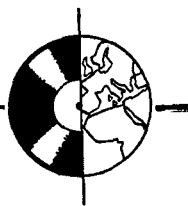


THE OTHER SIDE



Moses and Aaron, Tebaldi in *Don Carlo*

LONDON. THERE HAS BEEN a near-explosive quality about the dying weeks of the 1964-65 musical season, forcing even those sections of the press whose interest in music is usually confined to the pop charts to sit up and take notice, albeit for the wrong reasons! It was not Aldeburgh that caused such a stir, although this Festival of Britten is one of the very few annual events which really deserves the appellation of festival. Even the extraordinary cello marathon by Rostropovitch, currently filling the Royal Festival Hall, does not rate as front-page news, although the very idea of this one-man show embracing thirty-one compositions for cello and orchestra in the course of nine concerts is surely bizarre. No, it was not our quixotic visitor from the USSR but Covent Garden that hit the headlines, thanks to one of those four-letter words Fleet Street cannot resist: O-R-G-Y.

It was on June 28 that, after more than a year's preparation, the curtain at the Royal Opera House finally rose on Schönberg's *Moses and Aaron* before an audience studded with musical celebrities, among them Kodály and Walton, and including the heads of all the major European opera houses. When it descended at the end of Act 2 (no attempt was made to present Act 3, for which Schönberg wrote only the text—the latter was merely printed in the program-book), the cheers rang out for the excellent principals, Forbes Robinson (Moses) and Richard Lewis (Aaron), the astonishing chorus, conductor Georg Solti and his splendid orchestra, and for producer Peter Hall. It was obvious that Covent Garden had achieved one of the most notable triumphs in its history with this supposedly unperformable opera.

To get the record straight, this was in fact the third stage production the opera has so far had, though the first to use an English translation and certainly the first fully to realize Schönberg's scenic demands. There, indeed, lay the rub for, as soon as word got about that Peter Hall proposed to use the taxpayer's money to show the slaughter of animals and a sexual orgy culminating in the ritual killing of four naked virgins, those staunch defenders of our morals such as the *News of the World* went into action and worked themselves into such a frenzy that, on the opening night, Covent Garden was surrounded by police and every exit was besieged

by television cameras, bright lights, and interviewers.

I am delighted to report the abject failure of this disgraceful attempt to drag a great artistic event into the mire: those responsible only succeeded in making the present series of performances a total sell-out—thereby encouraging the Royal Opera House to plan a revival of the production next season or the year after that (originally Solti had considered the effort required for even a revival too great). In the event, the much-publicized orgy around the Golden Calf—though remarkably frank and uninhibited for a theater where, only sixteen years ago, the severed head of Jokanaan had to be hidden from the audience's view by a discreet piece of cloth!—commanded no more attention than Schönberg meant it to do; Peter Hall's brilliant production made this whole episode seem absolutely repellent and not in the least titillating, and it was his magnificent handling of the crowd scenes of Act I which really set the seal on one of the greatest theatrical experiences most of us have ever witnessed.

With a singing chorus of well over a hundred voices interspersed with a large crowd of supers, the stage resembled a seething cauldron of perpetual motion, while still enabling the incredibly complex choral writing to be performed with astonishing precision. In this context, the various miracles—rod into serpent, Moses's leprous hand, water turned to blood and back again to water—emerged as dramatic strokes of the first magnitude, and I am convinced that Hall's refusal to shirk the composer's scenic demands made it possible for the audience to come to terms with a score which might otherwise have been considered incomprehensible.

As for Solti and his musical staff, the mind boggles at their achievement in teaching this music to soloists, chorus and orchestra until they were able to perform it with such apparent confidence. There were a few questionable details, such as the use of electronic devices for dispersing the multiple voices from the Burning Bush to various points of the auditorium (from a design point of view, too, the Burning Bush and the Pillar of Fire represented the least successful aspects of John Bury's otherwise superbly imaginative sets). And this production proved yet again that the English language does not lend itself to

the Schönbergian device of *Sprechgesang*—except for a few sung bars, the entire part of Moses is delivered in this manner, and Forbes Robinson fought a valiant but losing battle to make it sound convincing. This role needs a protagonist of really towering personality—a Hotter, no less—if the glib Aaron (beautifully sung by Richard Lewis) is not to dominate the proceedings but, such minor reservations notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that, in making a popular triumph out of *Moses and Aaron*, Solti has crowned his Covent Garden tenure with a feat none but he would have dreamed possible.

It is also worth noting that, while these performances have been taking place at the Royal Opera House, the entire company under Solti has been engaged in its first major recording assignment at its rehearsal center in East London. The work in question is Verdi's *Don Carlo*, which Decca is recording absolutely complete and with a formidable cast including Tebaldi (Elisabetta), Grace Bumbry (Eboli), Bergonzi (Don Carlo), Fischer-Dieskau (Rodrigo), and Nicolai Ghiaurov (King Philip). Covent Garden's plans for the coming season, after two *Ring* cycles in the early autumn, feature a new production of *Simone Boccanegra*, which Gobbi will produce with himself in the title-role; there will also be a new *Flying Dutchman* with David Ward, a Solti-Visconti *Rosenkavalier* in which Sena Jurinac, long renowned for her Oktavian, will sing the Marschallin for the first time, and, on behalf of Joan Sutherland, Donizetti's *La Fille du Regiment* is to be revived after an absence of decades.

EMI's July releases are chiefly notable for two further discs in the *Music Today* series sponsored by the Gulbenkian Foundation. One of these is devoted to works by four British composers of the younger generation and offers eloquent testimony of the varied talents now at work in this country. But it is the companion disc, which takes us across the channel to France, that is likely to create a real stir since it contains, in addition to such interesting scores as Koechlin's *Les Bandar-Log* and *Le soleil des eaux* for soprano, tenor, bass chorus and orchestra by Pierre Boulez, one of the greatest works by the still controversial Olivier Messiaen. This is an orchestral score entitled *Chronochromie*, an incredibly complex creation inspired, as so often with Messiaen, by the sounds of nature—especially birdsong and the movement of water. In the splendid performance by the BBC Symphony under Dorati, beautifully recorded, it makes a quite astonishing impact: you may hate this strange music or find it absolutely fascinating—but you can hardly feel indifferent towards it!

—THOMAS HEINITZ.

Cheltenham Comes of Age

CHEL TENHAM, ENGLAND.

CHEL TENHAM is a beautiful town on the edge of the rolling Cotswold Hills, ninety miles west of London. Its imposing Regency buildings, and its street signs saying "Ladies' College—Please Drive Slowly," make an unlikely setting for the activities of the musical avant-garde. But for twenty-one successive years it has been the scene of a festival whose basic theme is "the presentation of new works by British composers and works by British composers of this century."

Some people feel that the avant-garde is too meagerly represented in the festival's programs, and certainly a good proportion of the music played could be regarded as *vieux jeu* in comparison with the latest offerings of Warsaw, Vienna, Cologne, Donaueschingen, or for that matter New York and Los Angeles. But then Cheltenham is probably realistic in its estimate of the center of gravity of contemporary British music: for ever since the sixteenth-century madrigalists, and perhaps even longer, British composers have been somewhere between twenty and eighty years behind the latest European developments.

The important thing to remember is that this is in no way a value judgment. After all, Bach was old-fashioned in his own day. Enough straws are flying in the same direction at this moment to suggest that the wind of musical progress may have changed in the last few years. The pendulum, of course, has swung far away from the romanticism of the late nineteenth century, and equally far from the neo-classicism of the Twenties. But there are signs that, having reached an extreme of tortured intellectualism in the work of Stockhausen and other total serialists, it is on its way back to a more central position of what, at the risk of being thought fuddy-duddy, I would describe as comparative sanity.

The extremes of style at this year's festival brought a big, romantically conceived piano and orchestral work by Alan Bush, and, in the same program, Peter Maxwell Davies's fiercely intellectual *St. Michael Sonata* for Seventeen Wind Instruments. Further underlining the diversity of contemporary British music was the juxtaposition, two evenings later, of Walton's Second Symphony with *Quincunx for Orchestra* by the English twelve-tone pioneer Elisabeth Lutyens and the British premiere of Roberto Gerhard's coloristic Concerto for Orchestra.

So far I have been theorizing, but I must not oversimplify. From the trend I have outlined, it would be impossible to deduce any consistent evaluations of the works premiered at the 1965 Festival. The first two orchestral works premiered

were the Second Symphony of Wilfred Josephs and the above-mentioned *Variations, Nocturne, and Finale on an English Sea-Song* by Alan Bush. Dr. Bush has done much for British music, both as a composer and as a teacher, but his new work seemed to me to fail of its own objective—which allowed my appraisal of that objective to recede into the background. The composer has set out to write an exhilarating virtuoso piece in the grand manner, but he has not achieved either the formal clarity or the beauty such a purpose demands.

Perhaps the reason I am not in complete sympathy with Bush's aims, quite apart from the question of his success in achieving them, is that the manner of his writing suggests, not so much a rejection, as an insufficient awareness of what is going on and has gone on elsewhere in the musical world. His style seems somehow unreal, like a religious faith embraced without the overcoming of any profound doubts. In this respect the Josephs Symphony is entirely different. This work, too, has strong links with tradition, witnessed not only by its medium but by the strong tonal elements of its idiom. But Josephs, though only thirty-seven, has been through the twelve-tone method and has come out the other side, and his musical language, as well as his formal technique, has been strengthened by principles derived from a system he now basically rejects.

The warmth with which the symphony was received by the audience, and the almost unanimous enthusiasm of press comment, set the position of contemporary composers in Britain in ironic relief: for like many other excellent works it was recently rejected by the BBC's reading panel, and thus cannot be broadcast over the national network. The premiere was relegated to regional wavelengths, and would not have taken place but for the enthusiasm and determination of the conductor, George Hurst, who led the combined forces of the BBC Northern and Midland Light orchestras in a magnificent performance. One cannot help wondering at the impression the BBC's rejection of Josephs's Symphony will make when his Requiem, which won the First International Composing Competition of the City of Milan, is premiered at La Scala in October.

On the other side of the stylistic fence, one of the most exciting events of the festival was the first performance of *Music for Albion Moonlight*, by twenty-seven-year-old David Bedford. Though it employed chance elements, this imaginative setting of four poems by Kenneth Patchen showed careful planning, and great aural resource too. Its shattering emotional impact was a valuable reminder that it is not the technique but the use made of it that counts.

—BERNARD JACOBSON.

Dartmouth

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Woodwind Quintet), a Sonata for Viola and Piano, a Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano, *Fibonacci-Mobile*, and his Seventh Quartet (Op. 96). Again, the variety and quality of Krenek's work made the evening a fascinating experience. Interest centered naturally on the world premiere of the *Fibonacci-Mobile* for String Quartet, Two Pianists and Coordinator. The title is derived from the so-called Fibonacci-Series, which is a row of numbers, each of which is the sum of its two precedents (for example: 1-1-2-3-5-8-13-21-34-55). Against the complete material, consisting of eighty-one measures, as played by the two pianists, the individual strings play various melodies which can easily be arranged in numerous juxtapositions; then against a different set of eighty-one measures played by the two pianists, the strings entering at different points play their own respective fragments. "Either complex," Krenek explains, "consists of five sections of 34, 21, 8 and 5 measures respectively. The musical material of these sections is the same, progressively condensed. The work is called 'mobile' because numerous combinations of the various elements may be used." Five versions of this interesting set of combinations were conducted by Krenek. To approach music with such a mathematical concept may seem at first glance to be productive of a most sterile and unmusical result. But not so. The material itself is fascinating, and Krenek, when explaining the process of composing the pieces, admitted that he was not sure exactly what would happen when all of the individual parts were put together. He was surprised and pleased at the way it evolved. In the repeated performances, as one becomes accustomed to various sequences, it becomes completely intriguing to hear how the different melodic lines are pitted against one another. It is really a maze of mobile counterpoint, and, while the result is not dissimilar to various aleatoric processes, it is the product of complete control. But who is to say that control need necessarily be dull? The work was received with great enthusiasm. It had a virtuoso performance by pianists Martin Canin and Anthony di Bonaventura and the Dartmouth String Quartet, composed of Stuart Canin, David Cerone, Ralph Hersh, and Paul Olefsky.

Krenek's *Pentagram* is a bright, intriguing *tour de force* which achieves brilliance and interest without undue exploration of instrumental possibilities, for he never pushes his instruments into weird ranges merely for tonal effects. Equally intriguing was the Trio, with violin, piano and clarinet providing