



## 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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## Quentin's Quest

WHATEVER drawbacks one may find in Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, the size of its concerns are impressive, and one can think of no other new American play this season that would have been as appropriate for the opening venture of the Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre at the ANTA Washington Square Theatre. For just as this is a theatre that carries the future hopes of a too-often disappointed theatregoing public, so is *After the Fall* a play that intensely examines one disappointed man's right to hope in a world where incredible horror and violence keep cropping up to make on suspect the progress of the human race.

While this man, a lawyer named Quentin, is a rather special individual molded in his creator's own image, he has within him a number of nagging conflicts that are universally felt in our times. Quentin began life with the presumption that one is moving toward some elevation; that there were injustices for him to correct, good and bad people for him to judge, and fixed principles to be placed ahead of natural or selfish impulses. Looking back on this period, Quentin bitterly remarks, "Not to see one's own evil—there's power and rightness, too."

This evil Quentin uncovers for us by re-examining his true feelings about his parents, his shattered political religion, his two broken marriages, and a friend's suicide. In retrospect he sees that total love and total innocence are impossible, and that total marriage can be a way of forcing two separate people into betrayal, hate, and virtual murder. He sees the majority of men reconciling themselves to a life of insincerity and fake innocence. As he puts it, "I walk down the street, I see millions of apartment windows lighting up—I swear I don't understand how each man knows which door to go to. Can they all be in love? I don't think so; it's some kind of innocence, a deep belief that all their destinations are ordained."

Still, the purpose of this play is not negation, but Quentin's attempt to decide whether or not to enter into a third marriage with Holga, a German woman who has reconciled herself with—though not absolved herself of—the guilt she feels for war atrocities. Holga's formula is simply "to take the idiot child of her life in her hands and kiss it." Since both Quentin and Holga have fallen from innocence to the knowledge that we are all dangerous, this third marriage ultimately strikes him as, at least, feasible.

The play's method is also intriguing. Quentin stands onstage for three hours addressing the audience informally and jumping in and out of short scenes that are re-enactments of portions of his life, evoked by what comes into his head as he speaks to us. Furthermore, these re-enactments also include images and thoughts that occurred to him at the original moment.

Why, then, we keep asking ourselves, is the skilful and energetic stage action so much less dramatic and compelling than the same man would be if he were sitting in our living room telling the same story? While Quentin's lines to the audience do attempt to establish this living-room atmosphere, the open stage and the "large-size" acting it requires of the individual performers make every enactment imply an earth-shaking importance that tends to drown out rather than lead gently to Quentin's conclusions. This is especially so because Quentin often professes a cautious lack of definiteness in these conclusions, and even sometimes wonders out loud why a certain image occurs to him at this moment, or whether he hasn't perhaps wandered off the track of his thinking.

THERE is a second fault in *After the Fall*, which may be a temporary one. Although Mr. Miller does not want us to regard the play as biographical, its events so resemble what the public knows of the playwright's own life that it becomes difficult for us not to believe that we are seeing exactly what went on behind the closed doors. Take the instance of Quentin's marriage to Maggie, the sex-generous star who eventually dies from an overdose of barbiturates. Can one not regard her as the late Marilyn Monroe, who was Mr. Miller's second wife, particularly since, after a brief first-act appearance as a quite different-looking girl, Miss Loden switches in Act II to something that is as much like Marilyn's public image as she can possibly make her? Inevitably we find ourselves becoming less interested in Maggie as a part of Quentin's experience and more interested in understanding what seems to be the real-life story of Marilyn. Is it? Mr. Miller says it isn't, and those who knew the late actress are quick to point out important differences in her personality, her talent, her intelligence, and in some of the crucial incidents that partly excuse Quentin in the play.

To Mr. Miller's credit is the fact that he does have Quentin accept much of

the blame for what happened, although almost everything bad about Maggie is demonstrated and almost everything bad about Quentin is only spoken by a man whom we tend to admire for the frankness of his admissions. After Quentin first meets Maggie, he tells his wife, "She's a stupid, silly kid, but one thing struck me. She wasn't defending anything, upholding anything, or accusing—she was just there, like a tree or a cat." Later, after he has married Maggie, Quentin tells her that she is really moral because she tells the truth even against herself. He admits that her past involvement with so many men gave him a problem of shame and doubt that one day resulted in his writing a letter, which Maggie understandably interpreted as betrayal. And at one point he reviles himself for having brought her the lie that she had to be "saved."

Quentin's guilt stops near the end when he tells the now addicted Maggie that she is setting him up as her murderer by giving him the bottle of sleeping-pills and then fighting with him to get them back from him. The implication is that Maggie had a death wish, that nothing he could have done would have stopped her from achieving it. Yet he confesses that out of self-interest he finally turned his back on her.

Almost everything else one says about the play must be favorable. Jo Mielziner's open-stage theatre is a beauty, as is his complex of steps and levels that constitute the scenery for the play. Because this is a temporary theatre, it does not have the forestage tunnels that are an absolute requisite for making open stages most usable, but that will come with the permanent theatre in Lincoln Center two years from now. Elia Kazan's staging brings characters onstage at full incandescence and arrives at a performance style that suits this theatre. Also, it makes it difficult to single out specific individual performances, except on the basis of their vitality and technical brilliance.

Jason Robards, Jr., not only survives a three-hour, nonstop ordeal, but keeps Quentin so human and off balance that we usually believe his confessions to be for their own sake, rather than an appeal for our sympathy. Barbara Loden does a remarkable job as Maggie, going beyond caricature. She also executes some sexual gymnastics that capture the essence of the act rather than degenerating into embarrassing obscenity.

However, one suspects that if this play is to achieve its full potential, it should either be rewritten to suit this style of performance, or be performed in a different style in another kind of theatre. Meanwhile, it remains a fine source book for an intensively searching but as yet not consistently dramatic play.

—HENRY HEWES.