



Bernstein Marshals Mahler's Eighth

AFTER THE darkness, the dawn. After the Seventh Symphony of Mahler, with its *Nachtmusik* and other ephemera, the sunburst of sound which is the Eighth. Leonard Bernstein climaxed the first portion of his Philharmonic season with a rousing revival of the rarely performed Eighth, the first time in New York it had been attempted in its entirety since 1950. With his own recent performances of Nos. 9 and 7 coupled to the Ormandy-Philadelphia reconstruction of No. 10 within recent memory, the weeks just passed have provided a perspective of the feverish creative activity of Mahler in the last years of his life, which can rarely have been equaled anywhere at any time.

The commentary on the abundance with which this man gushed music between 1904 and his death in 1911 (while putting in a full winter's work as conductor, first in Vienna, then at the Metropolitan, and later as director of the New York Philharmonic) is contained in the reminder that, abundant as it has been, the sequence has not included the work that is universally agreed to be his masterpiece. If *Das Lied von der Erde* is not "always" with us, it does recur frequently enough to be spared on behalf of the work that precedes it philosophically as well as chronologically.

For if one thing stands out about the Eighth, whether heard "live" or studied from a recording with a score, it is that it is no isolated phenomenon but an integral part of the process by which Mahler worked out his destiny as a composer. Indeed, to call it a "symphony" is to stretch the term almost to the limits of tolerance. Each of the two massive movements that make up its totality is constantly concerned with a verbal text (the first, the hymn "Veni, creator spiritus," the second, excerpts from *Faust*, Part II, Act IV, Scene 7, ending with the solemn reminder *Alles Vergänglich's/Ist nur ein Gleichnis* ("All earth comprises/Is symbol alone"). What binds the two parts together, in addition to a common mood, is a recurrence of the jagged theme of the first movement at the climax of the second, thus making a match of them in fact as well as in spirit.

Together they comprise not so much a symphony as a tonal fresco, whose equivalent of yards and yards of space (on a wall) is the hour and twenty minutes required for performance. Possibly if it had not been written with such incredible speed (the 218 pages, for or-

chestra, soloists, and choruses numbering altogether over 400, were poured onto paper between June and August of 1906) some of the detail would have been tighter. Probably, too, the tide of momentum that accumulates, breaker by breaker, would have slacked and receded. Between alternatives, the receptive listener will take the Eighth—when he can find it—exactly as it is, and be grateful that there has been, within living memory, a man with the intensity of impulse and the conviction of spirit to persevere in a creation of this magnitude.

Mural-like, the Eighth returns profit when considered in detail as well as in sum. Bernstein ventured the opening movement as part of the ceremonial inaugural of Philharmonic Hall in September 1962, but both his conception and the surroundings have improved since then. Now it was altogether a more musical experience, especially in the second performance on Friday afternoon, when the two sopranos (Saramae Endich and Ella Lee) had settled into the requirements of their roles. However, as those who heard the last complete performance of the Eighth here in 1950 will recall (it was also by the Philharmonic, with Stokowski conducting), the longer second movement is not only equally imposing, but also more profound. It is in this part of the mural that one can perceive, in more than sketchlike detail, the elements he enlarged, elaborated, and refined to produce the superb noonday richness of *Das Lied*, the rich afterglow of the Ninth, and the best parts of the night-shadowed Tenth.

HERE, in the framework of the *Faust* references, Mahler leaves behind the uncertainties, doubts, and intrusive digressions that mar some earlier works. He also achieves a serenity of spirit as well as a breadth of expression that brings him close to the plane of existence inhabited by those to whom he consecrated his life's effort as a conductor, Beethoven and Wagner in particular. As he strives for a conclusion worthy of the whole—in which, as is so often the case with Mahler, the grasp exceeds the reach—he pushes his contrapuntal lines to harmonic combinations of striking originality. It is no accident, in my view, that something of special effect occurs when the echoing sound of *Ewig* ("Always") takes hold of him for the first time, not to relinquish its spell until he

has worked out the famous dying-away of the same word at the end of *Das Lied*.

These, then, are some of the implications that were released by this enterprise. As a performance, Bernstein's may well be the finest he has ever given. Some of the superabundant energy he brings to his work was spent (literally) in the huge effort that is required to get the bulk of the first movement off the ground and make it airborne. This was beneficial not only to the first, but also to the second, which was not pushed beyond the bounds of the sound appropriate to it. Its introspection was recreated as it had been created—with serenity of spirit and breadth of expression. He had the grace, too, not to italicize what was already underscored by Mahler, even at the climaxes where a brass choir in the audience area was added, Berlioz-like, to the engulfing sound from the stage.

Lacking any accessible evidence, it is impossible to say whether, in any of the infrequent performances of the Eighth, there has been one with a totally satisfactory group of soloists. The septet for



these five performances (a Wednesday one was added to the normal four of the subscription sequence) were well chosen within the range of reasonable accessibility. The voices were of the type required, if not always with the full range of power that was desired. In addition to the sopranos mentioned, Jennie Tourel sang many beautiful phrases in the first mezzo part and Beverly Wolff had the substance to make the other mezzo part meaningful if not always impressive. The men (George Shirley, tenor, John Boyden, baritone, and Ezio Flagello) were a little undersized, or off weight, to penetrate where I was sitting. However, they were all audible when audibility was of the essence, with an average of comprehension that was admirably high. It was, altogether, a noble endeavor valiantly achieved, in a consistent pattern for Bernstein as a musician who does best when he dares most.

The season's first resumption of last year's revival of *Samson et Dalila* at the Metropolitan showed many of its previous virtues and a modicum of its occasional liabilities. In the first category was the richly ornate scenic evocation of

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The Critics Changed Their Minds

HE WAS a maverick in American art, a painter who at best could make sparks fly, at worst was scarcely more than a hack illustrator. Painfully neglected during his life, he is little known to the general public even today, though museums are paying high prices for his rarely available canvases. John Quidor is an artist easy to overlook. His few remaining paintings are relatively small, often seriously darkened by age, and on first glance may seem trivial. Yet further acquaintance establishes him as an authentic original who made other nineteenth-century American genre painters—such popular figures as William Sidney Mount and Eastman Johnson—look tame.

The story of Quidor is romantic. Entirely forgotten after his death in 1881 at the age of eighty, he was rediscovered in 1942 by John Baur, then curator of painting at the Brooklyn Museum. Appropriately it is again Mr. Baur (now associate director of the Whitney Museum of American Art) who has written an excellent introduction to the catalogue accompanying an important Quidor exhibition currently on view at

and organized by the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York.

Strongly identified with the history of New York State, the artist was more than a clever illustrator, though he frankly borrowed his themes from Washington Irving. If most of his best works come from this source, they at least always bear the imprint of the painter's own wild exuberance. It is his sometimes wispy, sometimes tension-charged line that sets him apart as an artist and keeps his storytelling pictures from becoming mere adjuncts to literature. He was his own man—eccentric, bawdy, pungent. While certain canvases may seem tedious (witness the one religious painting in the show), others explode with vitality. When caustic irony guided his brush, he discarded the overexplicit genre technique that occupied his more popular contemporaries, a fact that perhaps explains his lack of public support.

Because his pictures were not in demand, Quidor made his living painting banners and fire-engine backs. Better known during his life as a folk artist, since his death he has graduated into a "fine artist." Considering how recently he died, this complete critical reversal is an interesting commentary on America's swiftly shifting art tastes. Very few of Quidor's paintings remain; only about thirty have been definitely located, though forty-five are recorded. It is a pity that none of his original banners or fire-engine decorations survive.

Quidor was at once too tempestuous and too earthy for Victorian America. Take, for example, the uninhibited scene of *Antony Van Corlear Brought into the Presence of Peter Stuyvesant*, a painting inspired by a specific passage from Washington Irving. The picture breaks loose from any set text to become an agitated composition with figures deftly deployed in space. It is neither illustration nor caricature, though it verges on both. Instead, it is a splendid baroque intermingling of dramatic personalities so interrelated as to force our eyes step by step to the rear of a rectangular room and finally out the window. For Quidor, depth was not merely a theatrical backdrop but a lively piercing of space. Light filters across the interior, recalling certain Dutch seventeenth-century Little Masters whose work the artist might have seen reproduced in popular engravings. The scene, vibrant with movement and light, is dependent on expert

draftsmanship. Notice how the two heavy foreground figures are depicted with solid contours, the frenetic Negro and old man with nervous staccato lines. Here, content directed technique. The painting is noisy and raucous, electric with interconnecting currents.

Quidor seems to have gloried in the deliberate bad taste that gave native American art much of its unique flavor. Certainly it is not this country's cautious nineteenth-century painters we remember with pride. It is more often the extremists. And Quidor was an extremist, a painter who lampooned his own period with buoyant energy. His special brand of obsessive mockery exposed human foibles of all kinds and all times.

Occasionally he could become a mystic. In *The Money Diggers* a tree gesticulates with human overtones. Sheer terror is communicated less by caricature than by the symbolism of an eerie landscape reminiscent of the romantic German painter Caspar David Friedrich (whose sophisticated work Quidor was not likely to have known). Though *The Money Diggers* again derives from Washington Irving, this time from his *Tales of a Traveller*, it is a picture that needs no literary support. Flickering with light, the night landscape is touched by a poetry that even the exaggerated figures cannot destroy. One might wish, however, that in this case the human element had been omitted, for a tendency toward overemphasis at times makes Quidor's work too obvious. And yet, as a rule, he was technically advanced beyond his period. (It is thought he stopped painting in 1867, fourteen years before he died.) The transparency of his pigment, the masterly use of line and space, the daring thrusts of his moving figures were all rarities in early nineteenth-century American art.

The Quidor exhibition, now in Utica, originally opened at New York's Whitney Museum and will later travel to Rochester and Albany. Sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts, this show gives evidence of that organization's determined emphasis on decentralization. Under its auspices, exhibitions that otherwise might not have been organized are circulated throughout the state. According to the director, John Hightower, "The Council is interested in reassessing earlier lesser-known but important New York State artists." To have backed the Quidor show is to have performed a valuable service, for this offbeat and none too familiar painter is an artist of stature and a provocative figure in New York's history. I would imagine that the exhibition will have more impact in upstate New York than in Manhattan, for the smaller cities are less surfeited with art and less dependent on eye-shattering novelties.

—KATHARINE KUH.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT No. 1168

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1168 will be found in the next issue.

BND CYHMF LHM DFFTBMFG

LFY CTJM RVUGDBM; ZNDCM

STUG TA VU LHM ZDBOMY LFY

FLGVHLCCW EHMAMH SMHBW.

Q. O. BN MUGMHGTF

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1167

A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with use.

—WASHINGTON IRVING.