

# RECORDINGS REPORTS: Stage and Screen

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## WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

## REPORT

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*I Do! I Do!:* Music by Harvey Schmidt, lyrics by Tom Jones, Mary Martin and Robert Preston, with the orchestra of the Broadway production, John Lesko conducting, RCA Victor stereo, LSO 1128, \$5.79; mono, LOC 1128, \$4.79.

*I Do! I Do!* has nineteen songs, which probably sets some kind of a musical comedy record, and only two singers, which surely does. The performers, of course, make an illustrious pair. Mary Martin seems to be operating more on personality than voice, but if the latter is going, the former is more captivating than ever. Robert Preston is similarly vital and energetic as the male half of the couple whose marriage is chronicled—from first honeymoon to second. Of the aforementioned nineteen songs by the *Fantasticks* gentlemen, Schmidt and Jones, some are contrived, a few are maudlin, at least one is embarrassingly juvenile; but that still leaves room for a few that are brilliant numbers, and at those times, *I Do!* really does.

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*Walking Happy:* Music by James van Heusen, lyrics by Sammy Cahn. Louise Troy, Norman Wisdom, George Rose, Ed Bakey, Michael Berkson, and other members of the original Broadway cast. Capitol stereo, SVAS 2631, \$6.79; mono, VAS 2631, \$5.79.

The most attractive attributes of *Walking Happy* are Louise Troy, who speaks sternly but carries a sweet voice, and Norman Wisdom, whose infectious warmth is reminiscent of Anthony Newley in low gear. Their amiable performances make a routine score seem a bit less so, but aside from a couple of novelty numbers and one lovely ballad ("I Don't Think I'm in Love"), they are defeated by the lack of fresh material. George Rose and Gordon Dilworth are among the fine supporting players.

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*At the Drop of Another Hat:* Michael Flanders and Donald Swann performing their own words and music. Angel stereo, S 36388, \$5.79; mono, 36388, \$4.79.

Performers who would undertake to sing the finale of Mozart's Horn Concerto No. 4 ("Koechel Rating 495"), complete with cadenza, are obviously capable of anything. Flanders and Swann do, and they are. The duo, whose collective hat is currently in the Broadway ring, has been followed to these shores by a second "in performance" album that's almost as zany as the first. Swann, with his high-pitched wail and bouncy piano, and Flanders, with his gruff grumbings and incisive satire, tackle such tantalizing topics as olive-stuffing, fast flights, slow trains, and Russian camels in the desert. The fact that their doings were recorded in England means that a fair number of local jokes—about London neighborhoods and such—get lost in transit, but there is more than enough wit, wisdom, and buffoonery to provide a thoroughly engaging hour.

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*A Hand Is On the Gate:* Leon Bibb, Roscoe Lee Browne, Gloria Foster, Moses Gunn, Ellen Holly, James Earl Jones, Josephine Prémice, and Cicely Tyson. Arranged and directed by Mr. Browne, with music arranged by Bill Lee and Stuart Scharf. Verve-Folkways stereo, FVS 9040-2-OC, \$5.79; mono, FV 9040-2-OC, \$4.79.

This fascinating montage of Negro verse and song was first presented last August as a one-night-stand during the Shakespeare Festival in Central Park, then opened for a short off-Broadway run about a month later. There is so much of interest in this two-disc set—more than fifty poems by Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Le Roi Jones, and dozens of others, and a sparkling set of work chants, blues, spirituals, and dance tunes—that one can't even begin to single out highlights. The eight cast members are superb, both individually and together.

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*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum:* Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim; music direction and incidental music by Ken Thorne. Zero Mostel, Jack Gifford, Phil Silvers, Leon Greene, Michael Hordern, Annette Andre, Michael Crawford, and other members of the film cast. United Artists stereo, UAS 5144, \$5.79; mono, UAL 4144, \$4.79.

Zero Mostel and Jack Gifford are back in their Broadway roles, so there's not too much that could go wrong with the film adaptation of *A Funny Thing*, etc. The sound track album has the benefit, also, of likable singing by Michael Crawford and Annette Andre as the lovely lovers, and Leon Greene is delectably overbearing as the sturdy warrior who conquered Thrace thrice. Another bonus is a variety of "additional" music by Ken Thorne, including an excellent Overture-Fantasia of sorts which accompanies the long on-screen chase scene. The saddest thing that happened on the way to the film forum is that at least half the original songs were deleted; for completeness, there is still no substitute for the Broadway cast version.

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*The Bible . . . In the Beginning:* Music from the film score, composed by Toshiro Mayuzumi, conducted by Franco Ferrara; additional narration by John Huston. Twentieth Century-Fox stereo, S 4184, \$4.79; mono, 4184, \$3.79.

Toshiro Mayuzumi has created one of the most ambitious, effective, and dramatically successful scores that the movies have offered in recent years. The main theme has the broad lines and sonorous sweep that are *de rigueur* for Biblical epics, but there the clichés end. The Japanese composer uses exotic melodies, polytonality, electronic effects, striking rhythmic patterns, and powerful and imaginative orchestrations, blending them all to paint a series of vividly colorful musical images. The sound-track disc also has a highly commendable bonus: the story of the Creation, read by the film's multi-talented director, John Huston.

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*The Bible, and Other Music from the Screen's Great Epics:* arranged and conducted by David Rose. Capitol stereo, SR 2627, \$4.79; mono, T 2627, \$3.79.

Further biblical tales in the movies (*Ten Commandments*, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, *King of Kings*, et al.) along with such secular sagas as *Spartacus*, *Quo Vadis*, and *Ben Hur*, are recalled by veteran conductor David Rose. The arrangements seem rather anemic, set alongside the grandiose scorings of the original sound-track versions, but the music is certainly pleasant enough, and the Rose settings are tasteful if not dramatic.

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*A Man and a Woman, and Other Motion Picture Themes:* Ferrante and Teicher, pianists, with orchestra. United Artists stereo, UAS 6572, \$4.79; mono, UAL 3572, \$3.79.

Somebody out there must like Ferrante and Teicher's pop stylings of movie music, since the duopianists have probably sold more records of them than any other team since Eddy and MacDonald. The latest F&T collection is typical of the crop: Into the mold of glib, clever, tuneful arrangements have been poured such recent film favorites as the themes from *After the Fox*, *Is Paris Burning?* *Born Free*, *Hawaii*, and eight more.

—ROBERT SHERMAN.

# Ghost of "Semiramide"

By HERBERT WEINSTOCK

**J**OAN SUTHERLAND is a very popular star. So let's take a *bel canto* opera and record her in the leading role. Why not Rossini's *Semiramide*, known to the general public because of its overture and to enthusiasts of soprano singing because of the aria "Bel raggio lusinghier"? Fine. But find an Arsace who will not be blotted out by Sutherland's presence. Easy — there's Marilyn Horne. But *Semiramide* contains five other characters, not to mention the Ghost of Nino, and old Gioacchino expected them to do *bel canto* singing, too, even in small supporting roles.

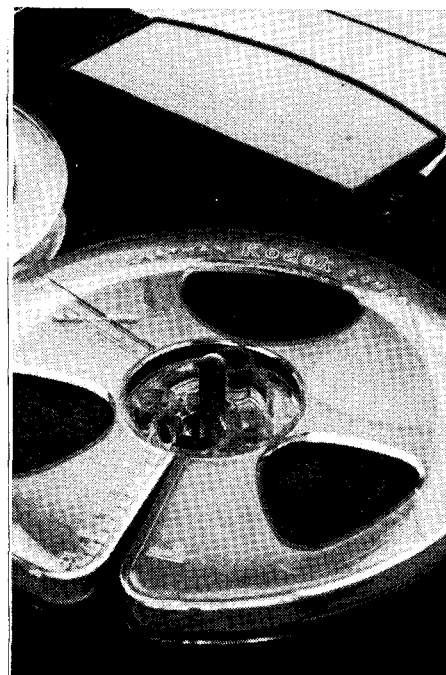
Well, I'll admit, that's more difficult, especially as three basses and two tenors are specified, and we all know that male singers who can really handle the *bel canto* agility aren't a dime—or sixpence, or even sixty lire — a dozen nowadays. But then—why didn't we think of it before?—we can edit the vocal lines down to life-size, and just cut the ridiculous difficulties in less important parts and places. We'll have to shorten the opera, in any case, to get it onto three LP sides. The result won't be exactly Rossini, but then who'll know the difference? We'll include with the records a booklet full of pictures and talk of the great singers of Rossini's time who could and did sing *Semiramide*: some of their glamour surely will rub off on those who sing it now. And, after all, we do have Joan Sutherland! And don't forget Marilyn Horne!

That imaginary conversation could well have been the background of this recording of *Semiramide* (London stereo, OSA 1383, \$14.91; mono, A 4383, \$11.91). This is a working model of various ways not to bring *Semiramide* to life and thus prove that it was worth recording at all. The opera has been cut until it bleeds, not only by the excision of whole arias, but by numerous elisions within the sections heard. The vocal lines have been altered—melodies actually rewritten—not only for the purpose of added ornamentation (of which Rossini scornfully disapproved by the time he composed this last of his Italian operas in 1823, and for which reason he carefully wrote out enough ornaments, and of the right sorts), but also to make many measures negotiable by singers (male) not equipped to sing the roles here assigned them. Rhythms have been flattened down, often by ignoring dotted

notes. Text words have been sacrificed to flashy, irrelevant effects. Scenes are sung out of proper sequence for unavowed reasons. Dynamic markings are only half observed. Telling phrases are destroyed by unwarranted changes of tempo and by gasps for breath. Unless the Ricordi edition with which I listened is very corrupt, some vocal lines even have been redivided among the singers and someone has "composed" several supererogatory new measures. Certainly this is not Rossini's *Semiramide* as it once was and perhaps yet may be again, but a version of that opera of a sort that would be loudly and publicly condemned if the composer were Verdi.

**R**ICHARD Bonynghe conducts with the merest workmanlike care, almost never addressing himself creatively to the real—that is, the expressive—musical problems of this rich, imaginative, varied score. Miss Sutherland sings along, most of the time, without clarity of rhythm, intonation, diction, or pronunciation, deadening many, many of Rossini's finest ideas. Then, with or without discernible expressive purpose, she takes off on a pyrotechnical display not in the score—and is astonishing. She astonishes, that is, in the first two or three of these ascents, which thereafter tend more and more toward monotony. Miss Horne sticks very closely to Rossini's score—as closely as the editing and conducting will let her—and therefore evokes the drama by simon-pure musical presentation. Joseph Rouleau, the Assur, and Spiro Malas, the Oroë, work very hard and sometimes succeed in not sounding overmatched and put upon. But Patricia Clark (Azema) and particularly John Serge (in what has been left intact of the role of Idreno) are, for a recording under these auspices, unbelievably bad and ineffectual. Michael Langdon does aptly the little that the Ghost of Nino is required to do.

In short, this recording of *Semiramide* seems to me to be a travesty of the original. Only when Marilyn Horne sings "Si, benedicte il genitore" as one imagines that Teresa Mariani may have sung it in 1823, or when she joins Miss Sutherland in a superior and accurate singing of the great duet "Alle più care immagini di pace," could the unwary extract from this performance any notion at all of what had made Rossini, by 1823, the most famous and popular living composer of opera.



## Clean cut



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