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SATURDAY REVIEW

Circulation Department

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THE PAST (continued)

One Gaul Out of Blood and Iron

"Massacre at Montségur: A History of the Albigenian Crusade," by Zoé Oldenbourg, translated by Peter Green (Pantheon. 420 pp. \$6.95), traces the struggle that led to the subjugation of Languedoc to the kings of France. Gray C. Boyce is chairman of the Department of History at Northwestern University.

By GRAY C. BOYCE

THE UNITY ultimately imposed on medieval France was wrought of blood and iron. It was not the result of sweet reason nor the final realization of a destiny foreordained. The monarchy in the hands of able kings, supported often by even abler servants, rarely failed to seize every chance advantage to increase its power and to extend the royal domain. This book, by a novelist become historian, is the story—and a grim if fascinating one it is—of how the fair land of Languedoc fell prey to northern knights and became eventually a part of the Capetian kingdom.

It is not a simple tale. There are multiple themes involving the contradictions, convolutions, and blatant inconsistencies characteristic of human relationships when issues clash, beliefs

are challenged, and ambition gets out of hand. Hardened as we are to the cruelties of our contemporary world and haunted by those evident in the course of our own history, we are nevertheless shocked by the disdain for human life and sensibilities displayed by Christians and Cathars, kings and peasants in the long contest that ruined the south of France and left destroyed a once flowering land.

The immediate if not the only cause for papal and royal intervention in Languedoc was the compelling challenge of rampant heresy. Cathars, or Albigenians if one speaks in regional terms, and Waldensian enthusiasts undermined the political, social, and economic order. Churchmen with rightful intent but questionable methods—feudal politicians with more ardor than their claims could justify—rushed in to reaffirm Christian principle and control.

CERTAINLY the Church in the Midi was spiritually dead, without the ability or the inspiration to combat the passivism of Cathar teaching. Often its chief challenge was to combat what it could not see, to fight those whose beliefs it did not clearly know—to fight an enemy who pretended often to be what he was not and who was so elusive that



—From the book.

Drawing from a bas-relief in the thirteenth-century St. Nazeire Church in Carcassonne believed to depict the death of Simon de Montfort.

he could rarely be directly observed. Even today we are hampered in our attempt to comprehend fully the nature of Occitan heresy because what information we have comes almost exclusively from Christian sources.

MME. OLDENBOURG's recognized skill as a novelist here strengthens her work as a historian. She has read wisely and well, and knows how to paint the large picture while remaining fully sensitive to the use of pertinent detail. She has especially fine talent for picturing the chief actors in this exciting story. At the head of the chronological list comes Peter of Castelnau, whose murder in 1208 precipitated the struggle between heretics and the minions of orthodoxy; but Simon de Montfort dominates the scene for ten years. Hero to some, villain to others, he was a bold, clever, redoubtable knight who met a gory death before Toulouse in 1218. Innocent III, here not always a sympathetic figure; the mercurial Count Raymond VI of Toulouse; his son and successor, Count Raymond VII ("a teetering tightrope walker"), and many others appear in these pages as men of flesh and blood. Though we may not like them, we see them vividly in the vicious, life-or-death struggle.

The Cathars were in a sense at war with the very purposes of life, and the thirteenth century met them head on. Even if they seemed to some more Christian than the Church, there was no prevailing sense of humanitarianism to soften the opposition they were bound to arouse. By knightly prowess and strategic skill Simon de Montfort crushed them at Muret in 1213; by constant preaching St. Dominic urged them to recant; by inquisitorial court the Church hounded them incessantly; and in frightful massacre at Montségur came the horrible end of a people doomed to die.

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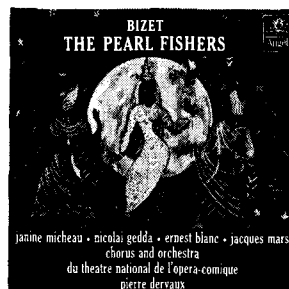
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Gerda Lammers Vivifies "Elektra"—Barabas, Barenboim

FOR THOSE who cherish operatic characterization as the end object of all singing-acting performance, the name of Gerda Lammers may be added to the list of those who can make the Metropolitan Opera House an exciting place to be. She is the new Elektra whose passionate artistry made a blazing thing of the Strauss score, well conducted by Joseph Rosenstock.

To speak of Miss Lammers as a "new" Elektra is something of a local license, for she has been celebrated in this part for half a dozen years, in her native Germany, in Vienna, in London. But her American debut brought something new to those who have been dependent on the versions of others in recent years, and revived still vivid memories of Rosa Pauly for those fortunate enough to have heard her in the late Thirties and early Forties.

Like Pauly, Lammers is well beyond the "glamour" stage of her career: she has something of the same broad body, and the none too pretty voice. Indeed, in the early phases of the performance, Miss Lammers conveyed the uncomfortable feeling of being perhaps too small of sound for the Metropolitan. But as her effort accumulated, and one scene merged into another, it became increasingly apparent that this was a singing actress of complete competence and confidence, who meted out her sound in proportion to the momentary needs, saving as much as needed to preface that triumphant choreographic climax whose only possible outcome is collapse, and death.

Others (such as Inge Borkh, with her abundance of sound) have made more of the opening monologue "Allein! Weh, ganz allein," which Miss Lammers addressed as if hypnotized to a spot, stage left, near the footlights. She conducted the dialogue with her mother in a properly crafty, sadistically intent manner, but with a full sense of the mockery in the words. And her grimly determined "Nun denn, allein" left little doubt that she was herself capable of the bloody deed, if need be.

However, the crux of the characterization was the melting tenderness of manner as well as tone in which she addressed her long absent brother in the Recognition Scene. It came from a richer source of emotion than the throat: a welling up of heartfelt impulse as she rejects his embrace, in shame and humiliation for the animal-like object Elektra has become. In this recollection

of the proud princess she had been, Miss Lammers established Elektra's thirst for revenge as something wholly human, not the frenzied madness it is sometimes made to seem. Climactically, the dance had a physically potent as well as a theatrically momentous part—for its slow, whirling steps began on the exact spot, stage left, where she had first invoked the spirit of Agamemnon. And, without exaggeration or gaucherie it spiraled to its blood-curdling outcome (which is, after all, what "thrombosis" means) as she fell inert and motionless.

Fortunately Miss Lammers had arrived sufficiently in advance of the first performance to coordinate her ideas with the other principals (though the rushing about of the ensemble, as directed by Michael Manuel, was much as it had been before). Jean Madeira's Klytemnestra in particular profited from the counter-irritant of this Elektra's scorn, and is now close to the category of great, in its avoidance of excess, its greater subtlety. Frances Yeend looked a believable Chrysothemis and performed the vocal line capably, if somewhat more than shrilly. To my eye and ear, Walter Cassel had a better command of the princely power a good Orestes should suggest than previously, and Albert da Costa was a satisfactory Aegisthus.

What, alas, none of the others could approach was Miss Lammers's richly inflected pronunciation of the German text, the bite of meaning she gave to the words "Triff noch einmal" ("Strike yet again") as Klytemnestra screamed her death agonies offstage, or the mocking "Darf ich nicht leuchten?" ("Shall I light your way?") to the unsuspecting Aegisthus. Perhaps some of this will communicate itself to the others in the repetitions to come. If not, the ear will bend in her direction gratefully.

One should be grateful, too, for the opportunity (none too frequent) of hearing "Salome" and "Elektra" in the same season, from the same stage, and under the same conductor. As well as underlining the magnitude of the power that Strauss commanded in this stretch of years (1903-08), it establishes (to my satisfaction at least) the considerable musical superiority of "Elektra" over its bizarre predecessor. Strauss himself, in writing to his collaborator Hofmannsthal, could speak of his "Salome" style. But no such limiting terminology could be attached to

"Elektra," which projects certain impulses of Wagner (the "Ring" and "Götterdämmerung" particularly) in a wholly individual way.

Given the inclination, the week of "Elektra" could also have been the week to hear a memorable concert version of Lehar's "Merry Widow" in Carnegie Hall with Franz Allers idiomatically conducting a German-singing cast of high proficiency. Sari Barabas, who was brought from Munich (when Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Hilde Gueden had to decline) is blond and Hungarian, in the line of Mitzi Hajos and Ilona Massey. Which is to say, she can sing quite enough to merit the other opportunities that go with merry widowing: fluttering, flouncing, flirting, and, finally, financing the rebirth of her native land's prosperity by making a match with Danilo. The latter was impersonated, and well, by the German favorite Rudolph Schock, whose debut this was, also. A fine balance to this pair, in the parts of Baroness Zeta and Camille, was struck by the adept Anneliese Rothenberger and the artful Nicolai Gedda. Hiram Sherman, as the narrator of a lightheaded script by Robert Russell, was even better than a Greek chorus.

IN THE months since his talents were last reported upon from Buenos Aires, and the years (four) since he last performed in New York, the youthful Daniel Barenboim has continued to grow physically as well as musically, so that his performance of the Beethoven C minor Concerto in the Wallenstein-Symphony of the Air Series could be appraised in absolute as well as comparative terms. Barenboim commands, in striking proportions, the grasp of musical design to complement his pianistic facility, and a vision of this work's emotional depth remarkable for one not yet twenty. Some of the first movement struck me as over strenuous, but this was a failing on the side of virtue.

That overwhelming impulse to communicate, musically, which dominated Gustav Mahler's life, is a strong factor in his Symphony No. 7 which William Steinberg conducted in his latest visit to Carnegie Hall. Only here the outcome is of greater inconsistency than in most of his other sizable works: occasional minutes of fulfillment in a ritual of more than an hour and a quarter. Steinberg's choice rather overvalued the current playing form of the Philharmonic (which he is guest conducting), especially the brass. It was more evenly mated in the preceding D major (No. 3) of Schubert, a youthful outpouring which Steinberg conveyed with zest and sympathy.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

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MARCH 31, 1962

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—Friedman-Abeles

Joan Fontaine is the pianist's partner on the dance floor during a reception after the opening concert of his 1961 cycle.

JOURNEY INTO YOUTH: THE RUBINSTEIN CYCLE

By JAN HOLCMAN

ATONEMENT has come for one of my greater sins, and I may now confess that after having skipped ten years of Artur Rubinstein at Carnegie Hall, I did "penance" by attending all ten recitals of his recent cycle. In 1961 the venerable pianist amazed everybody by offering ten evenings containing eighty-nine works (twenty-five major ones), not counting thirty-five encores. The series included two all-Chopin programs, featuring among other pieces an unknown version of the *Fantasie-Impromptu*. Some miniatures, i.e., the seventh Waltz by Chopin, were played on several occasions throughout the cycle, the total number of such repetitions amounting to twenty-five. These eighty-nine compositions are only a portion, if a fundamental one, of Rubinstein's entire repertoire, recorded by and large over the past thirty years, and performed in public for twice as long. If Rubinstein required six decades of preparation to present with undiminished velocity, power, and enthusiasm such an eloquent resumé of his life's artistic achievements, a re-

viewer could easily take six months to contemplate this courageous undertaking before forming any final judgment.

Cycles per se are not a novelty, and a series of ten has been exceeded more than once. In St. Petersburg, Josef Hofmann introduced 255 different works in twenty-one consecutive concerts, and Liszt was known to have performed a comparable feat. But they were half Rubinstein's age at that time. Artur Rubinstein's salvo included nine sonatas and Stravinsky's "*Petrouchka*," works intended for any but children and septuagenarians. He pulverized this rule.

Not all artists know when to withdraw from the public stage, and many never want to. The audience-addicted virtuoso may continue a career until the last finger ceases to respond, although the audience, sadly enough, may long since have done so. For many older artists, to exist without being heard is not to exist at all. Nor is it necessarily true that the more superlative the art, the longer it must last. The correlation between the quality and durability of a virtuoso is more akin to soap than silk. For most, the toll of the years dissolves the substance of craftsmanship, no mat-

ter how superior. It should be remembered that the attrition of age usually weighs more heavily on the performer than on the creative artist, for the former, in addition to withering mental and spiritual powers, is also confronted with atrophying muscles, stiffening joints, and rusting physical means of implementing through the instrument his emotions and musical ideas. He has to fight on two fronts. And while several leading writers or composers (e.g., Verdi) produced masterpieces in their eighties, equivalents in the performing arts are much more rare. Some of them, like Rachmaninoff at seventy, played phenomenally to the very end, and hence died untimely. Recordings also captured Saint-Saëns and Sauer at seventy—pianists who probably lost very little in the seventh decade, not to omit Planté, who remained quite active and vigorous while approaching ninety. There is, of course, another set of everlasting performers who keep on being masters—of inadequacy. The rarest species are those for whom improvement (especially technical) comes in the autumn of life.

How does Artur Rubinstein's stamina