



The Full Life on Lac Léman (Musique Compris)

DIVONNE-LES-BAINS (AIN), FRANCE.

ON THE MAP, this hyphenated spa is no more than a dot on the west shore of Lac Léman, eighteen kilometers from Geneva on the way to Nyon, Morges, and Lausanne. Putting a magnifying glass on that dot would bring into focus a pair of spacious hotels, an eighteen-hole golf course, thermal baths (originally patronized, so it is said, by better-class Druids), a contemporary form of *piscine private*—complete with diving board—a superb view of Mont Blanc, all plus a casino where serious gambling may be indulged.

For those to whom this is not quite sufficient to fill the waking hours spent in breathing soft-scented air from the south, Divonne also has a charming little *théâtre du casino* dating to the early years of the century. What it was originally utilized for, nobody of the present management (related to the American-based Restaurant Associates) is quite sure. But it is now serving for the ninth in a series of *Festivals Internationaux de Musique de Chambre*, for which it is more than happily suited. As it includes, in the period of this June-ending week, such able and varied ensembles as the Deller Consort of London, Antonio Janigro and *Les Solistes de Zagreb*, and the *Quatuor Instrumental Maxence Larrieu* of Paris, with Zino Francescatti and Robert Casadesus to come, the *Festival International* is operating on an artistic bourse as stable as the financial one that makes both French and Swiss francs equally acceptable at the box office.

To be sure, Deller, Janigro, Casadesus, and Francescatti are musical brand names that need hardly be sought out in mid-Europe. But what makes them worth seeking out—even worth the effort of producing, four or five times a day, the green *carte d'assurance* required to drive into Switzerland from France or back into France from Switzerland—is the kind of bouquet that distinguishes a local wine before it has traveled across the ocean. Musically, the equivalent is provided by the unique acoustics of the little theatre in which the concerts are performed.

Barely larger than the entrance halls of some nearby chateaux, it is built of the best possible materials for sound: wood and plaster, whose virtues were well known to the architects of grand-

mother's day, before acoustics became a science. Whether for the quartet of winds and harpsichord, the voices of the Deller Consort, or the strings led by Janigro, it gave back a voluminous kind of detail that most of us have heard only from the most carefully balanced recordings.

Closing the eyes, one could imagine Deller and company in a Tudor castle (better ventilated than most) in which six voices had the impact of six times as many, and a lute sounded like a lute. When the group the capable English countertenor has put together in recent years makes its first American tour a season hence, it will rarely find such surroundings awaiting it. Thus this was a demonstration at optimum of the wide range of musicianship, taste, and judgment Deller can deploy in the ensemble of three male and two female voices for which he functions, as conductor-vocalist.

In such music as the Weelkes-Dowland groups, with which the evening



began, the sweetness, balance, and distinction of the part singing recalled the art of the unforgettable English Singers of the Thirties. But, as those who work such fields are constantly aware, good models are meant to be improved upon, and Deller has profited from the example of his predecessors to evolve something no less expert but more varied. Thus four madrigals of Monteverdi and as many *chansons françaises* ranging from Jannequin of the fifteenth century to Debussy (*Dieu! qu'il la fait bon regarder*) of the twentieth left little doubt that such an ensemble of voices is as responsive as the demands put upon them.

Janigro's program was also deftly divided between the string sound of yesterday and today (Purcell's *King Arthur* music, a Telemann concerto for

violin, and a Corelli concerto grosso on one side, works of Hindemith and Webern on the other). I personally would have preferred to hear more of the leader's artistry as cellist than this program provided (he restricted himself to a solo part in Hindemith's *Musique de Deuil*) but there is little doubt that he has upgraded considerably his skills as a conductor since he first ventured such activity in the United States in the mid-Fifties.

Indeed, his appearance among a list of conductors being billboarded locally for next winter's series of concerts by Ernest Ansermet's *L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande* points a direction which his talent may increasingly pursue in the future. Cellists of Janigro's quality are rare, but conductors of such background—who have included Toscanini, Casals, Wallenstein, and Howard Mitchell, to mention but a few—have traditionally brought something special to their performances.

For that matter, the affinity of musicians for this part of the world (which had seemed to be some kind of coincidence to the uninitiated) becomes a much more purposeful preference when the locale itself is examined. The nearby village of Coppet is reminiscent of the Swiss financier who provided the means through which the Flonzar Quartet of yesteryear became one of the best of its time, and one cannot drive to Lausanne without passing through Morges, where Paderewski spent his last years.

What brought such persons of the past as Johannes Brahms to Thun (where he wrote his A-major sonata for violin and piano) or Richard Wagner to Geneva, also brought Gabriel Fauré to the neighboring Hotel Chicago (pronounced Chee-ka-go) forty years ago for a spell of sunlight, silence, and animating air in which he wrote a string quartet. It would hardly be surprising if he recruited some players from Geneva for a trial run in the very same little hall in which Deller, Janigro, *et al.*, have been performing this week.

The sum of it would seem to be that for those who like to combine foreign travel with the indulgence of other interests, Divonne-les-Bains is a kind of round-the-clock contest between virtues and vices. I would not presume to categorize them, but a day that can start with eighteen holes of golf, proceed with thermal baths, take in an interval of bridge, followed by a swim in the pool prior to a program of chamber music, offers ample range of either. I would suggest, however, that the concert tickets be purchased before venturing a session at *boule*, *baccara*, or *chemin de fer*.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



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LITERARY HORIZONS

Miss Merlin Lost Her Magic

PAMELA HANSFORD JOHNSON has been writing novels for some time—her first, *This Bed Thy Centre*, was published in the United States in 1935, and the first I read, *Winter Quarters*, appeared in 1943—and she has written some good ones. I particularly liked *The Humbler Creation* (SR, March 5, 1960), a serious and sympathetic study of the problems of a sincere and troubled clergyman. I am not sure, however, but that I liked it better the immediately preceding novel, *The Unspeakable Skipton*, a gay and witty and inventive study of a preposterous rascal.

In *Night and Silence Who Is Here?* (Scribners, \$4.50) Miss Johnson has returned to the comic vein—the book is subtitled “An American Comedy”—and has exploited it to excellent effect. As wife of C.P. Snow, who has lectured and been honored on countless American campuses, she has had good opportunity to observe our institutions of higher learning. Out of the knowledge she has acquired she has fashioned an engaging novel.

She has not, however, been foolhardy enough to attempt a direct attack on American educational institutions as such. Her novel does not deal, except incidentally, with either undergraduates or faculty, but is an account of the misadventures of a visiting Fellow at a New Hampshire college called Cobb.

This individual, Matthew Pryar, “fifty-one last week but looking like a well-preserved thirty-eight,” is not in any sense a typical academician, which is in part the point of the novel:

Having done almost no work of any description since he came down from Oxford (he was well-heeled), and devoting his attention solely to the sweetening of life both for himself and others, he had been nagged by

Dorothy Merlin into making a study of her work. Since he mildly liked her work, he saw no reason why not to: and as her total *oeuvre* consisted of twenty shortish poems and four slim verse-dramas, the labour was not demanding. He had all the luck of those who find themselves, by accident, first in the field. He was immediately accepted as the world authority on Dorothy Merlin, because he was literally the only one. And so, a rich American liberal arts college had desired him.

From his particular point of view, Matthew finds life at Cobb rather a hardship. There are no servants to bring him breakfast in bed, or, for that matter, to make either breakfast or bed. The eating facilities are meager, and liquor can be bought only in a town some miles away. America, Matthew discovers, may be a land of luxury, but it is not a land of comfort. “Bless them, they are the most generous, the most magnanimous people on earth, but their real standards are those of the Frontier. The only two things that persuade them of their comfort are overheated rooms and admirable water-closets.” Gradually, however, he learns how to adapt himself to the rigors of the American academic scene.

Well-informed as Miss Johnson is, some of the details of her narrative are puzzling. In her version New Hampshire seems to be about the size of Montana, if not of Texas. She makes



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much of the severity of winter, but one of the Fellows travels about on her bicycle, and a little bird looks for worms. Her handling of the American idiom is pretty good, but once in a while she slips up—e.g., “bills” for “posters.” The faculty of Cobb seems to be made up mostly of teetotalers and early risers, neither species common in my academic experience.

All this is of little importance in comparison with the vigor with which Miss Johnson exploits the comic possibilities of her themes. Matthew, as I have suggested, is not typical of the visiting Fellows at Cobb. The others are serious and hard-working and, in some instances, illustrious scholars, and this is why she is able to have fun with them.

The most amusing of her inventions