



Britten's War Requiem at Tanglewood—Tito

LENEX, MASS.

NOT SINCE the last works of Béla Bartók were first being heard in the later Forties has the world of music lovers had so worthy a new work to rejoice in as the *War Requiem* of Benjamin Britten which had its first American performance here under Erich Leinsdorf's direction late in July. The intimations of the recording under the composer's direction (SR, May 25) were not merely fulfilled but surpassed, thanks not only to the values it contains but also to the arts of persuasion commanded by Leinsdorf.

Here, in rolling richness, which qualified the Tanglewood "shed" as perhaps an even more advantageous place to hear such a score than the best concert hall, is a fervent product of the imagination suitable to its demanding subject. That is nothing less than the frenzy of destruction to which the world was subject two decades ago. It was to solemnize the rededication of physical casualty (the Coventry Cathedral) that Britten put his mind to this task. What emerged is a rebirth of the shock and horror of those days, a reminder of the mass spiritual casualty whose only atonement can be the determination that it shall not happen again.

In a way, the *War Requiem* rounds out a cycle for Britten which, when the War began, found him in America. Though he remained here for two and a half years, blood prevailed, and he returned home in 1942 (a conscientious objector, he was exempted from active service). Now, through inner growth, power of reflection, and ripe mastery of musical means, he has found the power to convey to the many the revulsion at war he felt as an individual, the true triumph of the artist.

The *War Requiem* is a work of such scope and yet such infinite detail that one may well debate which aspect is paramount: the force of what Britten has on his mind and in his heart or the cunning as well as the power of how he has said it. In the actuality, the alternation of the Latin text of the Mass for the Dead with the poems of Wilfred Owen had even more impact than had in the recording. Knowing what was to come next did not in the least diminish either the compulsion or the interest of this interweaving of elements. It was, purposefully, one moment on the heights and the next in the depths as Britten moved from the gran-

diose concept of Everyman's fate (liturgical) to Anyman's tragedy (poetic).

For the world beyond the music lover, the *War Requiem* may well be an achievement to rank with the Ninth of Beethoven, Wagner's *Tristan*, Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*, and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* as a motivating and activating force on composers unborn at the time of its creation. In it, Britten has not merely made of sound a strong new aesthetic experience but also regrouped its components in a stimulating fresh way. Unlike certain of the others, who innovated digression from previous modes of procedure, Britten has instigated a further progression in the prior, established order through the flexibility and resource of the tonal language he has evolved.

In the unwinding course of this hour and a half (Leinsdorf performed it with a pause before the Offertorium) Britten has made it perfectly plain that there is no music in a system, only in a man. Dissonance there is, perhaps even his own kind of a row, or motivational range of sounds. But any such conflicts or clashes are as deftly applied as acid to an etcher's plate, and for the same purpose: not to obliterate line and meaning, but to clarify, highlight, define. Some may point to this obvious kinship with the Verdi *Requiem* or to that reminder of Berlioz. But these are the heartening kinds of kinship that relate it to the family tree of music, as Verdi's *Requiem* traces a line to Berlioz, and Berlioz himself has his own antecedents elsewhere.

Much more of this will become apparent in the months to come, as Boston hears it three times in early fall, New York in October, San Antonio during the winter, and Los Angeles in the spring. Boston and New York will, of course, hear it under the direction of Leinsdorf and with the same participants: and a commanding direction it was of such able participants as Tom Krause, the Finnish baritone with the excellent English articulation, the finely prepared Chorus Pro Musica of Boston, and the Columbus Boychoir. They all approached the ideal more closely than either Nicholas DiVirgilio, whose pleasant tenor is light for the burden of meaning in his music, or Phyllis Curtin, whose style is too intimate and whose dramatic power is restricted for an expression on this order. There was a gratifying conjunction of expression and execution in her singing of the

Lachrymosa, but not in the agonized outcries of the Tremens, or the impassioned fervor of the Benedictus. The disposition of the boys' voices (and the Positiv organ) at the extreme perimeter of the shed at the conductor's left was not as the composer directed, but it provided the needed sense of remoteness. Overriding all such incidental considerations, however, was the embracing understanding that Leinsdorf brought to his task, the thoroughness and zeal with which he conveyed that understanding to the listeners. Eleven thousand of them remained to applaud for twenty minutes in tribute to a musical service that will be long remembered.

A concert performance of Mozart's *Clemenza di Tito* is hardly the first thing one would think of as an attraction to determine whether there is a summer audience for non-summer fare in the air-conditioned Philharmonic Hall of Lincoln Center. Despite a day in the 90s, the auditorium could be described either as two-thirds full, or one third empty—which is to say that there were no more vacancies than might be expected for just the same kind of program in mid-winter.

Those who made the effort found much that was rewarding in a performance by the Cantata Singers under guest conductor Paul Callaway which could be described as informational rather than absorbing. Unfortunately, there was almost as much vocalization by narrator William Murphy, reciting a rather too whimsical script, as there was by Martina Arroyo as Vitellia or Betty Allen as Annio. They were discomfited if not incommoded by the wide-ranging demands of a vocal style for which little opportunity for indoctrination exists today. But the demands weighed even heavier on their associates, especially David Lloyd as Tito.

As for the score itself, it is unquestionably magnificent—for anyone but Mozart. It is noble, it is elevated, it even has a certain amount of grandeur, notably in the great aria "Non più di fiori." But one is constantly aware of a constant sense of reserve, even of restraint, as Mozart tempers his immortal impulses to the conventions of the *opera seria* style decreed by the circumstances of *Tito's* composition. Recurrently, there are gambits and modes of procedure that rose to higher fulfillment elsewhere (in *Così*, for example) but fail of their ultimate—meaning Mozartian—influence here.

The interim report on the rearranged acoustical panels might read, weather-wise: The higher the cloud ceiling, the better the audibility at ground level. Forecast: changeable.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



The Balkans in Brief—7. To Buda and to Pest



—H.S.
Socialist Sunday—One of 300 baths in Budapest is enjoyed by this lissome lass.

THE RITUAL of entry into Rumania is severe and military, but the formalities as practiced by the Hungarians are nearly a lampoon of Socialistic dicta. The customs inspectors are two, one to watch the other. One is a man, old, well padded with the caloric content of countless plates of *csusza*, the round, lard-cooked noodles that accompany every steaming dish of goulash. His counterpart, to keep the sexes at parity, was a woman, and so there would surely be no inequality she wore the same buttoned tunic, the same peaked garrison hat, as we used to call it in the army. She was something out of *Ninotchka*, dated, and too broadly costumed to be properly believed.

There was a small flurry at the customs desk. The few *forints* we had bought in New York to take care of tips and cabs—about \$7 in all—were in denominations forbidden by the regulations. They had to be held in bond at the airport until our departure. We would depart by train for Vienna. *Tant pis*.

On the other hand, the guide sent to fetch us was young, alert, well dressed, almost suave. After Bucharest, where the hotels recall Leningrad in 1955, in the first days of post-Stalin tourism, the Gellert in Buda was brilliant and sophisticated. The lobby gleamed. A

battery of uniformed attendants stood in readiness behind the marble desk waiting to give service. So did the barman in his spotless nook, the newspapers spread out in an orderly row, on top the Paris edition of the New York *Herald Tribune* blaring the latest race crisis back home.

From the balcony of our room we could survey the Danube and the bridge across it. The bright tables of the hotel's open-air café made a pattern below us. Unlike traffic in Bucharest, where we could walk across a square that seemed as broad as the Place de la Concorde without seeing a car, that in Budapest rolled like an endless caterpillar. The assortment of vehicles was the widest I had recalled since wartime, and one morning when we left the Gellert there was a blue convertible Thunderbird with New Jersey license plates pulled up in front of the door.

If Bucharest seemed to survive, to exist, quietly, like Omaha, then Budapest teems like Chicago. It lives in a way that is perhaps akin to Paris, full of outdoor places to eat, *quartiers* with old winding streets, and celebrated vistas—in this case abetted by the circumstances of its location, on the banks of a broad river with palisades on the Buda side rising abruptly from the shores.



—H.S.
Soviet Tourists—These troops have their photos taken in Heroes' Square where the monuments tell history of Hungary.

In the night the place to be is the Kis Royal, a homely retreat with beamed ceilings, wallpaper that would look fine in a farmhouse, old plain stoves in the corner. Pertis, the gypsy who played for royalty, still saws his violin engagingly, but the spokesmen for the regime are eager to point out that while he and others of his *genre* are gypsies of Indian origin, they play Hungarian folk music which they have helped to publicize. Unquote.

THE music was all that one might have expected from gypsy violins, which we had tried so hard to find in Rumania. Pertis and the gypsies play as well under the Communist regime as they did for the monarchy, and for the Horthy dictatorship that followed. Nor would there appear to have been any diminishment in the fabled cuisine of Hungary. It began with *crêpes* of Hortobagy, named for a vast rural plain in the east of Hungary near Debreczen, the center of the country's Calvinist doctrine. Debreczen was as far east as the Presbyterians penetrated. I'm not sure what all this has to do with the output of the farm kitchens of the Hortobagy plain, but one can be sure that the Calvinist housewives send their husbands into the fields prepared for a full day's labor. The *crêpes* were stuffed with mushrooms and veal liver and smothered with a sour cream sauce blushing with paprika. After that came a veal chop cooked *en papillote* along with mushrooms, ham, and goose liver. At the far end of the hall a wedding party was dancing the *chardas*, and after the second course I yearned to be one of them, if only for the exercise. How the bride takes part in any of the feasting is not clear to me, for by custom she must dance with all of the men, each of whom pays for the privilege; the household fund gets an early start.

Stuffed like a Hortobagy *crêpe* by the time we got down to the dessert, I was surely fortified for a full day's labor on the morrow. Natty in a well-cut business suit and carefully combed, our guide appeared the next morning and we began at Heroes' Square, the *grande place* of Budapest which commemorates the beginning of Hungarian history. A collection of statues and bas-reliefs, it was put together in 1896 for the 1000th anniversary of the arrival of the Magyars from the northern end of the Ural Mountains in what is now part of the Soviet Union. From their mountain homeland one group headed north and became Finns, the other turned south and became Hungarians, reaching here in 896. Long before that the Romans had arrived and, discovering wells and thermal baths, they established the