



Verdi's "Iago"—Colgrass and du Pré

IT IS a not unknown fact about Verdi's next to last opera that he considered calling it *Iago*, before accepting the Italian equivalent of Shakespeare's *Othello*. But it was as *Iago* that it was played for the first time at the Lincoln Center Metropolitan. Any conductor, tenor, or soprano who accepts the participation of Tito Gobbi as the schemer runs that risk, and none of the others—whether James McCracken or Montserrat Caballé, as the foredoomed pair, or Zubin Mehta as conductor—had the artistry or sense of characterization to challenge his dominance.

This may sound as if Gobbi elbowed the others out of the way, took over a prominence not rightly his, or otherwise overstepped the bounds of proper operatic villainy. Far from it. His points were all made with the rapier-like thrust of purpose which spells Iago's gentlemanly decorum, with sly turns of the head, angles of the body, inclinations of the elbows—a practiced perfection of emphasis from the top of his well-coiffed head to the tips of his buffed fingers. Not only better made up and costumed than the previous best, it was also more strongly sung than on most prior occasions. This does not put Gobbi close, vocally, to the Warren class (light cruiser rather than dreadnought) but does suggest that he had expended all possible pains to be vocally right for this occasion. What he was doing, and doing well, even transmitted itself to Shirley Love, whose effort as Emilia was more consistently in the dramatic picture than may, most times, be the case with this character.

Had the other elements been of the Gobbi quality, this *Othello* might have been the *dramma per musica* as Boito conceived it and Verdi composed it. As they were not, it was merely one of the more typical evenings of Metropolitan Opera, with some risks better calculated than others. In the case of James McCracken there was, of course, no vocal risk at all. His voice now fills out the kind of burly outline he projects with his body, but without much addition of dramatic subtlety or refinement of the suffering inherent in the role. Against such an Iago as Gobbi's, the attack is much too frontal, head-on, aggressive to develop a credible duel of wits. It is all lunge and no parry. However, in terms of McCracken's conception, the performance he gives is rock solid.

In her first Desdemona, Mme. Caballé showed further the kind of qualifications

needed to succeed to Zinka Milanov's place in the affections of many Metropolitan Opera goers. They will hear the same comforting kind of tonal production and nondisturbing kind of character projection, whether the role is Leonore or Leonora, Marguerite or Desdemona. It was a foregone conclusion that she would sing the "Willow Song" and "Ave Maria" beautifully, but there is much more, dramatically, to the role than that. In the long run of her bland, well-formed, generally colorless phrases, it became rather easy to regard sympathetically Otello's growing anger with her. There must be a more subtle way of conveying innocence than the one she offered. Miss Love's Emilia had altogether more dramatic purpose as well as impact. In the subordinate but far from minor part of Cassio, Ermanno Lorenzi, a newcomer from Italy, showed too little vocally or dramatically to justify his importation for this speciality.

As for the kind of *Otello* conducted by Zubin Mehta, it could be described as rough but not ready. There was nothing in his over-muscular, under-refined treatment to counter the assertion that it was his first venture with the score any place. To undertake such a maiden effort at the Metropolitan, in the company of such experienced artists as Gobbi and McCracken, is an act of presumption that no amount of talent can justify.

The so-called "second cast" came into the Metropolitan's *Die Zauberflöte* for the third performance and the following broadcast, and showed itself capable of sustaining the quality standard of its predecessor. It is a cast wholly American, but its members met the challenge of a German text on even terms. In the instances of Judith Raskin as Pamina and John Macurdy as Sarastro, it achieved results of surer Mozartian quality than its predecessors, and George Shirley as Tamino was also admirable. A particular credit was earned by Theodor Uppman, the adept Papageno of many performances in English, who showed a fluent command of the German text, difficult as such an adaptation is. However, Roberta Peters had her downs as well as ups as Queen of the Night. A sampling of the fourth (broadcast) performance by ear alone suggested that what is really anti-Mozartian in this production is not the imaginative décor of Marc Chagall but the unimaginative conducting of Josef Krips.

Erich Leinsdorf's latest show of sam-

ples from his Boston line of novelties included perhaps the rarest of products in today's musical mart: a work which was not only new but good, not only ingenious but fanciful, not only witty but warm. It was the creation of thirty-five-year-old Michael Colgrass, titled *As Quiet As* in which are depicted, musically, the responses of a group of school children to the challenge of filling out that kind of analogy.

Among the likenesses he chose were *As Quiet As*—"A Leaf Turning Colors," "An Uninhabited Creek," "An Ant Walking," "Children Sleeping," "Time Passing," and "The First Star Coming Out." In all of them, Colgrass (trained as a percussion player) showed a highly sensitive ear for orchestral colorations and an engaging affection for wee definitions of sonority (fluttering strings and a tinkling bell for one, *spiccato* strings and harmonics in another, soft thumps of the timpani and veiled snores—by muted trumpets—in a third). The concluding coda using a double instrumental ensemble à la Ives (with Charles Wilson, who performed the celesta and harpsichord parts, serving as second conductor) did not quite provide the solution of an end. Taken as a whole, it was all as quiet as Colgrass growing. Leinsdorf, who directed the new work skillfully, prefaced it with a too strenuous Beethoven No. 2, and the concert also included Gina Bachauer as soloist in the Second Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto.

TWO cellists of note shared an evening when Jacqueline du Pré, the enormously gifted English virtuosa, made her first appearance with the New York Philharmonic in Lincoln Center, and Mstislav Rostropovich continued his tour of the solo literature with the London Symphony in Carnegie Hall. Miss du Pré's abundant gifts were no less apparent than at her American debut a year ago, but her playing of the Schumann Concerto with Leonard Bernstein suggested that she is, perhaps, taking her press notices too seriously. That is, she indulged in a good deal of weaving and bobbing in the name of "temperament," which more than once disrupted her aim where finger accuracy was concerned. In addition to sponsoring Piston's well-written "Variations," the latest Rostropovich program included Strauss's *Don Quixote*. It was, regrettably, lacking the pith and zest to be expected of a performer of his capacity, perhaps, in the first instance, because the orchestral playing directed by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky was lumpy and without a sure sense of direction. Glynne Adams drew a finer likeness of Sancho Panza on the viola than his famous associate did of Quixote on the cello.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



Where the Deer and the Fruit Bats Play

IT IS ONE THING to fly over the Western desert as I was doing the other morning while sipping a cup of coffee, and another thing to be able to walk in it as I found myself doing later the same afternoon. Frankly, if I had realized just what was lurking among the saguaro cactus and the boom trees, I might never have gotten farther into Tucson, Arizona, which is where my plane set down, than the tarmac. *Puercoespines*, *zorillos*, *coati-mundis*, *javelinas*—a regular psychedelic zoo.

There was scarcely time to do more than claim my bag, find a pad, and have what is so quaintly called out here in Marlboro country a chuck wagon lunch, before I was speeding along West Speedway Boulevard in the general direction of the Papago Indian Reservation. It seemed to me less a boulevard than a hard surface ribbon that had been poured into the middle of the mesquite and now served as a respectable trail for cars bound for an establishment called the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum.

There is, I assure you, nothing faintly resembling a Rembrandt in the Desert Museum, although they have on hand a dandy collection of original fruit bats, some nasty Mexican wolves, a matched set of rattlers, and a few mourning doves who give a long coo followed by three short ones presumably in memory of anyone who has stepped unwittingly into the rattlers' lair.

The Arizona-Sonora exhibition is in

effect a living museum, a reservation in which all sorts of beasts enjoy a reasonably exact, albeit controlled, arrangement of their normal lives on the desert. The peregrine falcon, which lives on prey that it seizes in a 160-mile-an-hour Stuka swoop, hasn't much room for a long run here, but it sits in majesty anyway, existing on pretty much the same diet it would get were it free to come screaming down from a high perch. Across the pathway, or more precisely, in the very next cage, dwell two sparrow hawks. On the day I was there they were at table, one clutching a recently deceased white mouse in its claws, the other dipping into *its* mousely morsel with about the same gusto with which the poker club goes after the post-game cold chicken. Otters, who are found on the Colorado River, were frolicking in a man-made pool. Min and Gus, a pair of antelope born in the Mingus Mountains last May, had found a home where they could play in the same compound with a number of resident deer. The skies were not cloudy, and it was difficult to be anything but at home on the range.

The coati-mundi, which looks like a raccoon and is called *coati* for short (or *chulos* in Spanish), live in larger families, dine on eggs, fruit, rodents, and lizards. In the wild of the desert they roam in groups of fifty, rather like teen-aged bands on Sunset Boulevard. Similarly, they grow their hair long, in the fashion of Persian cats, and they look like monkeys with a strain of ant eater



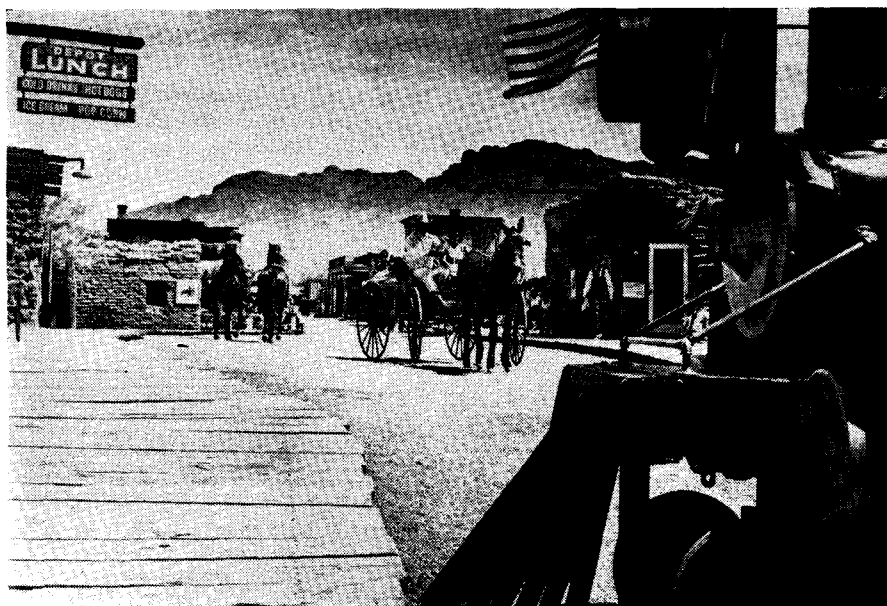
The Wishing Shrine, downtown Tucson—"America's upholstered outback."

thrown in. Antelope squirrels live in what is called Prairie Dog Village, scurrying about like ladies in the afternoon, occasionally sitting up on their hind legs to see where they are. Much of their time must be spent in housekeeping and home-building. According to antelope squirrel intelligence, which is dispensed on the scene, one prairie dog village—really a city—extended over an enormous area 1,000 miles long and 250 miles wide, holding a population of 400 million. Well, that's what my notes say, although as I reflect on it now, the whole idea sounds incredible.

A *javelina*, in this near-to-Mexico locale, would be known as a wild boar in other parts. Some members of that bristly tribe are in pens on the property. So are coyotes, whose yapping is said to be the song of the West, and mountain lions, or pumas, which weigh more than 200 pounds and can leap forty feet for dinner. Jaguars are the largest cats in the hemisphere, weighing 300 pounds, and inhabiting the crannies of southern Arizona, New Mexico, parts of Texas, and lands south clear to Argentina.

I had the impression that large black bears worked the roads of Yellowstone, wandered north to the precincts of Glacier Park when the tourist season began, and were squatters on the public lands of Alaska, to mention a few habitats that came to mind. I had no idea at all that they, too, were in Arizona, but they are, dwelling in the cool of the mountains.

Oddly enough, none of these large animals struck as much terror in my imaginative heart as the Mexican wolves, which walked relentlessly in a pack, always at double-quick time, nearly at a trot, searching, turning, peering, waiting, the mayhem coiled and ready, the madness to kill held only by the thinnest thread, marching and countermarching—they would have chain-smoked if they had known how—like penned mobsters of three decades ago waiting for the mouthpiece to get them sprung so they could go shoot up the South Side. On the floor of the bare cage were the remain-



In Old Tucson—Live actors using blank cartridges act out an open-air playlet several times a day.