



BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Forward Without Anger

LONDON.

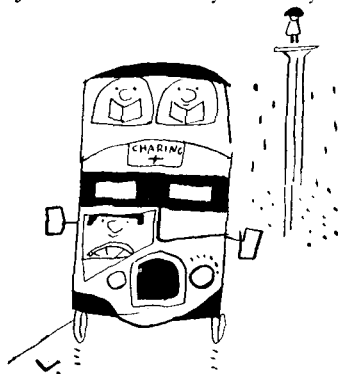
A MAJOR part of the excitement in this year's British theatre season seems to be coming from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company's London branch. Under the directorship of Peter Hall this group has cornered the actor market because it can offer performers annual employment in a repertory of classic and modern plays. And the attraction of good actors and West End attention has appealed both to directors and to the new wave of playwrights, many of whom have promised the company their next work. For the unknown playwright, the company has taken over the Arts Theatre and set up an experimental program which has just scored a success with its first offering, "Everything in the Garden." The play, which neatly describes the self-imposed corruption of some status-seeking suburbanites, was written by a forty-three-year-old Anglo-Irish TV writer, Giles Cooper.

Meanwhile, the company's other branches are flourishing, too. Its production of Jean Anouilh's "Becket" drew the prize both for the best production of the season and for the best performance, which went to Christopher Plummer for his portrayal of King Henry II. Its enthusiastic reception necessitated its being moved out of repertory into a regular theatre. Only the fact that Mr. Plummer was previously committed to playing "Macbeth" and "Cyrano de Bergerac" at the Canadian Shakespeare Festival in Stratford will keep it from continuing beyond May 5.

Mr. Plummer's performance is indeed remarkable as he boldly fluctuates between outrageous low comedy and eloquent high despair. In the early scenes he plays the King as a loutish, good-hearted vulgarian. He and Becket, played in the cockeyed style of Alec Guinness by Eric Porter, romp about sharing private jokes and insulting the clergy. When Mr. Plummer looks at a pretty young Saxon girl and says, "Shall we wrap her up to take with us or have her sent?" it is out-and-out music-hall buffoonery, but this sort of behavior is a symptom of the King's compulsion to tolerate life by joking it away. Behind it, however, there is always the wretchedness that is later to erupt in ordering Becket's assassination and the agonized fit of a man now completely alone in a world where he loves no one. Mr. Plummer plays the scene magnificently, and

the moment when he collapses in a spectacular fall over a table is as moving as it is breathtaking.

At its own theatre, the Aldwych, the company is continuing its repertory program, which at the moment includes last summer's "As You Like It," from Stratford, and Brecht's "The Caucasian Circle of Chalk." Just finishing is Michel St. Denis's production of "The Cherry Orchard," starring Dame Peggy Ashcroft and Sir John Gielgud. Because the production rehearsed eight weeks, it was able to achieve a high level of perfection and a number of marvelous moments. These include one scene in which the squeak of a man's new boots is used with precise timing to fill a silence; Dorothy Tutin as Varya summing up the joy she has missed in her life as "just a dream"; Peggy Ashcroft's hysterical laughter at herself as she embraces the furniture; John Gielgud's amusing apologies for talking too much and in the next breath talking some more; and a truly funny priggish love scene between Ian Holm as Trofimov and Judi Dench as Anya. And yet this



fine gallery of nostalgic portraits, plus a few by less talented members of the company which are not so fine, seem too calculated, too reflective to move us. All the same, we admire and are richly entertained by a great deal of the performance.

There are some in London who feel that the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company is a middle-of-the-road solution to the problems of the English theatre, friendly to both the staid and the new but lacking the force it might have if it asserted the future against the past. And while there is probably some truth in this, the fact remains that this is the problem everywhere. The most hopeful thing about Mr. Hall's organization is that his company is facing the problem practically and without self-delusion. —HENRY HEWES.

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Four Out Of Five Americans Support The United Nations



Where do the American people really stand on the United Nations? The figures speak for themselves. Three separate polls come up with almost identical answers. At least four out of five Americans believe the United States must support and strengthen the United Nations. They don't want to bypass it, downgrade it, replace it, or berate it.

At a time when questions are being raised about the United Nations, it is important to register the fact that the American people have not lost faith in it, and still see it as the world's best hope for peace.

FIRST, Congressman William B. Widnall (Republican) of New Jersey, took a poll of the people in his District.

One of his questions:

Do you regard the United Nations as the best hope for maintaining world peace?

This was the result:

YES 83.95% NO 13.55% NO OPINION 2.50%

Another:

Do you believe that the United Nations has been effective in maintaining a better understanding between nations in the past?

This was the result:

YES 79.01% NO 16.05% NO OPINION 4.94%

Another:

Do you believe that the purpose of world peace could be achieved through strengthening the U.N.?

This was the result:

YES 81.84% NO 12.50% NO OPINION 6.02%

NEXT, Congressman James Roosevelt (Democrat) of California, sent a similar poll to the voters in his District.

One of the questions:

Do you think that the United Nations offers the best hope of keeping peace in the world?

This was the result:

YES 84.8% NO 15.2%

Another:

Do you think that further strengthening of the U.N. would be apt to advance the cause of world peace?

This was the result:

YES 87.6% NO 15.2%

★ ★ ★

OBVIOUSLY, two Congressional districts from the entire country are not enough of a sampling to warrant sweeping conclusions. But now consider the latest nationwide Gallup survey:

First question:

Do you think the United States should give up its membership in the United Nations or not?

The answer:

SHOULD NOT 90% SHOULD 5%
NO OPINION 5%

Second question:

How important do you think it is that we try to make the United Nations a success—very important, fairly important, or not so important?

The answer:

VERY IMPORTANT 83% FAIRLY IMPORTANT 9%
NOT SO IMPORTANT 4% NO OPINION 4%

Third question:

In general, do you think the United Nations is doing a good job or a poor job in trying to solve the problems it has had to face?

The answer:

GOOD OR FAIR JOB 78% POOR JOB 12%
NO OPINION 10%

American Association For The United Nations

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Ellstein's "Golem"—Met Auditions—Recitals

THE magnitude of the problem posed by the legendary tale of "The Golem" makes it almost mandatory that a new operatic version be the product either of a very experienced or a relatively inexperienced composer. Unlike Eugène d'Albert, whose version of the Twenties was his eighteenth work for the serious stage, Abraham Ellstein had written only operettas prior to receiving a Ford Foundation grant for the score which opened the spring season of City Center opera.

The adaptation by Joseph Buloff of the famous tale by H. Leivick about the sixteenth-century rabbi in Prague who passed the miracle of breathing life into a clay figure of his own creation is reasonably succinct. But as expanded into a libretto by the composer and his wife Sylvia Regan it becomes a creature almost as much beyond control as the monster who left no option to the rabbi but to destroy it before it destroyed him.

Great earnestness and some melodic impulse are the basic materials of Ellstein's effort, but he lacks the specialized skills to build, theatrically, with them. Sections follow upon each other without much in the way of coherent development. For the most part, the voices pursue a line of quasi-melodic recitative (spelled now and then by an aria or arietta) above an orchestral scoring which is more undertone than commentary.

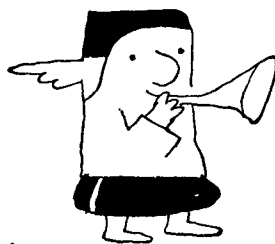
Much the best writing is that for the Maharal, Rabbi Levi Bar Bezallel, a part impressively created by Jon Crain, whose aptitudes included excellent enunciation of the English text. Ellstein was not so fortunate in finding an expressive speech for the Golem itself, though Chester Ludgin's physique and the artfully constructed costume dominated the stage. His music had neither the impact to make it terrifying nor the accent to make it pitiful (which, finally, the Golem comes to be anyhow).

The complications of the crowd scenes with many beggars, and the danced sequence (staged by Sophie Maslow) in which the rabbi has a vision of himself bringing the dead to life, put a severe strain on the company's staging resources. That there was, finally, order rather than chaos may be attributed in large measure to the relentless effort of conductor Julius Rudel in collaboration with director Allen Fletcher. Lester Polakev's scenery is decidedly drab—but what else

could a ghetto in sixteenth-century Prague be? Lee Venora gave a glint of light to the dark proceedings with her charming performance as the rabbi's granddaughter Deborah.

Rudel had more rewarding material to work with later in the same week when Benjamin Britten's "The Turn of the Screw" was added to the company's repertory. Fortunately, this was not wholly a new enterprise, but one which he had rehearsed in Boston last summer. It presented an opportunity for Patricia Neway to add another to her gallery of operatic characterization, this time the Governess whose "hallucinations" animate the Jamesian plot. With such other resourceful and well-selected performers as Richard Cassilly (Quint), Janice Martin (Mrs. Grose), and Jean Kraft (Miss Jessel) at his disposal, Fletcher evolved a solution of the scenic problem both economical and effective. The credits could, with justice, also be extended to Michele Farr (Flora) and Bruce Zahariades (Miles), whose actions suited to the life the behavior of the beautiful, clever, devious, devil-ridden children of the novel.

As was noted here when the work had its North American premiere under the composer's direction at the Stratford Festival in 1957, Britten has been brilliantly successful in evoking the atmosphere of the old house in which the "Screw" plays, through the use of a chamber orchestra and minimal stage personnel. We are in the spell of Myfanwy Piper's text more as a sung play than a libretto struggling to be heard, which is all to the dramatic good. However, Britten's compositional impulse produces a first-act finale in which the "mute" apparitions become as vocal as any of the others, at a definite disadvantage to mood. And, as in the instance of such other major Britten works as "Peter Grimes" and "The Rape of Lucretia," the interest aroused at a first hearing tends to dissipate with repetition.



Almost as often as there is a Metropolitan Opera National Council Award (which is to say, annually), there is at least one talent whose lack of recognition puzzles as much as the preference extended to others. This year it belonged to Grace de la Cruz, of Los Angeles, California, who sang her "Ritorna vincitor" from "Aida" with admirable control of a particularly vibrant, pliable sound. Miss de la Cruz, who is twenty-five, bulky rather than sylphlike, and a Negress, should reckon with at least two facts: Sopranos of the category to which she aspires mature later than others; the Metropolitan has sometimes misjudged the capabilities of persons on its roster as well as those with an aspiration to it.

It would not be surprising to find Janice Martin, the Mrs. Grose of the "Turn of the Screw" noted above, a singer of utility to the Metropolitan, but the arrival at that decision through the Auditions' procedure is. She has appeared with the San Francisco Opera in two recent seasons, and is obviously in a totally different career category than Joanna Simon, who was among the thirteen finalists competing on, presumably, even terms. There were occasional allusions to the intents and objectives of these Regional Auditions in remarks by chairman Howard A. Hook, Jr., and Rudolf Bing, who made the award to Miss Martin, but not enough to clarify this issue.

Birgit Nilsson's first Carnegie Hall program, which began with Gluck ("Divinités du Styx") and ended with Verdi ("Pace, pace"), was otherwise non-operatic. In between, Miss Nilsson provided her audience with much pleasure, whether singing Schubert and Strauss sympathetically, if not with much profundity, donning a second gown for the post-intermission portion of the program, conversing in English, etc. Her Sibelius and Grieg were outstanding.

EARLIER on the same Sunday, William Olvis, a youthful tenor at the Metropolitan, shared a program in the Carnegie Hall Recital Hall with pianist Edward Schick. They collaborated well in Schumann's "Dichterliebe," which bore out the presumption that Olvis's flexible, well-placed voice should make him a highly listenable lieder singer. This performance was more for the voice than hall, which is to say that some parts of "Ich grolle nicht" (especially the climaxing A) were overproduced for the intimate surroundings. With suitable experience, Olvis's feeling for the idiom and, above all, his musicianship, could make him a concert artist of quality.

—IRVING KOLODIN.