



Lessons in Documentary

A TELEVISION documentary called *Louisiana Diary* concerns a CORE voter registration drive among Negroes in a rural parish. The film unit of KQED, San Francisco's community TV station, shot it last summer; it is currently being shown on National Educational Television. Few viewers sympathetic to the civil rights struggle will watch it without being moved by its account of the ordeal certain Americans must endure to win a fundamental birthright guaranteed them by our Constitution.

The CORE drive involved training parish residents who would seek to register as voters. The visiting task force drilled the volunteers to meet the formal requirements of voter registration, but they also prepared them to do so without resisting the physical and psychological brutality they might encounter. Hands covered their heads to protect them from mock blows that must actually have hurt; knees were pulled up as they rolled on the floor. Civil rights fighters learn from experience how to defend themselves against dogs, fire hoses, and cattle prodders; the techniques of nonviolent resistance in mass situations were taught like a military maneuver.

One memorable scene showed the training given to an individual volunteer who might be subjected to isolated questioning. A young Negro woman sat in a chair. Two other young women of her own race spoke sharply to her, deliberately insulting, slapping her, seizing her hair painfully, moving a lighted cigarette end very close to her

face. It was a training situation. These were her friends—yet the simulated aggression and submission suddenly took on a kinetic reality. The blows seemed sadistic, the fear of the victim passed the tenuous boundary between make-believe and fact. For the audience, the scene becomes almost unbearable.

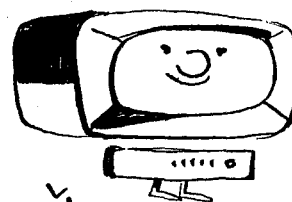
What makes the incident memorable is that the camera transcended the act of reporting to achieve insight into the behavior of human beings caught in the subtle, cruel ambivalence of suffering and unconsciously wanting to inflict pain. The objective of the CORE training in Louisiana was to insure successful response to situations by anticipating them.

Louisiana Diary illustrates a challenge to makers of documentaries. One follows a series of unfolding events with the camera. These events exist on different levels: their surface actuality and their deeper meaning or latent possibilities. If one is lucky (as with the training scene above), the two levels meet. If they do not (and this is mostly the case), then one must have immediate, imaginative discernment to shoot not what seems to be happening, but some aspect of deeper truth in the concrete scene. The ability to capture such moments of truth is rare among even the finest cameramen and directors. The next best thing is to use strategy that tries to anticipate situations relevant to the documentary subject and to plan responses to them. Under ideal conditions, therefore, one makes full use of the opportunity for advance research and thought-taking. Fiction-makers do

this when they construct each shot of a screenplay carefully in advance.

Irving Saraf and Philip Green, the KQED film unit cameramen, "winged" most of their film in trade jargon—"shot from the hip," we might say. The entire crew was emotionally involved to a man. In the heat of fast-breaking events, they tended to commit the common error of equating the excitement of their personal involvement with excitement for an audience. This is not to carp at their work. We are talking about that elusive ideal in documentary-making that successfully blends art with truth—a difficult achievement.

Louisiana Diary is longer on truth than on art. The film, as finally edited, was too long. Scenes shot with unsteady, hand-held cameras were often out of focus. Questions about the



voter registration drive were left unanswered. Why did some volunteers succeed in registering while others failed? Does registration guarantee voting rights? Some Negroes refused when CORE representatives asked them to volunteer. The camera failed to hint why, to reveal their fear or ignorance. Too often, it accepted face values of people and events.

Louisiana Diary does transmit the raw emotional impact of bravery in the face of injustice. It is probably the most courageous television documentary yet made by noncommercial broadcasters. It is also a useful object lesson in the tricky art of detachment while making a currently topical documentary.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.

EDITOR-WRITER

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Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1076

A host is like a general: It takes a mishap to reveal his genius.

—HORACE.

Tebaldi's Return—*La Juive*

RENATA TEBALDI'S hold on a devoted public assured her of what is called a triumph when she returned to the world stage of opera at the Metropolitan in the broadcast matinee of *Bohème* after an absence since she gave up *Adriana Lecouvreur* in February 1963. So much was evident from the reception that greeted her first appearance. That it was also a success is a tribute to the effort she has applied to reverse the trend of vocal decline that brought about the absence.

The curious effect of this Mimi was to make it a kind of double exposure, with a familiar pattern of action expressed through a quite unfamiliar quality of sound. No longer full and voluptuously vibrant in the old manner, it is the consequence of a much more forward production, tending to the vibrato-less, or what is called "white." The suggestion to this ear is that this has relieved the throaty constriction that had given the sound a rather unwieldy weight in some recent seasons, made it more responsive to her always active artistic intelligence. She let out a bit for the key phrases of "Si, mi chiamano Mimi," but plainly was working within pre-planned limits. The act-ending duet was pitched to a top B (rather than the written C) reached with effort, and not quite sustained.

In Act II, Tebaldi did what a Mimi has to do (which isn't very much) with assurance, charm, and the talent for magnetizing attention that has long been hers. For Act III, the vocal crux of the role, Tebaldi worked close to the familiar pattern of her treatment of the duet with Rodolfo and sang a truly affecting "Addio." It was hardly of the old warmth of sonority, but, experienced performer that she is, Tebaldi utilized shrewdly what she now commands to give Mimi's plight a personal anguish quite her own. Here, as in Act IV, the meticulous attention to detail, the acts of artistic conscience that distinguish the outstanding from the average performer, were always under control, save in the area of A or B flat. Another performance or two may give her greater freedom in this range, too.

This was otherwise a *Bohème* of quality, beginning with Fausto Cleva's purposeful shaping of the whole and continuing through the excellent Musetta of Laurel Hurley, Frank Guarera's spirited Marcello, and the accomplished Schanard of Clifford Harvuot. Best of all the Bohemians was the Coline of Jerome Hines, which has been

elaborated into a richly detailed character study to match the easy power with which it is sung. Sándor Kónya's Rodolfo was all consideration for his partner, for which he earned high marks in colleaguesmanship. He would earn higher marks for artistry if he would focus his good sound on the true line of the music rather than breaking it up with sobs and exaggerations born of a misbelief that this is "Italian" style. It is merely a style practiced by bad Italian singers, lacking his resources in color and phrasing.

To be sure, by the measure of the Canio sung earlier in the week by Franco Corelli, Kónya was almost abstemious. This was another in a series of misadventures in which the tall man with the handsome voice has cut himself down to the size of a provincial tenor. This was no favor to such associates as Nicolae Herlea, who sang an excellent "Prologo" not quite sustained by his playing of Tonio, and the usually adept Nedda of Lucine Amara. In the preceding *Cavalleria*, Eileen Farrell performed Santuzza with abundant vocal power and more dramatic conviction than she has summoned for almost anything else at the Metropolitan. Arturo Sergi was a rather lightweight (vocally) Turiddu, but not without promise. Joann Grillo's Lola was, likewise, a little unready for this stage, for all her evidence of aptitude. Nello Santi as conductor fared better with Leoncavallo than Mascagni.

Despite evidences to the contrary in the concert version of *La Juive* presented lately in Carnegie Hall by the Friends of French Opera under the direction of Robert Lawrence, some who believe in Halévy's score found it possessed of the substantial merits remembered from its last stage performances here twenty and more years ago. These relate to the choral writing, the Passover Scene, and the composer's ability to evoke the somber tone suitable to the subject as a whole as well as to Cardinal de Brogni's "Si la rigueur," Eléazar's "Rachel, quand du Seig-

neur," and the other well-known solos.

Those who found the evening long might consider the mode of presentation in which a five-act work was broken by only a single intermission, and such contrasting matter as the ballet music was omitted. Lawrence was culpable, too, in not preparing a better performance of the orchestral score (the American Symphony was hardly adept enough) and also in depending for his Rachel on Suzanne Sarroca, a French soprano of quality who is, however, hardly of the type called *falcon* for which Halévy wrote (the term derives not from any birdlike attributes but because the first Rachel was named Marie Cornélie Falcon). Likewise ill-suited for what they had to do were Micheline Tessier as Eudoxie and Jean Deis, who challenged the high Cs (and a D) of the writing for Léopold more by main strength than by true vocal disposition. Not only Halévy but also Norman Treigle, a basso with the profundity of manner suited to the Cardinal as well as the profundity of sound suitable for his music, and Richard Tucker, who sang an Eléazar of compelling vocal power as well as great artistic distinction, deserved more in the way of companionable associates.

If there was more zeal than organized effort in Lawrence's effort, it made some points about *La Juive* well worth noting. Halévy's skill in planning and executing ensembles, as of 1835, was certainly a beacon on the road followed by both Wagner and Verdi (as they shared the birth year of 1813, they were only twenty-two at the time), and he had the striking capacity to evoke the atmosphere of religious conflict to the point where it could be sensed in this concert performance without the aid of scenery, costumes, or action.

It is, indeed, a more solid work and better suited to occasional stage performance than some early Verdi that enjoys recurrent attention. However welcome, these are but the dawn of genius, whereas *La Juive* represents the talent of Halévy at high noon. Certainly when there is a tenor available who has not only the good of the work in his heart but also the best of the sound required in his voice (as Tucker does) the opportunity for him to impersonate Eléazar in all his human dimensions should not be denied. As for the Lawrence effort: it merits applause for enthusiasm, but some reconsideration, too, of whether a faulty case for French opera is preferable to no case at all.

In a seasonal succession of symphonies that has brought new works from a series of artistic quarters, the third of Ross Lee Finney, introduced by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra on their most recent visit to

(Continued on page 63)

