



## Sutherland as Donna Anna, Britten's "Rape"

JOAN SUTHERLAND had the finest hours of her New York career to date when she sang Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the Metropolitan for the first time. There could be no argument that this was the best *Don Giovanni* of the year (it was also the first); but it was, in some respects, the best sung in years, thanks to the exacting standard set by Miss Sutherland and the competitive response it aroused in a cast well disciplined by Karl Böhm.

For Miss Sutherland it was a chance to demonstrate many things about her artistry hitherto excluded by her Metropolitan round of *Lucias*, *Sonnambulas*, and *Traviatas*. One, and perhaps foremost among them, is that she has the pride in her profession and the respect for her colleagues to be "a member of the wedding" even if not the bride. Relieved of the burden of bearing the principal part of a *prima donna* opera, she took a normal natural place of equal among equals.

If her place was normal and natural for a Donna Anna, it could hardly—with that voice and technique—be an inconspicuous one. It was a model of vocal deportment from first to last, as conscientiously attentive to detail in the recitatives as in the two arias, and a rock of support in the ensembles throughout. Unlike some others who must labor to meet the requirements for "Or sai che l'onore," she slipped easily into the vocal gear it required; and her climaxing "Non mi dir" was a fulfillment of Mozartian purpose rarely, if ever, equaled since the Metropolitan resumed giving *Don Giovanni* regularly in the late Twenties.

What distinguishes Miss Sutherland from most of her predecessors in this role is the combination of flexibility with breadth in her vocal vocabulary. That is, she has much more flexibility than the average dramatic soprano who is drawn to the part; and much more dramatic accent than the average florid singer. It is out of such odd and unusual attributes that standards are born, and Miss Sutherland is Donna Joanna for this time. Of further advantage is the restricted range of movement and mobility the role embodies, meaning that she was asked to do nothing, dramatically, that was not well within her competence.

Generally speaking, the fullest response to the Sutherland order of vocalization came from Cesare Siepi, who had clearly applied some effort to making his sound lighter, more pliant, and pointed. He accomplished this without

relaxing any of the vigor or the vivacity in a characterization of Don Giovanni which is ever more close to the Pinza standard. New among the others were Alfredo Kraus as Don Ottavio and William Walker as Masetto, with Pilar Lorengar as Elvira, Ezio Flagello as Leporello, and Justino Diaz as the Commendatore. They had varying success with their solo obligations—Miss Lorengar, especially, was heavily burdened by the dramatic demands of the part—but in such episodes as the quartet of Act I, the "Mask Trio," and the sextet of Act II, the sounds they grouped around the strong supporting column provided by Miss Sutherland were uncommonly well blended. An exception to other inequalities was the Zerlina of Laurel Hurley, beautifully articulated and performed with a powerful kind of charm. Another conductor than Böhm might have fanned the occasional sparks into something like a blaze, but he did not, at least, dampen the glow that erupted now and then.

THE sublime to the ridiculous was encompassed within the same four walls in this week with the return of what the Met calls *Fledermaus*. Whereas it was the original dispensation of Rudolf Bing to make fun out of Johann Strauss, Jr.'s marvelous score with such qualified opera stars as Richard Tucker, Ljuba Welitsch, John Brownlee, and Set Svanholm, he is now making fun of that score with a variety of performers who barely qualify as satellites of others. It might be a pardonable conceit to present the barely audible Kitty Carlisle as Orlofsky in a cast strong enough to keep her afloat; but when she stands out from the others—the others should sit down. Among these others the best was Donald Gramm as Dr. Falke, for Arturo Sergi was a strangled Alfred, Mary Costa a vocally ill disposed burlesque-queen kind of Rosalinda, and John Reardon a poor imitation of a proper Eisenstein. Even Roberta Peters's chirp as Adele clearly needs retuning. In all, with Franz Allers's conducting proffering speed for verve and Garson Kanin's direction forsaking anything like subtlety for exaggeration, it was a woefully mediocre treatment of a work whose inclusion in the repertory was defended on the premise that it was "a masterpiece." That being the case, it should be treated like one.

It was almost, but not quite, like turning time backward to find an opera company in the City Center presenting Ben-

jamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. This time, however, it was not the New York City Opera but the Metropolitan National Company. Gone was the splash of the first season a year ago in the New York State Theater; gone, too, the bright hopes of a prolonged future (as recently announced, the company will suspend indefinitely at this season's end).

In the face of so much that was shadow rather than sunshine, the present personnel put itself seriously to the task in hand, with a spirit, professionalism, and complete devotion to the ensemble idea fostered by the company's directors, Risë Stevens and Michael Manuel. Under the skillful direction of Robert La Marchina, the presentation achieved high marks musically, if rather less dramatically. That is, after all, in line with the premise on which the company was founded—to enable singers to develop abilities (as actors) they might not otherwise achieve.

The best equipped of the performers were Joy Davidson as Lucretia and Theodore Lambrinos as the author of her shame and death (Tarquinius). Even these two, however, too often left a murk rather than a meaning in their articulation of the English text. Too often, also, such performers as Chris Lachona and Clarice Carson (Male and Female Chorus) were more intent on making agreeable vocal sounds than performing their function of delivering understandable comments on the action. Peter Van Ginkel was Collatinus, with Ronald Hedlund as Junius, and Ellen Berse and Linda Newman were Lucretia's attendants. Günther Rennert's direction and Alfred Siercke's décor qualified as functional.

The Schoenberg Violin Concerto had one of its infrequent performances locally in the latest sequence of Philharmonic concerts, and a very proficient one it was, too, with Leonard Bernstein as conductor and Zvi Zeitlin as soloist.

As it happens, both were on a parity of excellence, which served to point the paradox that the better such music is performed, the less it communicates. That is, the less doubt in the listener's mind that what he is hearing is exactly what the composer intended, the less confusion that what he is hearing is to his taste. The short, scrappy phrases, the angular rise and fall of patterns, the occasional interludes of altered pace and character were all clearly interrelated, but not the esthetic that determined their "inevitability." Zeitlin commands exceptional means for articulating every detail, but not the mesmerism to make them meaningful—if, indeed, such meaning exists. Bernstein muffled the impact of the possibly explosive work by surrounding it with blankets of Beethoven: the *Fidelio* Overture and the *Eroica* Symphony.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



# Books

SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR

## LITERARY HORIZONS

### Three Lives at the Crossroads

WHEN Richard Blackmur assembled the prefaces that Henry James had written for his works as they appeared in "the sumptuous, plum-colored, expensive New York Edition," he called the volume *The Art of the Novel*. The title makes large claims, and, as Wayne Booth demonstrates in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, James did not say the last word on the subject; but he did say many words that are still worth reading. In no small measure because of James's teachings, most novelists and would-be novelists today are acutely aware of the importance of devising the right way of telling a story. This is so true that the constant reader of fiction is surprised when he comes upon a novel whose author seems unconscious of the problem of form.

The "story" Arthur A. Cohen tells in *The Carpenter Years* (New American Library, \$4.50, to be published Feb. 13) seems promising; the *donnée*, as James would have said, has possibilities. Morris Edelman, an unsuccessful tax accountant with an unattractive wife and an ailing child, decides to change his identity. Vanishing from the sight of his family, he takes the name of Edgar Morrison, becomes a Christian, and eventually finds himself executive secretary of the YMCA in a small Pennsylvania city named Langham. He marries a local girl, who bears him two children. Some twenty years after running out on his family he learns that his son, Daniel Edelman, who is about to receive his Ph.D. in psychology, is coming to Langham to be interviewed for a job.

The novel opens on the day Edgar hears of his son's approach. Very disturbed, he drinks more than he is accustomed to, talks to various people, and gets home late to find that his wife has gone to look for him. While this business takes place, the reader learns from a series of flashbacks about the life of Edgar Morrison, born Morris Edelman.

The entire first section, called "Friday," is told from his point of view. So far, so good.

The second part, "Saturday," is told at first from Danny's point of view as he drives from New York City to Langham. The reader sees that there may be problems for the author in getting back to the father, but it does seem right that we should look, at least for a time, through Danny's eyes, and there are some enlightening flashback descriptions of his conversations with a psychiatrist. Then suddenly we are being told about the marriage of Edgar and Edwinna from the latter's point of view, and after that half a dozen minor characters are allowed to speak their pieces. As a result, the confrontation of Edgar and Danny loses force, and the end of the novel seems both implausible and pointless. (The title refers to the years in the life of Jesus before he began his ministry—"the unknown years, where all of us have to live and die most of our lives.")

Although he has written nonfiction, *The Carpenter Years* appears to be Arthur Cohen's first novel. *Go, Said the Bird* (Little, Brown, \$5.95) is Geoffrey Cotterell's ninth. In many minor ways he proves to be a practiced and resourceful novelist, but, surprisingly, he loses control of his story when he is about halfway through, just as Cohen does. In the end, thank goodness, he gets hold of the reins again, but only after the reader has been considerably tossed about.

*Go, Said the Bird* is a study of a young Englishman whose only ambition is to live the life of the rich. With good looks and good manners, though not much else, Phil Terriss is able to attach himself to the Milton family, becoming a slave to Mr. Milton, who is a wealthy manufacturer; an agreeable companion to Mrs. Milton, and a confidant of the three Milton children. For the first hundred pages or so the reader sees the situation solely through Phil's eyes; but then Cotterell

35 Literary Horizon: Granville Hicks reviews "The Carpenter Years," by Arthur A. Cohen; "Go, Said the Bird," by Geoffrey Cotterell; "A House in Order," by Nigel Dennis

36 Letters to the Book Review Editor

37 "Madame Sarah," by Cornelia Otis Skinner

38 "Letters of James Joyce," Vols. II and III, edited by Richard Ellmann

39 "Letters from Petrarch," selected and translated by Morris Bishop

40 Pick of the Paperbacks

42 "Blueprint for Peace," edited by Richard N. Gardner

47 "Steady Work: Essays in the Politics of Democratic Radicalism 1953-1966," by Irving Howe

48 "Men at Work," by Honor Tracy. "Prudence, Indeed," by Anne Bernays

49 SR's Check List of the Week's New Books

lets the point of view wander from one Milton to another, so that the novel is transformed into something like a family chronicle. We almost lose sight of Phil for a considerable period of time, and when he is brought back to the center of the stage, our interest in him has been largely dissipated.

THE title comes from a famous passage in T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton":

Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality.

It is obvious from the first that Phil Terriss lives in a fantasy world, that he is never what he thinks he is; but Cotterell wants to show us that what is true of Phil is also true of every member of the Milton family. He makes his point all right, but in such a clumsy, uneconomical fashion that it doesn't seem particularly important.

After two novels that fall short of their possibilities, it is a relief and a pleasure to come upon one in which means and ends seem perfectly adapted to one another. Nigel Dennis, who published a brilliant satirical novel, *Cards of Identity*, a decade ago, has now written *A House in Order* (Vanguard, \$4.95). It is