew
Who, at last, had learned
A little of do-or-die.
The hour of love,
And what could I say;
"Desire is truth,"
I had taught them, "obey."

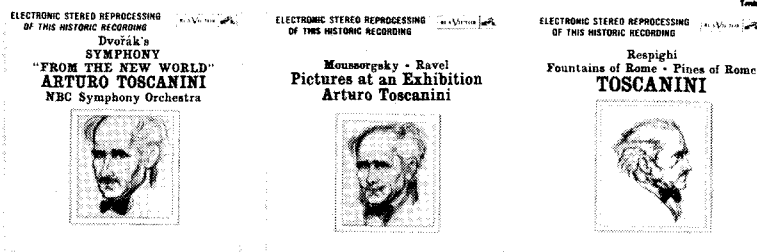
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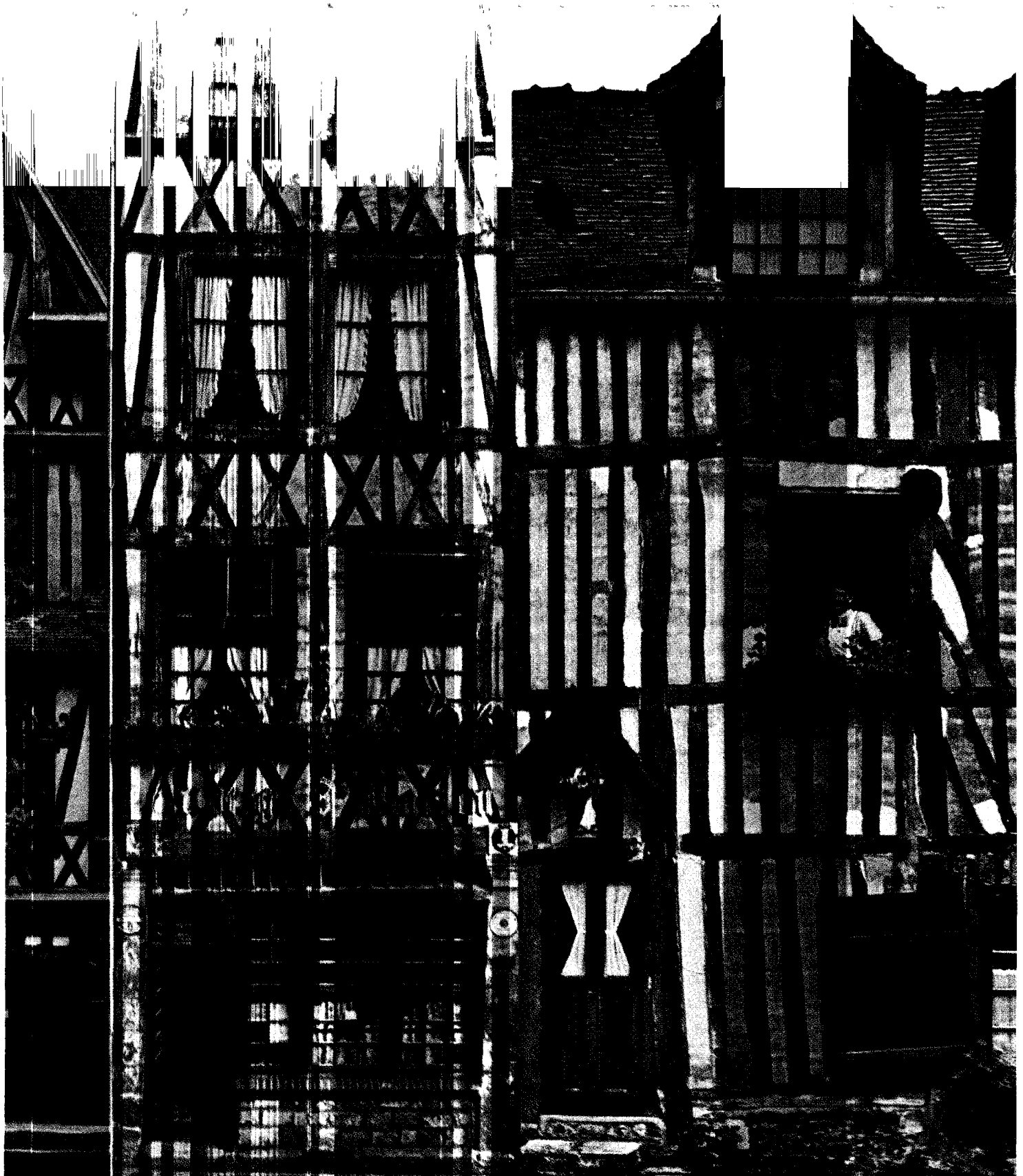




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The oldest inn in France, this is a beautiful example of 14th Century architecture. Its walls are crisscrossed with smoky timber. Its windows open to Joan of Arc's tragic square. And its kitchen is superb. There are no rooms at the inn but you can spend a memorable evening over the delicate Pâté de Caneton de Rouen, the local fillet of Saint Pierre smothered in Norman Hollandaise, followed by the Coquellet from the friendly fireplace and finally, a great cheese. Price: just \$2, price-fixed.



Yet the most expensive charges only \$8.50 a day, complete!

Auberge Saint-Jouan. Deep in the artists' quarter of Rouen, down an old brick street, you'll find this auberge. Tiny, simple, inexpensive, it's one of the finds in France. The first floor is terraced in ancient red tile. Old stone walls, primitive antiques, apple green goblets and a riot of flowered Norman pottery will put you in the mood for the good, rich, cream-and-butter cooking. You can have a delicious dinner here for \$1.50, price-fixed. And a simple but immaculate room with modern conveniences for \$2.25.

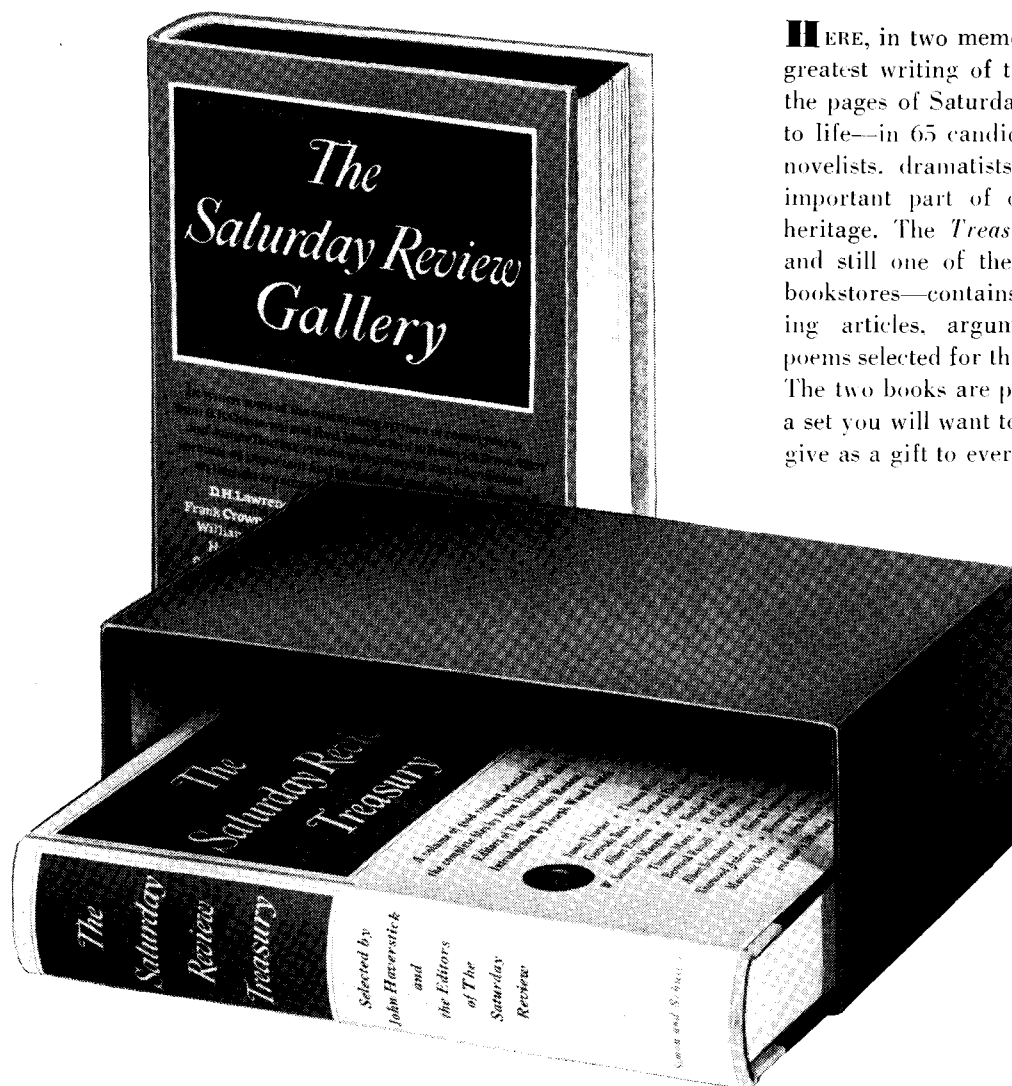
is in Pont-Audemer. If you're mad for French Provincial collector's items, Heaven waits in Pont-Audemer. This auberge was converted from a tannery into an inn decades ago. It has all its original charm and one of France's most colorful antique collections. Exciting as the menu is, it's hard to keep your eyes off the pewter and brass. But you'll enjoy great Norman cooking here for \$3.50 à la carte, and a fine room with a shower for a mere \$4.

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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Tallulah's Merry Chase

IF DIRECTORS, actors, and designers frequently turn a good play into an inadequate evening of theatre, it stands to reason that they should also be able to do the reverse on occasion.

Director Burgess Meredith, actress Tallulah Bankhead, and designer Ben Edwards have been lavish with their talents in attempting the latter in "Midgie Purvis." Unfortunately, Marv Chase's new comedy defies their heroic efforts because it is a bad play that also lacks the virtue of being consistently bad. In it Miss Bankhead portrays a slightly younger version of the "grandma" we met a couple of weeks ago in Edward Albee's "The American Dream." Somewhat more facetiously and bromidically than in that play, our society is criticized for making its own life joyless, and for inflicting that same joylessness on its children.

The result is a strange mixture of effective moments, almost-grasped notions, and tedium. Particularly hilarious is Miss Bankhead's reaction to the news that they are awaiting "the Plunketts." "The what?" says Miss Bankhead, dropping her voice two octaves in the manner made famous by Dusty Fletcher. And two or three times during the evening she allows her special and overwhelming ability for expressing a reluctant wisdom to grip both her and us. The imaginative Mr. Meredith's skill as a director is most neatly demonstrated in a scene between Clinton Sundberg as an amorous psychiatrist and Kim McArdle as his pretty but evasive quarry, whom he pursues within a framework of doctor-patient clichés. And Ben Edwards has constructed and painted settings that often make a nicer humorous comment than do the lines.

But in the end these high spots become insignificant islands in a chaotic sea. We go home remembering them, and remembering that Miss Chase seemed to have said some amusing and recognizably true things. We also remember that these were inundated by random and routine foolishness.

By modern standards, Dion Boucicault's nineteenth-century melodrama, "The Octoroon," is a consistently bad play. And by any standards at all, the recent dreary productions of dramatic masterpieces by the Phoenix Theatre Company have rivalled Mr. Boucicault both in unsatisfactoriness and in consistency. But to everyone's surprise the Phoenix has performed "The Octoroon"

with the utmost care and fidelity, and the new presentation continually emerges as fascinating and hilarious, despite the pricks of social conscience we may feel when we find ourselves laughing at victims of racial injustice.

The play spins an old-fashioned tale about the sale of a Southern plantation and the plight of the slaves who are forced to leave their home and kindly owner for harder bondage. But it is not so much the story that now seems absurd. Indeed, all the events of "The Octoroon" could have happened. Rather, it is such devices as stopping in the middle of a crisis to spout passages of noble rhetoric, the aside to the audience by the villain admitting his own nefarious nature and his inability to be anything else, the inhumanly spotless heroine who is beloved by everyone only to be betrayed by fate and her own goodness, and the unabashed way in which the playwright pulls out all the stops to wring our hearts.

The cast is excellent throughout. Juliet Randall, as Zoe the pretty octoroon, P. Jay Sidney as an elderly slave, Robert Blackburn as the handsome young scion with progressive leanings, Gerry Jedd as the vapid but wealthy girl who loves him unrequitedly, John Heffernan as the unmitigated scoundrel who almost has his way with Zoe, and Franklin Cover as the indecently decent overseer, all stand out. But for the third time this season it is Ray Reinhardt who emerges as the real tower of strength in this company. His all-out performance in the role of the noble savage who kills and scalps the villain is perfect.

It might be amusing to say that what director Stuart Vaughan has needed all along was a bad play, but this is not quite true. It would probably be more accurate to believe that Mr. Vaughan's skills as a director are most valuable in the production of plays where a series of well-executed theatrical highlights constitute the drama.

TWO other Off-Broadway attractions can be highly recommended to readers of this department. One is "Call Me by My Rightful Name," which in Michael Shurtleff introduces the most interesting new playwright of the season. The other is an extremely good revival of Denis Johnston's Irish play, "The Moon in the Yellow River." Unfortunately space restrictions force postponement of any discussion of these until another week.

—HENRY HEWES.

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