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## Booked for Travel

David Butwin

### Palmy Days in Ireland

SOMETIMES A STRANGER arrives in a new town and senses even before he has stepped out of his car that the place is alive and he will not be bored. My built-in action meter had already jumped 10 points before I crossed a bridge over the River Slaney on the road into Wexford, a seacoast town in the southeast corner of Ireland.

This feeling, I confess, was not altogether intuitive. My arrival coincided not only with a Halloween Friday night but with the closing weekend of the Wexford Festival, Ireland's answer to Spoleto. Opera is the festival's main event, and has been for eighteen years, but the people who yearly threaten to burst the town's crumbling Norman seams doubtless show more interest in the extracurricular activities. At no small enticement, hotel bars waive their customary closing regulations during the ten-day assault.

Wexford on that last weekend in October was blessed with a streak of unseasonably balmy weather, and although the wind blew stiffly off the coast, it carried an almost tropical scent. This was not imagined, for when my eyes had adjusted to the light of the following day I perceived a species of palm tree posted ever so often along the shoreline, causing me to wonder how far I had really traveled the night before. Ireland's southernmost extremities support several subtropical flora, including the strawberry tree and the cordyline palm. These were introduced by nineteenth-century landowners who must have been inspired by County Wexford's mild win-

ters, a relative absence of frost, the magical powers of the Gulf Stream, and perhaps a vision of Waikiki on the Irish Sea.

Another mystery one might have pondered that weekend was where all the celebrants put themselves after the pubs had closed and the singing had died away. Wexford's two worthy hotels, the Talbot and White's, hold a combined 128 rooms, and three others within stumbling distance of town—the Castle Motor Inn, Strand Hotel, and Great Southern Inn—pack an additional 200 or so. That left a few score of private houses dusted off for the occasion by the good ladies of Wexford, but it's doubtful that Mrs. Fortune, Mrs. Kehoe, Mrs. Malone, Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Walsh, and their neighbors found room for all the strays.

Even in a town of Wexford's cramped proportions and limited amenities, it was difficult to settle into one drinking station, knowing another might be hitting a higher key. A consolation, for those in a sampling mood, was the close proximity of the three or four traditional spots. My weekend began at Des Corish's pub on Main Street, a byway barely wide enough to accommodate two passing tipplers, let alone a pair of vehicles. Des Corish's father was once mayor of Wexford for twenty-five years, and his brother Brendan is the leader of Ireland's Labor Party; so the atmosphere, on any weekend, is abrim with political talk.

Brendan was home for the holiday, holding forth at the bar. He is a big man with bushy eyebrows and white hair. His features and his politics, too,





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walks of life, without men.

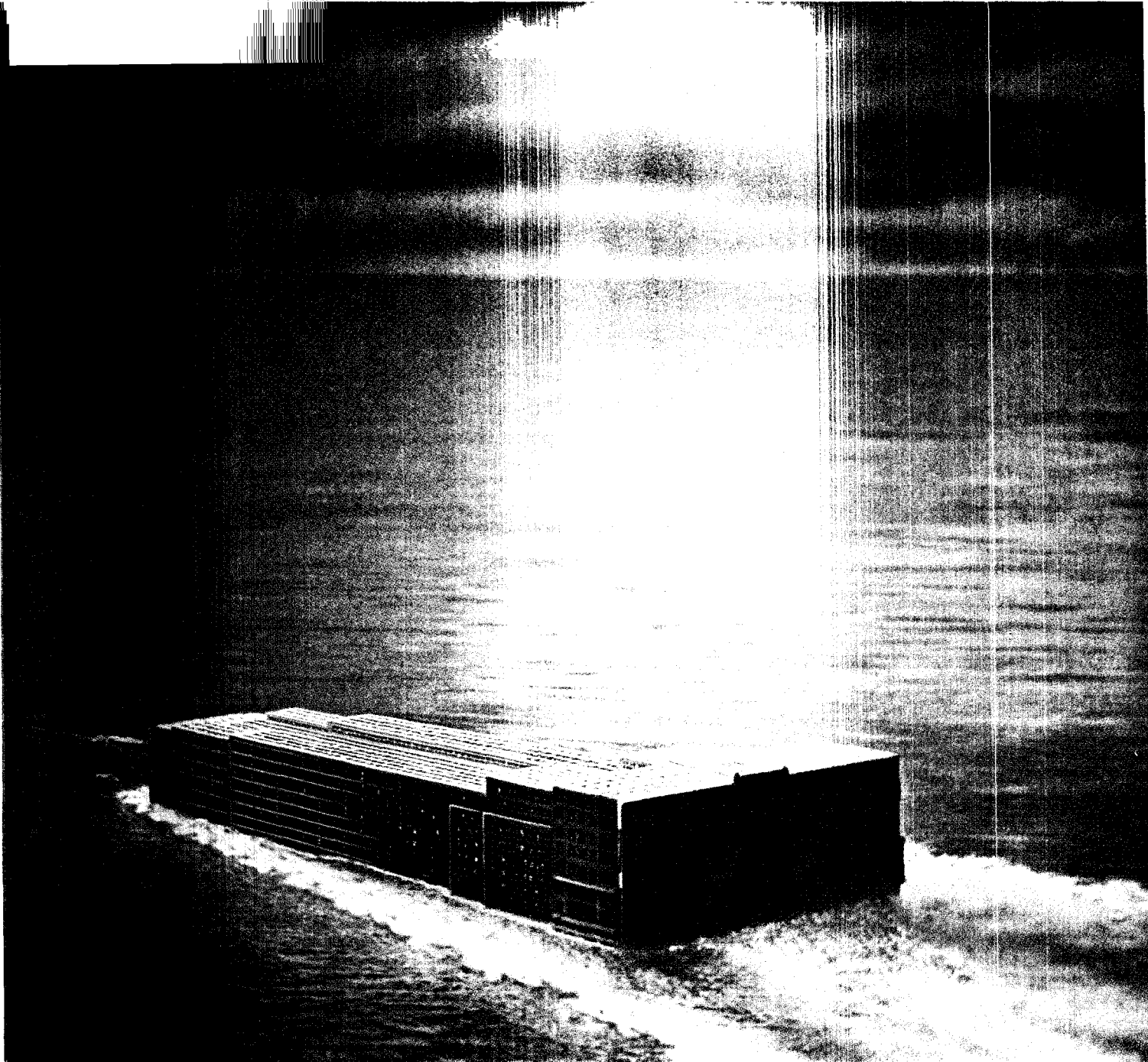
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remind one of New York's Paul O'Dwyer. The pub was filling up by the minute. Along the walls housewives and other townsfolk sat at small tables and lifted their steins with mechanical regularity, looking only slightly bemused by the waves of outsiders surging before them.

I thought the man standing next to me appeared a bit awed by the commotion, until he was introduced as T. F. Byrne, the mayor of Wexford. No doubt he had stood a similar watch at festivals past. Lounging against a wall, dragging on a beer, he seemed to relish the anonymity of a bystander. One might have expected a mayor to plunge into a crowd of visitors and apply a backslapping promotion job, but Byrne looked content.

He did assert his executive authority moments later when a band of yelping children pushed through the side door and began to scream for Halloween booty. I threw a few coins their way, but that only turned them into bigger game hunters. I said I was out of money. "If you don't have no money," shrieked a tiny blonde lass, "you wouldn't be in there drinking beer." With that the mayor stepped in. "Come on now," he said calmly, "mind your fingers," and turned the little smudge-faces into the night.

From behind, I felt a draft issuing from the front door, and looked around to see a parade of men and women in formal evening attire filter into the room. Bangled and spangled, they had trooped down from the Theatre Royal to seek refreshment during an intermission of Verdi's *Luisa Miller*. Corish's always does a big business during opera season because it is the closest pub to the theater, a two-minute walk at a brisk, gown-raising pace.

When the opera crowd had left, the Corish brothers cleared a channel through the sea of patrons and led the way around the back of the bar to an adjoining room, where a singing contest was about to erupt. I talked with Brendan Corish while the room filled up, and he recalled Saint Patrick's Day speeches he had made in America and a snub he had received from a Midwest state because of his socialist beliefs. I asked if he admired any American politicians, and he lowered his head and thought for a long moment. "Well, you see, he's dead."

"Jack?" I asked.

"Yeah, Jacky."

John F. Kennedy was—and perhaps still is—the most popular figure in County Wexford. He is the favorite son. Kennedy's great-grandfather left the little thatched homestead at Dunganstown near New Ross more than a century ago, but the people of Wexford talk of the Kennedys as though they

had never departed Ireland, as though Jack and Bobby were still alive. One topic you seldom hear discussed in Ireland these days is the Chappaquiddick incident. Many Irish seem to think, if they don't talk about it and don't read about it, Teddy's trouble will go away.

In the back room, Des Corish led off the contest with "Swanee," and Philly McGuire, a local pudding vendor, followed up with "Scarlet Ribbons," Anna Dillon, Corish's fetching barwoman, belted out "I Enjoy Being a Girl," and I was beginning to wonder if this was Ireland. The bar stopped pouring drinks during the singing, to the considerable dismay of an old man with ruddy face and black brows. Afterward he was still complaining bitterly, instead of ordering a round or two to catch up with lost time. "But couldn't you have served me on the q.t.?" he asked the barman over and over. From Corish's I went to White's, and last to the Talbot; there was no letup.

Wexford's summery breezes provided rejuvenation on Saturday, All Saints' Day. I drove to the palmiest corner of Ireland, passing on the way huge heaps of sugar beets piled beside the road like wooden blocks. Rosslare, ten miles from Wexford, boasts the most sunshine and least rainfall in Ireland, and on this first day of November it was pleasant enough to lie on the beach and contemplate a swim. Remembering even calmer days than this, Bernard Shaw once said: "I was lost in dreams there. One cannot work in a place of such infinite peace."

Back at the Talbot in midafternoon, I joined Brian O'Kennedy, a comical Wexford man who leads tours of the surrounding countryside in his red minibus, doubtless benefiting from his astonishing resemblance to the Kennedy brothers, particularly Jack. "I did look like him until I got my teeth kicked out," O'Kennedy said, baring a gap caused a few weeks earlier by an aggressive horse. Though he can't trace his ancestry directly to the Kennedys, Brian is rather convinced of the kinship, and to look at his profile—the nose, the head—one would hesitate to argue the matter. O'Kennedy has perhaps extended the image by styling his hair like the late President's, but one could not otherwise accuse him of exploiting the sentimental attraction. He is a puckish sort, not given to maudlin reflections.

Brian drove the twenty-five miles southwest from Wexford to the John F. Kennedy Park, a rolling 140-acre meadow overlooked by the brooding escarpment of Slieve Coillte. Trees and shrubs from five continents are slowly climbing above the tender green acreage, some still centuries away from full growth. The park was opened on

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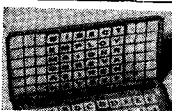
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May 29, 1968, by Eamon de Valera, the President of Ireland. Mrs. Sargent Shriver was there to attend the dedication; the first choice, Bobby Kennedy, begged off so he could campaign in California. From a ridge near the peak of the sloping park we looked down on the valleys of the Barrow, Nore, and Suir Rivers ("the Three Sisters") glinting in the late afternoon sun, and across to neighboring Kilkenny County.

Mary Ryan, a second cousin to the late President Kennedy, lives a short distance from the park in a house beside the Kennedy homestead. On her walls are posters of Jack and Bobby and photos of the President's visit in June 1963. Mary Ryan sat in a chair and looked straight ahead. She is an old woman, too old to burden with questions.

**I**n the tiny Kennedy homestead of whitewashed stone and green trim, there are Kennedy key chains and other trinkets for sale, going items during summer's tourist pilgrimages. I couldn't wait to get back on the road, the very road Patrick Kennedy must have taken the day he left Dungans-town for good. We swept past hoary oaks and chestnuts, stone houses decaying by the roadside, and around a bend we came upon a farmer, a gun over his shoulder and two dogs at his side.

That night I crowded into the Theatre Royal with 450 or so temporary abstainers to see the Haydn comic opera *L'Infedeltà delusa*, by far the more popular of the two works performed this year. Neither escaped the barbs of Irish newspaper critics, who lit into the director, Brian Dickie, for bad costuming, psychedelic settings, and the extensive use of candles and torches in a theater susceptible to fire. Probably the lightest moment of a weightless evening was provided by a young lover who, inspecting the contents of his picnic basket, held aloft a familiar brown bottle and piped: "Guinness is good for you?" That's an old Guinness sale's slogan, but its resurrection on stage didn't please officials of the Dublin brewery that rescued the festival from extinction six years ago and has helped bankroll it ever since. "We didn't make it up," a Guinness man told me. "Somebody in the cast dreamed it up during a rehearsal. We tried to stop it."

I can attest to the theater's low safety standards, for once or twice the connected row seats in which I was sitting nearly tumbled over with laughter, and when the show let out, we 450 waited interminably to clear the narrow exits. The sad result was that Des Corish's had closed by then.

## Manner of Speaking

*Continued from page 16*

clean-cut, high-minded, shoulders-back, chin-out air of busy hypocrisy that I hadn't seen or talked to Ague in weeks, and that whatever he had said, he was the only one who had said it.

Please don't think I admire you less if I suggest that maybe you have had enough practice on the domestic scene. Isn't it time for a little applied sneakiness on the international level? I know you have a whole mess of sneaky handy men that came with your lease. Couldn't you send one to out-sneak Hanoi, and maybe one to Greece and the Middle East, and some of the rest to Cuba, Biafra, Russia, Taiwan, Red China, and so forth? Bring that off, and I don't see how anyone could doubt your peerlessness.

Meanwhile I certainly would be grateful if you would send me some pamphlets on how to be peerless around the house, and on how to get all my querulous commentators to gag themselves.

I've tried, my secretary has tried, Spiral Ague has done as well as anyone could expect, and I even hid a tape player in the dummy of my Silent Majority. The trouble is that dummies talk only when the button is pressed, and the button always makes a loud click. This generation of kids, alas, has a fantastic ear for the sound of a button-click. Drat their impudent snobbery, they have even memorized all the tapes, and they chant them at me in rock-rhythm whenever I switch my dummy on.

That's why I keep dreaming of a dummy with a real voice in it. That would make those impudent snobs sit up and listen! Besides, if you put a real voice into it, there is always a good chance that it might stop being a dummy. I guess I really want to say that I hunger for a real voice. I know that if I once heard one I might stop waking up in the morning feeling at least inadequate and probably fictitious. I think I might even begin to feel real, even if I had to give up the dream of being peerless.

There must be a real voice somewhere inside one of your unused PR images. I write in the hope you might be persuaded to try it sometime. The man in the biggest house in the world should be able to say something real to the people in the little houses. I, for one, would like you to know that I will be waiting to hear what it might be, and that I will be more than eager to cheer for anything real.

In sympathy and admiration, sir, I remain,  
Yours hopefully,  
John Q. Citizen

# World of Dance

Walter Terry

## Festival in Brooklyn

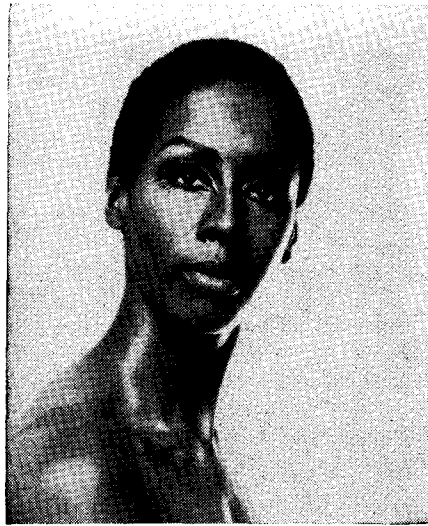
THE Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, in peak form with the finest complement of dancers it has ever had, was the third major company to take part in the ten-week Festival of Dance (the second annual festival and one supported by a substantial grant from the Rockefeller Foundation) held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The groups, each allotted a two-week season, are the new Eliot Feld American Ballet Company, the Harkness Ballet, and the Ailey troupe (their stint is completed), the American Ballet Theatre (now ending its engagement), and Merce Cunningham (to come on January 5).

The major new work of the racially integrated, but mainly black, Ailey company was *Masekela Langage*, choreographed by the director himself to music of the South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, with costumes by Christina Giannini and lighting by Gilbert Hemsley. It is a notable work, quite as powerful as Ailey's *Revelations*, rooted in Negro spirituals, now a classic in the world of dance, but different. *Revelations* is folk recollection, sad, devout, funny, joyful. *Masekela Langage* is now-commentary, biting and restless and even violent at times, about people instead of folk.

The setting is a saloon, in a tropical or semi-tropical climate. The ceiling fans turn sluggishly to stir the sultry air, and slatted blinds keep out the sun and the heat. There are chairs, a table, a juke box, and the action is separated into vignettes, seemingly distinct personal dramas or reactions, but all encompassed by the dance hall, all strangely intermingled.

A girl, comfortably stoned, swings her hips as she crosses and recrosses the floor; two men pull chairs before the juke box and worship it; a girl, all in black, lets us see her lonely soul; there is itinerant courtship, and there is a man, bloodied, who comes in to die.

Watching and hearing *Masekela Langage*, one might say that here is a club in a native section of South Africa. But then, there are whites present; so could it be America in a sordid but gaudy scene? Or is Ailey saying that this is life with introspection, introversion, loneliness in the midst of conviviality, shaking hips, and the shudder of death? It is a stirring work, for it succeeds in being entertaining and disturbing at the same time, and that, in



Judith Jamison, principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater — "Bravissima!"

the classical sense, is what theater is all about.

Praise is due every performer in *Masekela Langage*, but I would be remiss if I did not single out Judith Jamison for special attention. Her solo of agonized, but curiously contained, loneliness was brilliantly conceived—but then this might have been expected of a young woman who is darkly beautiful, whose technique is dazzling, and whose artistry makes her the undisputed *prima* of the Ailey company.

Miss Jamison, handsomely assisted by Dudley Williams, was there to be watched in Michael Smuin's new *Pa-*



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*nambi*, but, unfortunately, it is a ballet that completely misses its mark. Smuin, one of the best of our newest (and highly selective) crop of choreographers, was defeated by two elements: the first was the music of Alberto Ginastera, which is so overwhelming aurally that it makes anything of a kinetic nature seem like a feeble echo; and the second was a surface treatment of the primitive (this approach trapped Eliot Feld in his *Pagan Spring*) that settled for surface patterns instead of dynamisms, for attitudes instead of contents. What the dismally inappropriate choreography failed to perceive was captured in Jim Housley's projected settings, especially the final one that celebrated the results of innocent fructification in brilliant leaves, in glorious flowers, in nature's unmatched patterns.

Another new work was Pauline Koner's *pas de deux* in modern style, *Poeme*, exquisitely danced by Linda Kent (white) and George Faison (black). Miss Koner, a choreographic craftsman of high repute and a sensitive artist, fashioned her movement patterns on the shapes and on the gestural characteristics of these two dancing bodies. The result was a work that was polished to a delicate luster and in which flowing movement gave a songlike cadence to the total action. Indeed, the flow is literally given physical substance in the form of a filmy pink scarf—it is not only sewn to the costume (and is an integral part of it) that Miss Kent wears, but it disappears, at the other end, in the general direction of heaven (in this case, upstage left).

The scarf is most effective as part of this lyrical composition. Miss Koner herself, some years ago, used a scarf of heavier material that stretched across the stage, but used it for terrifyingly dramatic effects in her own solo, *Cassandra*. The musical setting for the new *Poeme* is the second movement of Samuel Barber's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (this is the movement in which the flute assumes dominance).

A fourth new work, Richard Wagner's *Threnody*, to music of Tadeusz Baird, completed the roster of new additions to the repertory, and I shall hope to comment upon it on another occasion. But for the moment, it is important to cheer Mr. Ailey himself for a brilliant new creation, *Masekela Langage*, and to hail the Ailey dancers for giving hardy travelers to Brooklyn a cornucopia of good dance reasons to make the journey worthwhile time and time again for the two-week period. So *bravo* to the dancers and the fine stage crew, and an extra special *bravissima* to the captivating Miss Jamison.



# Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

## Casadesus chez Szell; Curtin for Finnila

ALMOST ANY performance that brings George Szell as conductor together with Robert Casadesus as piano soloist is occasion for a celebration, but the most recent was particularly so. It provided for a New York observance of the pianist's seventieth birthday, in a style suitable to his worth. It was spent among friends (four Philharmonic audiences), with Casadesus performing music to which he is devoted (the D-major Concerto of Mozart) or listening to music he had composed (the B-flat Suite for Orchestra). Last, if this time perhaps least, he also got paid for it.

What matter if Casadesus is now nearer seventy-one than seventy, inasmuch as the date of his birth was April 7, 1899? This only added slightly to the admiration he merits for commanding as much agility as he possesses knowledge. This need not be viewed as some historical phenomenon, for the late Wilhelm Backhaus was giving recitals

only a week before he died recently in his eighty-fifth year, and there is no telling how long Artur Rubinstein, who was entering his teens when Casadesus was born, will continue to concertize. He is merely moving upward toward an even more exclusive company than the one he leaves behind.

It was appropriate, in the circumstances, that the choice of a concerto was the happy one that Mozart wrote in 1788, a radiant, coruscating, seraphically beautiful work that reflects in every detail the practiced hand that had previously produced twenty-five or so similar scores. As Shakespeare alternated comedies and tragedies among his output, so Mozart was capable of injecting his subjective state of mind into what he wrote, or rejecting it completely, without in the least compromising a grain of the artistry with which a particular result was accomplished.

In this instance, though his personal fortunes were low, his artistic impulses were of a height to accommodate every flight of which Casadesus

and Szell were capable. Rejecting the temptation either to dramatize the undramatic or to prettify the exquisitely decorative, they made a delight of the work's science, and a science of the work's delight. Nothing unimportant was slighted, nothing important overstated. The outcome was an exhilarating instance of craft seasoned by experience, the interpreter's age enlivened by the perpetual youth of what he interpreted. As an instance of experienced collaboration, was it an illusion that Casadesus trilled for an extra beat (after the cadenza in the first movement) before Szell picked him up, or did the collusion occur a fraction sooner? Whatever it was, the narrow gulf was quickly bridged, the pieces falling swiftly into place as the necessary adjustment was swiftly made and deftly sustained.

The most gratifying moments came in the slow movement, about whose notation Mozart was either so rushed or so casual that he did not write out the left-hand part for the soloist, or even add the designation *Larghetto* (which it now bears). But there was nothing in the least casual about the Szell-Casadesus reconstruction of the patterns with which they had to work, from the beautifully even, rhythmically regular articulation of the opening melody to the maintenance of mood throughout. Should one be determined to find, in the musical patterns, the justification for the title the work bears in several languages (for which "Coronation" is the closest English equivalent), the gaily scintillating finale typifies the crown it wears. The jeweled execution was accordingly appropriate.

Casadesus had his moments of misgauged pianistic aim here and there, indicative, perhaps, of the tribute age pays to youth for experience. In the aggregate, however, it was a performance of a quality that the little girl sitting two seats away, who was bobbing and weaving to each rhythmic impulse, may remember when she is older (if she is fortunate) than either principal. The program began with a sophisticated if staid playing of Haydn's G-major (No. 88) Symphony, and after the well-designed, non-distinctive suite of Casadesus, concluded with the second suite Ravel made from his *Daphnis et Chloé* ballet score.

The following space was reserved for a comment on the debut recital in Alice Tully Hall of Birgit Finnila, a Swedish-born mezzo who has performed with an increasing number of orchestras in this country. However, Miss Finnila became a virus victim and was unable to perform, Phyllis Curtin deputizing for her.



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