



## Rhodes's Salome, Nilsson's Tosca—Igor Oistrakh

WITH most performers of Salome, career expectations relate to vocal condition—how long they can continue to sing Strauss's difficult score. With Jane Rhodes, the Frenchwoman who lately added her name to the Metropolitan's performers of the part, job security has more to do with inches and pounds, for it is the presently interesting relation of them that does most to make her an eye-filling if ear-trying embodiment of history's most loathsome egocentric.

In her youthful bearing, bright red wig, and peremptory pout, Miss Rhodes conveys valid suggestions of a teenager, if Parisian cinematic rather than Judean historic. She sustains this characterization well in the first half of the performance, which is reasonably restrained, becoming more calculating and mentally purposeful as the prophet's rebuke stings deeper. She makes clear that Salome has an evil design on Jochanaan well before Herod asks her to dance (she anticipates the script by wearing the veils under her wrap from the start), choosing the moment when he has offered her an unconditional reward to agree. And the dance itself was more graceful, at the start, than the average; but Miss Rhodes moves best when she moves least, and grace departed as she took one whirling step and then another.

If she was vocally unimpressive before the dance, Miss Rhodes was totally inadequate for a theatre of the Metropolitan's size after it. Her debate with Herod about the oath he had sworn (in her mangled German "eid" had more the sound of "aid") was petulant, not menacing, his capitulation hardly inevitable. As well as being small in size, her voice is limited in color: when she finally curled up with the head cradled in her arms, the voluptuous curve of Strauss's vocal line was thin and pinched, the compulsion of the scene not expressed by any new revelation of ardor, but by more of the old revelations of pseudo-nudity which most Salomes reserve for Herod. Miss Rhodes offered it, as an encore, in the blatant illumination of a spotlight.

Here, finally, at "Ich habe deinen Mund geküsst, Jochanaan," conductor Joseph Rosenstock gave Strauss his due and Miss Rhodes could not be heard at all (were he accused of drowning her out, he might have replied as Beecham once did on a similar occasion: "I did so in the public interest"). Previously

he had shown her more than merited consideration, for one with his thorough knowledge of the score could have conveyed more of its fury and heat were he not, clearly, holding back. It was, otherwise, a familiar kind of Metropolitan "Salome" in the remnants of Donald Oenslager's quarter-century-old scenery, and with wear also evident in the voices which Ramon Vinay had to offer as Herod and Blanche Thebom as Herodias. Walter Cassel's range is short for the rolling richness required for the incistered prophet which left William Olvis, as Narraboth, doing the best singing. Ralph Herbert's staging was well devised. As a full evening's entertainment, however, this "Salome" is shabby value at Metropolitan prices.

The values of the Rhodes Salome were reversed in Birgit Nilsson's first Tosca, which had abundant vocal power but little dramatic illusion. As a variant from her last "Götterdämmerung" Brünnhilde of but a few days before, Miss Nilsson's Tosca earns accolades for vocal versatility, but it was hardly Puccini's Tosca at all—vocally awkward, thick and oversized in sonority, without the nuance or flexibility to make the conversational line of the first act meaningful. Her power counted for more in the second act, but for such music Miss Nilsson's sound is overpowering and undermodulated. Franco Corelli's Cavaradossi and Anselmo Colzani's Scarpia were much as before, only louder—a condition which "conductor" Kurt Adler was powerless to influence, let alone control.

FOR this season's Rossini, the opera enthusiast had to seek out the Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall, where Thomas Schippers devoted half a program to the first act of "Le Comte Ory." Rossini wrote no comic operas after this one, though he had forty years of life in which to do what he wished. Apparently what he wished most was not to deal further with plots about a count disguised as a hermit who seeks the hospitality of a countess whose husband is off to the Crusades, but he made his valedictory a triumph of ingenuity as well as high spirits. This first act contains any number of artful new turns for patter phrases, extensions of melodic formulae into new equations of meaning, and everything else that adds to musical pleasure if moral turpitude.

The pleasures were marshaled purposefully by Schippers's baton, the style

being one for which his aptitude was evident in his Metropolitan "Don Pasquale" of half a dozen seasons back. Among a young, mostly American group of singers, the pliant bass of Norman Treigle made the best effect in the unscholarly music of the count's tutor. Each of the others—Judith Raskin as the light-voiced countess (cousin of Rosina), Shirley Verrett-Carter as the amorous page, and Frank Porretta as his/her adventuring employer—performed well when not being required to pierce the vocal stratosphere which was a natural habitat for the exceptional singers of Rossini's time.

The indications from David Diamond's Seventh Symphony as heard in its introductory performance here by the Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Eugene Ormandy are that this composer's craftsmanship continues to accumulate as his discrimination sharpens. The bonding together of sonorous layers which make up the tough texture of his first movement is accomplished with the certainty of a master painter laying a texture on canvas, the achievement of a climax no less persuasive for being a dying fall rather than a rising shout. The slow movement is equally single-minded in its atmospheric intent, the ostinato finale suitably summarizing. It is, in short, what "a symphony" suggests—a musical discourse of a length to suit its materials.

The evening also returned Rudolf Serkin to the local concert scene after his season-long sabbatical in great, perhaps too great, spirit for the Beethoven No. 4 following a warmly phrased, beautifully integrated B flat Mozart (K. 595) Concerto. Clearly Serkin saw these works as complementary to each other (the last of the Mozart concertos, and the last of the Mozartian concertos) but he was a shade strenuous in some of the quieter moments of Beethoven. Bartók's "Portraits," with the solo violin well performed by Anshel Brusilow, completed an absorbing evening of music.

Also absorbing was Igor Oistrakh's introduction as soloist in the Beethoven violin concerto with the Symphony of the Air knowingly directed by Alfred Wallenstein. He is, altogether, his own man as a violinist, however much he may be his father's son as a musician. Suavity, sonority, a lustrous command of color and nuance are the outward marks of a violinistic gift not only rare but soundly disciplined. He retrieved one memory slip of his own (in the first movement) and a failure by the horns (in the larghetto) without sacrificing mood or jeopardizing command. Nor could any soloist, however eminent, ask more in collaboration than Wallenstein provided.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



## The Novice's Story

**L**UIS BUNUEL's "Viridiana" is as bold a film as has come to us recently, filled with erotic and religious imagery, perhaps deliberately paradoxical so far as its meaning is concerned, and yet clear and uncompromising in the march of its incidents. If its implications were religious alone, it might be regarded as the chronicle of a young woman's fall from grace, but Bunuel has never been known for his adherence to doctrine. He would seem rather to be dealing with the theme of the corruption of innocence, as Viridiana, a novice in a Spanish convent, makes what she supposes to be her final encounter with the world before taking her vows. That world—a vaguely contemporary one—is the world of a religion-dominated Spain, but it is also one in which the hierarchies have begun to lose their definition. Something is rotten, in other words, and Viridiana can only struggle vainly against the prevailing corruption.

She visits her uncle Don Jaime, a widower who lives on a large farm that is going to seed, and he sees in her the living incarnation of his dead wife, for whom he still has a necrophiliac kind of worship. Viridiana is beautiful, a young woman whose innate passion has been turned toward religious symbols. The large wooden cross she keeps with her is implied by Bunuel to have both a religious and a phallic significance, her pious laceration (she sleeps on a crown of thorns) to have a basis of masochistic eroticism. In this strange atmosphere, the events take on a diseased quality. Don Jaime's twisted desire for the girl leads him to attempt her seduction while she is asleep, and afterwards, profoundly guilt-stricken, to destroy himself.

Even stranger events follow. Viridiana, obsessed by guilt, too, takes it upon herself to rescue a group of diseased beggars. She puts them up at the farm, which she shares with Don Jaime's son, a young, easygoing materialist who has brought his mistress with him. In the film's climactic scene, a wild and shocking orgy of the beggars occurs in the handsome dining room of the main house of the farm. It is a stunning sequence pictorially, obscene and brutal, a chillingly observed parody of "The Last Supper." The impact of innocence upon the corrupt has resulted in a greater corruption, in extremes of behavior which at last victimize Viridiana, who has been foolish enough, even blasphemous enough, to look, upon her-

self as a provider of salvation. Ravished, humbled, she joins the world, no better now, no worse than those she has held herself aloof from.

This summary hardly suggests the emotional force of the film; for within the framework of the incidents are seemingly minor details (a crucifix opens into a knife, Viridiana burns her cherished crown of thorns) which build a powerful atmosphere. Disturbing, too, is the implication that, unless controlled, the destructive forces in human nature will emerge, that the fate of purity is profanation, that beauty breeds possessiveness. There is a suggestion that a rigid, encrusted religious system cannot cope with these forces, and that sicknesses within society are not the business of individuals, but of society.

If the film were less well made, if it were not so strikingly written and directed by Bunuel, it could be dismissed as sensationalism, with a too easy emphasis on the sexual elements. But its artistry is unquestionable. Bunuel has touched on these themes before—on sexuality, religion, irrational violence, and death—but never so well as in this case. And curiously, it derives force from the omission of a final, messagelike statement. It is left to us to find its meanings. The acting, by the way, is impeccable. Sylvia Pinal, as Viridiana, continually suggests the banked fires of a young woman caught between religious and carnal desires. Fernando Rey, as Don Jaime, is pathetic as he indulges in his middle-aged fetichism; Francisco Rabal, as his son, has a handsome arrogance.

The film, made in Spain, won last year's Grand Prix at Cannes, was immediately banned in the country of its origin, and the Spanish government was also successful in having the film banned in France. Perhaps the Spanish authorities saw into it too deeply. Films that deal with the spiritual and sensual diseases in individuals and societies are not, in themselves, necessarily corrupt. Nor is this one. Bunuel has dealt with life passionately; this, after all, is what we ask of artists.

NOTE: Edward L. Kingsley, the American importer of "Viridiana," died suddenly on January 31 of this year. For many years he had exercised notable taste and judgment in the importation of films from abroad, and helped spread the audience for foreign films of excellence. He will be missed.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

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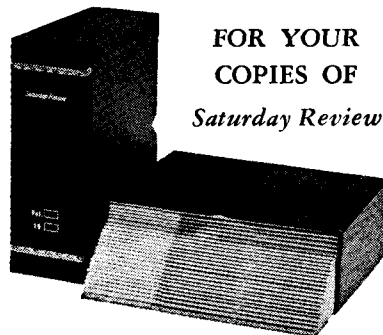
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