



THE THEATER

"Hell is Murky"

NORMAN MAILER's new play based on his 1955 novel, *The Deer Park*, is described by one of its characters as "a curious evening watching the damned chase after love." On the face of it this would seem true. For the evening at the Theatre De Lys is divided into eighty-eight short scenes in which we see a number of varyingly contaminated people unsatisfactorily coming to terms with sex, love, and the movie industry.

The play's protagonist, a blacklisted ex-motion picture director named Charles Eitel, has his creative energy reawakened by a marvelous sexual experience with another man's abandoned mistress. From this point on, we see in glimpses the progress of this newfound vitality through several phases that in the end lead to its destruction and Charles's death.

Unfortunately, the novelist appears to have been more interested in describing the whole spectacle of Hollywood at its worst than he does in committing himself to a deep exploration of any one of his major characters. These include the abandoned mistress Elena, played with a mixture of voluptuousness and coarseness by Rosemary Tory; Marion Faye, a bisexual pimp portrayed with savage mockery by Rip Torn; a Hollywood gossip columnist whose insidiousness is nicely caught by Margret O'Neill; and a movie mogul devastatingly satirized by Will Lee. Perhaps because Hugh Marlowe's soft-spoken and dreamy performance makes Eitel seem less vital and interesting than need be, the play's focus is further diffused. And the result is a constantly fascinating series of scenes leading to no conclusion.

Will Steven Armstrong's set reflects all the gaudy glamour of a cheap nightclub. The device of indicating on an electric sign how many scenes remain to be played helps to reassure us that our season in Mailer's hell is finite and to reconcile us to the play's jumps among seemingly unconnected events. And Leo Garen has directed the difficult work with dexterity, audacity, and a respect for whatever unstatable truths lie beneath Mailer's cynical and ribald surface views.

These views are frequently shocking and funny. But when the playwright tries to add them up at the end with wise-sounding statements such as, "The poor man went of that disease that goes by so many names, that law of life so cruel and so just that we must grow or else pay more for remaining the same,"

we are not convinced that this follows from what we have witnessed. Neither does the cryptic speech, "Sex is time, and time is the connection of new circuits," serve to clear up very much for us. Nevertheless, Mailer's wild swings at a sordid segment of our society are welcome in a theater that has been too much confining itself to jabbing and clinching.

ANOTHER kind of hell is defined in the Brandeis University Theatre production of Don Peterson's new play, *Does A Tiger Wear A Necktie?* In an institution for teen-age dope addicts we come to see that for these unfortunates hell is not so much their incarceration, but all the social forces which combine to make hope of kicking the narcotic habit when they return to the outside world almost nil. And since the action takes place before the recent hopeful experiments with methadone, it would seem to be accurate.

While the play offers us a panoramic view of the institution, it concentrates its dramatic exploration into two case histories. One involves a violent psychotic named Bickham, strongly portrayed by Peter MacLean. Bickham, who is searching for a father he can respect, responds to an understanding teacher whom he recognizes as being unrealistically idealistic. But he is destroyed by a psychiatrist who commits him to an insane asylum when Bickham goes berserk at the prospect of facing the hard realities of his desperately unsatisfactory situation.

The other case is that of two Negro addicts, Conrad and Linda, sensitively played by Clarence Williams III and Barbara Ann Teer. Conrad becomes convinced he can rehabilitate himself, but Linda knows that she cannot. Thus their love affair, which under ordinary circumstances would have led to a fine marriage, is here aborted. This is touching, and perhaps should have been the core rather than one aspect of the story.

The dialogue is pungent, and under Charles Werner Moore's direction there are many convincing performances from the student members of the company as well as from the professionals. Student designer David Sackeroff's setting also serves the play well. What the production cannot do is to make the play's montage of scenes go very far beyond being taken-for-granted demonstrations. It is colorful and convincing, but lacks a shape that might have made it more emotionally and intellectually provocative.

—HENRY HEWES.

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Chagall's "Magic Flute." Evans as Beckmesser

NEW YORK'S two Metropolitans became one (symbolically) with the introduction of Marc Chagall's production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at Lincoln Center. A one-man scenic show on a scale too grandiose for even the largest gallery of the Metropolitan Museum, it gave back to the eye the kind of luminous beauty and unflagging invention which characterizes Mozart's score itself. It is, indeed, doubtful that a better blend of images has been seen and heard at the Metropolitan Opera since Eugene Berman's *Don Giovanni*.

When the curtain rose on the "over-ture drop," it seemed that a part of the famous "yellow" wall painting which Chagall designed for the front of the house had been transferred to the stage. However, as scene succeeded scene, the difference became increasingly apparent: One was a job of work, done with good will and consummate technique; the other, an act of creation in which the heart participated as well as the hand and the mind.

By the end of the first act it had all that was required for a memorable success—taste, fantasy, suitability to the subject. But it was only as the reaches of the second act deepened that the magnitude of Chagall's accomplishment began to emerge. At the outset, the stage was framed with side hangings working the primary colors of his palette. Green, blue, and red were the dominant values for much of Act I, with stone gray where appropriate. But as one eye-filling drop succeeded another in Act II, and the oranges, yellows, purples, and golds began to show themselves, they still remained congruent with the basic side pieces and hangings. And the costumes, emerging from the same sense of hues and tints, made a mobile counterpoint to the solid base of the set pieces. It was, in short, in the great tradition of Russian stage painting from Leon Bakst down, through its cross fertilization, in Diaghilev ballet days, by Picasso, Benois, Bérard, etc. It is on such uncommon ground that the Metropolitan Museum and the Metropolitan Opera finally met. (The all-important link was the lighting board operated by Rudolph Kuntner.)

The set pieces themselves, sliding in and out on casters, or lowered unobtrusively into place, were adroitly conceived, in conjunction with stage director Günther Rennert, to recreate the mood and style of the classic stag-

ings of a century ago. That is to say, the magic in *The Magic Flute* was given full play in the fanciful amalgam of animal, mineral, and vegetable which Chagall controls so well. His birds and beasts were Mozart's own, from the tail feathers of Papageno's costume to the pair of lions which confronted him at his last "trial." Such a dazzling repertory of invention and elaboration defies verbalization: It has to be seen, and will be, for years to come.

Implementing the opportunities afforded by Chagall's lovely masterpiece was the true, natural action invented by Rennert and passed on to a cast of mostly able performers. It was vastly superior to anything Rennert has done previously in my view (whether in New York, Vancouver, or Glyndebourne), and qualified him as the day's leading authority on *Zauberflöte*. Inspired, no doubt, by the rich array of vistas around him, Rennert brought into being not only the allegorical aspects of the work, its solemnity and nobility, but also its sense of frolic and fun, mystery and wonder. As the late Bruno Walter wrote at the time of the Mozart bicentenary, in 1956, Mozart's last opera is the epitome of the man himself—his nobility represented by Tamino, his relish for life and simple pleasures embodied in Papageno. This range was inherent in Rennert's activation of the episodes invented by librettist Emanuel Schikaneder in the hope of making a success, but elevated into immortality by Mozart (who could not help himself). Little gay touches, such as having Papageno sit on the prompter's box to confide his problems to the audience, or having him pop out of sight through a trap when he defies the gods, were balanced by a simple sense of the sentiment inherent in the relationship of Pamina to Tamino.

It was a validation of all that Chagall imagined and Rennert composed to have so fine a humane heart to it all as Hermann Prey's Papageno. This engaging artist has been seen here previously as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* and the Count in *Figaro*, but he has found his life's vocation in a characterization of Papageno whose like defies recollection. He has not merely the voice—light but vibrant—for the music, and the body—awkward but agile—for the action, but also the face to portray wonder, cowardice, or delight with equal ease. When a baritone wins bravos with "Mädchen oder Weibchen," he is clearly in a class of his own.

He did, in fact, tower slyly over all the others, including Lucia Popp, who showed rather more dramatic temperament and vocal impact in her debut than the average Queen of the Night (and may very well do better as time passes): Nicolai Gedda as a pleasant but stiff Tamino; Pilar Lorengar as an often excellent, sometimes edgy, Pamina; and Jerome Hines, who was more imposing in presence than sound as Sarastro. Prey's Papageno deserved the best of Papagenas, and was rewarded with just that in Patricia Welting, a minuscule soprano who charmed the audience as well as her chosen man. Thoughtful casting also provided an excellent trio of ladies in Jean Fenn, Rosalind Elias, and Ruza Pospinova, and a superior Monostatos in Andrea Velis (vice Paul Franke). Whether it is better to have boy sopranos as the "Genii" than mature females was not quite resolved by what the three youngsters—Kevin Leftwich, Peter Herzberg, and John Bogart—did this time.

Decision must also be suspended on the kind of Metropolitan *Zauberflöte* Josef Krips may conduct when the tensions and uncertainties of a premiere on such a scale as this one are past. It was, in every stylistic respect, admirable in line, accent, and pace. What it drastically lacked was coordination between pit and stage. Whether this was a circumstance of the moment or related to some flaw in Krips's line of communication—his beat appeared dangerously low to be visible by the singers—can be only a speculation. Considering the combination of values brought together by Rudolf Bing, this must be rated his most sophisticated venture at the Metropolitan, one which will long outlive his own period of service.

A FRESH census of Nuremberg's population at the Metropolitan's latest nose count for *Die Meistersinger* revealed two new arrivals: One was Phyllis Curtin as daughter to Veit Pogner, the other a semi-ardent candidate for her hand in marriage, Sixtus Beckmesser, portrayed by Geraint Evans. When first heard at Covent Garden in the early Fifties, Evans was Night Watchman to a fine Beckmesser named Benno Kusche; out of these and other observations he has evolved a characterization wholly his own. It is a study on the order of his Falstaff and Leporello, a superlative instance of a man with more mind than voice making one indifferent to such imbalance. He has, actually, more voice than the average Beckmesser and a mind to use it productively, in projection of a *Stadtschreiber* who is whimsically pedantic and slightly effeminate at the same time. Taken together, they provide shades of meaning that Wagner might have imagined but which are seldom