



The Mechanics of Laughter

THE care and treatment of the last war's mental cases hardly seems a promising point of departure for comedy, but *Captain Newman, M.D.*, based on Leo Rosten's popular novel, so deftly blends horror with humor and shock with slapstick that the subject never becomes distastefully crude or depressingly clinical. And it could easily have been both. Too many films have viewed war in retrospect as one long romp, with an occasional bombardment or patrol action to mar the festivities. Others have exploited mental illness for sheer sensationalism. *Captain Newman*—or, more correctly, director David Miller—walks a delicate line. He does not slight the causes of crack-up in good men, or even suggest that there are cures for all, but he bears down on the combination of scientific skill and humanitarian spirit that can make many of them whole again—and, ironically, fit once more for active duty.

This irony is not lost on Newman himself, played with quiet dignity by Gregory Peck. The head of the neuropsychiatric section of an Air Corps base hospital, he ponders the question when faced with a colonel who, despite his bombast, has cracked under the strain of losing his men in combat; a catatonic captain unable to live up to the ideals he had set for himself; and a young corporal whose self-hatred on deserting a comrade has turned him into a psychotic. The war has blasted these men just as surely as if they had been splattered with bullets. And when, after enormous expenditures of time and training, the corporal goes off to combat and his death, Captain Newman's sense of futility is poignantly shared by the audience.

If none of this is precisely new or earth-shattering, it still has the distinction of being told with warmth, sympathy, and simplicity. The film emerges all the more dramatic for its consistent understatement.

What sends it winging into new dimensions, however, is the introduction of a fast-talking, ingenious, and genuinely funny aide to Captain Newman, Corporal Laibowitz. Tony Curtis plays him as a scrounger with a heart, a man born to deal with practicalities regardless of Army rules and red tape. Laibowitz, both laughable and lovable, proves to be the flywheel that keeps the entire film in motion. More than merely a foil for Newman, he operates largely on his own; and the script's astute juxtaposition of his frenetic wheel-

ing and dealing with the more sober aspects of life in a mental ward gives the film its special flavor, lightness, and momentum. Thanks to polished writing, performances, and direction, these disparate elements fuse into entertainment that never loses sight of the essential grimness of its material, but never gets overwhelmed by it.

On the other hand, *Sunday in New York* hasn't a single thought in its pretty little head, but it is so consistently ingratiating and attractive that only the sterner realists are liable to object. Adapted by Norman Krasna from his own play, it takes advantage of the wide screen and Metrocolor to examine some of the less likely vicissitudes that a virtuous young girl might encounter in wicked old New York. Despite unbecoming costumes, Jane Fonda is a delight as the girl who decides to put her virtue to the test; Rod Taylor is engaging as the man she tests it on; and Cliff Robertson gives a lithe and amusing outline of an airplane pilot with a double standard—one for himself and one for his sister. But the film's top performance comes from Robert Culp, who, as Jane's disappointed suitor, flashes a jaunty smile at the moment of parting that plumbs an unexpected depth of heartbreak. Director Peter Tewksbury, stepping up from TV's *My Three Sons* and *Father Knows Best*, makes a welcome addition to the world of big-screen comedy.

THERE are flashes of acrid humor in *The Guest*, but comedy—unless it be the human comedy—was far from the intent of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, from which this corrosive film was over-literally adapted. Once more Donald Pleasance insinuates himself into Robert Shaw's grimy room in a London tenement, fawning, wheedling, and eventually bullying the mild, demented man in persistent assertion of his "rights." Once more Alan Bates creates his fascinating, enigmatic portrait of Mick, Shaw's soft-spoken brother, with his startling outbursts of irony, cruelty, and sheer sadism. And once more Pinter's unorthodox play commands respect by virtue of his harsh, fully dimensioned characters, while leaving one utterly perplexed as to their ultimate fate or (perhaps symbolic) meaning. The play's fetid, claustrophobic atmosphere has been, if anything, intensified by director Clive Donner's insistent use of enormous close-ups throughout the entire film.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

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Kónya's Lohengrin—Addabo, Calderon

IN THE time since he first (and last) sang Lohengrin at his Metropolitan Opera debut in November 1961, Sándor Kónya has brought his total of performances of Wagner's Swan Knight very close to an even 200 in a sequence that started in 1958. This could mean much or little, depending on where and with whom they have been sung. Fortunately, enough of them have been at Bayreuth for a real Wagnerian discipline to prevail, which means that the Lohengrin he sang lately is the best that has been heard at the Metropolitan in a decade at least.

As noted at his debut, his is a voice of quality as well as volume, freely produced in the area of A and B, where even the better Wagner tenors tend to become constricted. The gratifying signs of improvement this time were not so much what has been added, but what has been eliminated—a tendency to the sob, the catch in the throat that is sometimes confused (primarily by those who employ it) with "emotion." It is easily overdone in Italian roles, and it has no place at all in the German. Somehow, in some circumstance, Kónya has been persuaded that his Lohengrin can very well do without it, and the surgery has left the patient much better off than before.

Thus, this was a fluent, beautifully controlled vocal effort, from the opening thanks to the closing farewell to the swan, with the Narrative as a proper climax after an elegantly sung love duet. As he delivered it, one felt the full impact of the text in the recitation of his origins, making it in truth the narration it was meant to be rather than merely an exercise in vocal production. With so excellent a protagonist to build around, the long-wanted new production of *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan should become a priority project if only to resolve the *mésalliance* of costuming that prevailed on this occasion, with Kónya in a blinding Bayreuth gold, and the others wearing whatever they had brought along. As for the "nobles" of Brabant, they were clearly an underprivileged lot.

For such a new production, Kónya has a strong ally in conductor Joseph Rosenstock, who kept order among orchestra and chorus while forging steadily through the sea of troubles that are ever present in a Wagner opera. Here they tended to concern Régine Crespin's Elsa more than anything else,

especially in the *a capella* quintet near the end of Act I, where she had a leading, off-pitch part. This is, on the whole, an equivocal role for her, as her natural disposition to a driving, dramatic production has to be constantly held in check to suit the lyrically limpid music Wagner wrote for his dream-wracked character. She made the effort with all conscience, and didn't overproduce, either for the Dream in Act I or *Euchlüften* in Act II; but the sound tended to be undersupported and thus fade from hearing. Once past the middle of Act II, Crespin's solid virtues, including an ability to dominate the strongest ensemble, made for very much better results. On the whole, her Wagnerian future would seem to be toward Elisabeth and Isolde rather than the lighter Elsa.

As the quibbling couple, Walter Casse (Telramund) and Nell Rankin (Ortrud) gave little cause for regret that Wagner's fate for them was lethal. Each gets the text out, in time and on pitch, but the vocal sound adds little to the ear appeal of what they are doing. This did not deter some overwrought enthusiast from a hoarse "Bravo" after Miss Rankin's shrill delivery of her invocation to the gods in Act II. Ernest Weiman is short both of the top and the bottom for Henry's music, which left him a rather middle-class king. Little wonder, then, that in such company Kónya sounded more than ordinarily like a visitor from a distant land.

IF the first requisite of a conductor is to be an opportunist, both Claudio Abbado and Pedro Calderon showed themselves to be well equipped as associate conductors of the Philharmonic while Leonard Bernstein was enjoying a busman's holiday at the Boston premiere of his *Kaddish* symphony. They did, indeed, offer more varied programs than has prevailed with some of the Philharmonic's more celebrated guests this season, ranging from Mozart's *Impressario* overture, Prokofiev's *Chout* ballet suite, and the second symphony of Tchaikovsky on the Abbado program, to Rossini's *Semiramide* overture, the Haydn No. 83, and the Shostakovich First Symphony at the Calderon pair.

Soloist for both conductors was Charles Treger, who showed the beautifully disciplined control of the bow and strings that won him first prize in

the Wieniawski Violin Competition in Poland in 1962. The bow is mentioned even before the strings because of Treger's adroit use of it in the kind of refined, highly stylistic performances he provided of the Mozart G-major (with Abbado) and Szymanowski (with Calderon) concertos. His stroke was always at precisely the right place at the right time to give the emphasis and articulation for which he was striving. Aside from a fussy cadenza in the Mozart, Treger (who is head of the string department at the University of Iowa) made his first Philharmonic performances memorable ones.

AT his session, Abbado worked on an upper curve from competence in Mozart to distinction in Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky. Doubtless the heavier scoring of the Russian music assisted, for the Mozart was brittle in sound, a little hard-driven for its best interests. Nevertheless, there was conviction in everything he did, a clear sense of line and purpose, and, in the Prokofiev, a freedom from inhibition that permitted its bold colors full effect.

Calderon's objectives were a little less inclusive, but he also came closer to realizing them in a musically conceived, adroitly controlled performance of the Rossini overture, a lightly, but tightly, drawn estimate of Haydn, and an expressively disciplined Shostakovich. He also collaborated well with Treger in the Szymanowski concerto. The winter book on the potentialities of these two young conductors might show a short price for Abbado in the immediate future, with Calderon a longer shot to prevail later on.

If there was a sinister aspect to the recital presented in Philharmonic Hall by Paul Badura-Skoda and Joerg Demus, it was, simply, because a large portion of the audience was arranged on the left side of the auditorium, the better to watch the pianists at work. Actually, though Badura-Skoda and Demus may sound like three, there were only the two of them, alternately performing solos of Mozart and Schubert, playing four hands on one keyboard, or arranging themselves at the two pianos for duets.

All this was thoroughly agreeable, for both are happily in the orbit of the composers they prefer, and together make a much more compatible couple than musicians who are the product of more diverse environments. Indeed, if there were some dissidents in the hall, they were on the dexter or non-keyboard side, from which it sounded as if more variety in the programing would have yielded greater dividends in interest. A sharp contrast or two from the
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