



## Rubinstein, Konya—Case of the Misguided Critic

**H**AVING run out of other competition for the title of greatest living pianist, Artur Rubinstein has now taken up the challenge of the only remaining claimant for such honor—himself. The musical decathlon in which he is engaged in Carnegie Hall between Halloween and Thanksgiving has only one precedent in recent years—the pentathlon in which he played seventeen concerti in 1957. Some might cite the seven-concert sequence of Sviatoslav Richter, but it was narrower in range of repertory, and had some repetitions, which Rubinstein disdains.

Some might also cite Richter as a man, presently, of greater pianistic capacity. This would hardly be remarkable, as he is twenty-five (or more) years younger. But the accolade of performer par excellence was Rubinstein's even before the first program was completed. Listeners to the right of him, listeners to the left of him volleyed and thundered their applause, but Rubinstein rode right on, into the valley of death (to many pianists) represented by the finale of Beethoven's "Appassionata." Having launched the movement at a rashly chosen tempo, he retrieved it in the only way possible: with an even faster one for the coda. Despite a threat of disorder, the large line emerged intact, for what the pianist found impossible, the performer made palatable.

In a ten-event equivalent of an Olympic test in which Rubinstein is engaged, there will be the pianistic parallel of dashes and distance races, flats and hurdles, jumps and weight-lifting. I would not, however, expect to hear the vaulting lightness and airborne grace of his D flat Nocturne of Chopin surpassed. Here, in the midst of tumult and excitement, was a long-sustained sigh of completely controlled perfection.

"Lohengrin" was more nearly itself at its first performance of the Metropolitan season than it has been for some time past. A new "hand" of performers undoubtedly played its part, but the real results related to the informed, poised, and still individual way in which the cards were shuffled by Joseph Rosenstock. His was the kind of Wagner conducting that carried the singers on a texture of sound which aided rather than impeded them in doing the best of which they were capable.

In some instances this was very good indeed, beginning with the Lohengrin of Sandor Konya, in his Metropolitan

debut. An excellent musician, a capable actor, he also is that real Wagnerian rarity—a tenor with a voice of quality as well as volume. Such fresh, freely produced sound is a pleasure in any circumstances, but especially in these, for he blends full command of the German text with a timbre more customary in Puccini or Verdi. Now and then he indulged his Italianate inclinations with an emotional sob, but he could, perhaps, be persuaded to reserve it in future for such roles as Johnson in "Fanciulla" which he also sings. The Metropolitan should insure him against damage, theft, or marine disaster.

**A**S Elsa, Ingrid Bjöner earned marks for distinction, although she did not perform with as much assurance in her debut. Possibly because of the unfamiliar surroundings, her tones were a little unsteady in Act I. She improved measurably thereafter, and though her sound tends to be strong rather than sweet and not too rich in overtones, it is accurate and generally true to the pitch, a malleable complement to her good appearance. Irene Dalis sang a practiced Ortrud in her first attempt with the part here, conveying dramatic venom without vocal vinegar. In the lower range, the ensemble had a secure Telramund in Walter Cassel and a broadly sonorous King Henry from the ever more artistic Jerome Hines. Norman Mittlemann marked himself for future attention by making the debut role of the Herald a showpiece for his vibrant, well-shaded baritone. In all, including the thoughtful stage direction of Ralph Herbert, this "Lohengrin" promised good things ahead for the Metropolitan's lyric Wagner.

The new, more highly refined Herbert von Karajan made conducting look easy and the art of drawing finely molded sound from such an orchestra as the Berlin Philharmonic a mere matter of mesmerism in their two appearances together in Carnegie Hall. Whether the subject in hand was the B minor Suite of Bach, Beethoven's "Eroica," or the Seventh Symphony of Bruckner, Karajan demonstrated a working arrangement that was less a matter of men and master than of instigator and instigated.

A man of keen musical intelligence as well as artistic insight, Karajan has divined that most orchestras, especially such fine ones as the Berlin Philharmonic, are usually overconducted. His

method tends to the rudder rather than the whip, reserving time-beating and cues to the moments when they are meaningful—at tempo changes or when a tricky upbeat entrance impends. All is clarity and consideration, based on thoroughgoing preparation.

That the outcome nevertheless has more to do with mechanics than with expression is no indictment of the method. It is, simply, that Karajan has more interest in design than in content, in the glossy surface rather than the throbbing musical purpose that lies beneath it. A deviation intruded during the second concert, in which Leontyne Price participated as solo soprano for "V'adamo, pupille" from Handel's "Giulio Cesare" and Leonore's great scene from "Fidelio." This determined singer distinguished well the vocal needs of the two opposed styles, giving line its due and meaning its function (with no suggestion of the vocal distress that forced her to give up "Fanciulla del West" at the end of the second act two nights later). Karajan's adroit management of the orchestra added measurably to the effect of each, though his horns had several passages of unsteadiness in "Abscheulicher."

Which provides a da capo to a subject under recent discussion here. To the concluding sentence of "The Case of the Reluctant Horn Player" (SR, Oct. 28) should be appended an additional brief: "The Case of the Misguided Critic." At the time of the "Fidelio" broadcast from the Metropolitan in which the ragged playing of the horn passages in "Abscheulicher" added another patchy chapter to the sequence of mishaps afflicting the horn section in that season (1959-60), the information I received—upon inquiry of responsibility—pointed to one particular player. I did not then know his name, nor associate any individual with that episode, until the whole subject was exposed for public discussion many months later (last summer).

Since attributing this shortcoming to Lester Salomon, I have replayed the recording and reached the following conclusion: Inaccuracies in the second horn part were present but not major; the particular ones to which I referred were in the playing of the third horn. What happened on this occasion should not be charged to Salomon, but to a section mate (since his name has not been part of any public discussion, it need not be mentioned here).

No one else has heard the record and it will not be a factor in the decision still pending, as I have informed the Secretary of Labor's office of my misfeasance. I apologize to Salomon and strike this recollection from any opinion I may have acquired of him as a horn player.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



### Progress Reports

SINCE the scheme of partially subsidized permanent resident companies performing on fluid stages has come to be accepted as the best answer to the American theatre's present difficulties, it is heartening to report two new developments that constitute real progress toward that end.

First is the news that the Lincoln Center Repertory Company will inaugurate its first thirty-three-week season of four or five plays in October, 1963. Two of these plays will be directed by Elia Kazan, who along with Robert Whitehead will guide the destinies of the new company of thirty-five performers. This company will be made up of the best actors available, people equipped to play a wide variety of classic and modern roles, and sufficiently dedicated to the repertory way of work to sign a two-season contract at much less than they would be paid on Broadway or in Hollywood.

The building in which they will perform will contain an 1,100-seat theatre whose stage can be altered within two hours from a proscenium arch type to an open stage like the one at Stratford, Ontario. Because the proscenium arch will be adjustable and because the balcony only hangs over the last three rows of the orchestra, the theatre will have adequate sight lines from all seats, and because no seat will be more than sixty-five feet from the stage, intimacy will be preserved. Unlike other auditoriums in Lincoln Center, it has not been planned with the restrictive condition that it must suit the traditional conventions of production. And even more unusual is the fact that the building was designed by a theatre person (scene designer Jo Mielziner) in equal collaboration with an architect (the late Eero Saarinen).

There will also be a rehearsal studio, to be called the Forum, which will have 299 seats and which will not only give the actors a feeling of theatre during their rehearsals, but which also can be used to test new plays of special appeal that do not require literal settings. When the Forum is not being used by the company it will be made available to avante-garde theatre groups and to some of the nation's drama schools that may wish to demonstrate their work in New York.

For those who cannot wait until 1963, I recommend a trip to Washington, D.C., where Arena Stage has just opened the world's first theatre-in-the-

round to be unequivocally designed and built from the ground up. Designed by architect Harry Weese to specifications presented him by Zelda Fichandler and based upon her experience in operating Arena Stage's two previous makeshift theatres-in-the-round, it features a rectangular 30-by-36-foot playing area surrounded on its four sides by 752 seats in steeply banked blocks. There is an admirable lack of decoration inside the theatre, which along with its judiciously planned lighting installations places the emphasis where it belongs: on the stage. Indeed, the only slight distraction now present is the white concrete walls of the four tunnels through which actors and wagons carrying skeletal houses, etc., enter and exit. And this can easily be corrected with a couple of coats of flat black paint.

The inaugural production is Bertolt Brecht's "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" in a new English version by John Holmstrom. In general the production and the adaptation emphasize the lyricism and the humor of this narrative morality tale about the abandoned Governor's child who after being rescued by a peasant girl must be awarded to its rightful parent. The costumes and masks are colorful. The new melodies Teiji Ito has composed are sweeter than was Paul Dessau's original strident music. And Alan Schneider has directed the play with an eye to its universal qualities.

The Arena Stage Acting Company is led by two of Broadway's strongest performers: David Hurst, who casts a spell with his narration and who makes a vigorously funny if somewhat unsubtle judge, and Ray Reinhardt as a soldier who loves the peasant girl, Grusche. But the delightful surprise of this production is Melinda Dillon's performance as Grusche. Miss Dillon, who was discovered by Mr. Schneider in Chicago, where she played at the Goodman Theatre and with the "From the Second City" company, has an adorable forthright beauty that doesn't have anything to do with makeup, coiffure, or pretty features, plus a lovely singing voice. Her Grusche is practical rather than sentimental, and would, I think, have delighted Brecht. It certainly delighted the opening night audience, which went away feeling that the birth of a new theatre had been heralded with the first glow of a bright new star.

Meanwhile, Broadway had a typical week. In the new musical, "Kwamina," Robert Alan Arthur nominally poses a few of the questions facing a newly independent African nation and attempts to link them with a tame misogynistic love story about a London-educated African physician and a pretty lady doctor whose father was a missionary. One of Richard Adler's songs, called "Ordinary People," is catchy but seems wrong for this genre. And despite the efforts of Agnes De Mille, who has seen to it that the show's talented dancers exert 101 per cent, and of Sally Ann Howes, the prettiest musical comedy star in the business and a girl who sings like two larks, the carefully abridged love scenes don't please either the anti-misogynists or the promisogynists. Indeed, literal misogyny works infinitely better than this new marriage between the accidental boy-girl romance and the inexorable tribe-democracy epic drama.

Hugh Wheeler's "Look We've Come Through" tackles head-on an even more difficult subject. It is a love affair between a passive young man who has been permitting a homosexual relationship with a kindly older man, and a plain and gauche young girl who has deliberately encouraged a handsome but stupid television actor to deflower her. The play is painfully accurate, and under Jose Quintero's direction Collin Wilcox and Ralph Williams give remarkably honest and fervent performances. But, as the show's quick closing may suggest, accuracy and poignant moments require a shape in the author's mind even if the characters are themselves unaware of it. Mr. Wheeler is extraordinary in his ability to depict New York's rat-race society, but he still focuses more like a novelist than like a dramatist.

FINALLY there is Frederick Knott's "Write Me a Murder," which takes us in on the planning of a clever murder and holds us in suspense while we wonder whether it will be committed as planned, and then wonder how the perfect crime is discovered. To make all this spread over an entire evening, Mr. Knott simply stutters. By a *mors ex machina* the original plan is at the last moment made unnecessary. This gives the author a middle act in which he can create a new target for an old weapon. The detective story aficionado may guess the outcome a bit too easily. Nevertheless, under George Schaefer's direction a cast headed by James Donald and Kim Hunter keep us reasonably absorbed in the dusty goings-on in an English manor house, and this trivial entertainment may well outrun any of the season's more significant efforts.

—HENRY HEWES.