

Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

"Parsifal," Pure and Simple; David Gilbert, Conductor

THE METROPOLITAN at last owns what it has lacked for many a long season (and some short ones, too): a newly designed, thoughtfully produced *Parsifal*, with a cast of mostly capable performers and a few outstanding ones. The pictorially handsome and thoroughly stageworthy production (underwritten by Mrs. DeWitt Wallace) is the work of the dependable Robert O'Hearn, the well-conceived action directed by Nathaniel Merrill. Together they have evolved a blend of old and new values (the use of the revolving stage is especially apt for serving Wagner's "transformations" in Acts I and III smoothly and fluidly) that should enrich the theater for years to come.

Aside from a tendency to the fashionably dim *chiaroscuro* (which is much more *oscuro* than *chiaro*), O'Hearn's designs tread a well-plotted course between the realistic and the symbolic. Some may find the lake of Act I located in the wrong place (at stage rear, with the result that the procession bearing Amfortas enters from the audience's right and detours to its left) and the verdure appropriate to the "Good Friday Scene" of Act III mostly token; but there are dignity, spaciousness, and the sense of eternity overall. To ask much more of a *Parsifal* conception would be to look for Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig in the same being.

Outstanding in the wholly new cast were Christa Ludwig as a pocket-sized, admirably believable Kundry; Cesare Siepi, singing in German for the first time and making a warmly appealing success of his Gurnemanz; and the new Swedish tenor Helge Brilioth, in his debut as Parsifal. It is natural to group them together, for each—no matter what idiosyncrasies—is a thoroughly schooled technician, with nary a bark nor a bite to roughen the lines of some of Wagner's most beautiful vocal writing. The compliment would have to be amended drastically for Thomas Stewart, a rather dry-sounding Amfortas, and Ezio Flagello, an almost overmellow Klingsor. As usual, John Macurdy produced a superior sound for his part, which in this instance is Titirel.

A believable, trim, and youngish Parsifal, Brilioth produces a sound just about sufficient to serve for so big a

theater as the Metropolitan. He uses his breath uncommonly well, his German enunciation is better than average, and he has a sufficient sense of posture and movement to avoid the unbecoming. However, those who are looking beyond Parsifal to bigger Wagner roles for Brilioth should reckon with the lack of vocal metal needed for such a trumpet part as Siegfried or Tristan. He should serve very well if he isn't tempted beyond the category for which he is suited.

As for Siepi, he will achieve an uncommon transition from the Italian repertory to which he has devoted his whole career when he improves his articulation of German. Vocally, he has both the presence and the richness of sound to be a Gurnemanz of top rank. Few recent German bassos have commanded the legato to sing the "Good Friday" music as beautifully as he did (despite a cold) and none since Ludwig Weber or Alexander Kipnis. Miss Ludwig made her mark among the best Kundrys in years with the range and richness of her singing, but she might refine her actions somewhat more in Act II. At one moment there was a suggestion that her next gambit to seduce the unseducible Parsifal—who is, in this context, pure as well as simple—might be borrowed from Salome, but she desisted.

Taken all together, what restricted this *Parsifal* from taking wings and measuring, musically, to its scenic magic was the methodical but phlegmatic conducting of Leopold Ludwig, a visitor here with the Hamburg Opera in 1967, who was making his debut as a member of the Metropolitan's staff. Ludwig's *Parsifal* was orchestrally transparent, neither hurried nor overly deliberate in pace, both inclinations to applaud. But he rarely shaped a really supple phrase, curved an instrumental line around a voice, or otherwise made Wagner's most prismatic score shimmer as it can. It was, unfortunately, all too consistently in the temperate zone, whether the scene was Titirel's mountain castle or Klingsor's tropical garden.

Two aspects of the late Jonel Perlea's musical gifts were in evidence at the season's first concert in Carnegie Hall by the National Orchestral Association. By no accident, at all, the results were more creditable to his major fame as a conductor than to his lesser identity as a composer. The good was embodied in the excellent

effort of David Gilbert, a Perlea pupil before he became a top winner in the last Dimitri Mitropoulos International Competition.

Gilbert's major assets, in addition to a tall figure, a useful supply of auburn hair, and a straight back, are musical intelligence, excellent means of communicating with his players, and the ability to share his attention among several sections of the orchestra simultaneously. It was also worthy of note that the bristling, fervent, and shapely performance of Mozart's D-major (*Prague*) Symphony was accomplished with only a modest output of effort, suggesting that the real work had been done in rehearsal, where it should be done.

The young conductor also honored his mentor with a keen performance of the Symphonic Variations written by Perlea in 1934 and introduced to New York at the World's Fair of 1939 under the persuasive direction of the late Georges Enesco. It shows a conductor's insight into the functioning of an orchestra through the Respighi-Ravel-Strauss idiom then *à la mode*. But it does not give enough evidence of a composer's creativity to suggest latent, thus far unrecognized, distinction on Perlea's part. Gilbert also offered first performances of three Webern songs of the 1913-14 period, not unlike others of that phase of his development, for which Charlotte Regni was the soprano. He also undertook to lead the student orchestra in Debussy's *La Mer*.

The Istomin-Stern-Rose Trio gained a little stature and lost a little luster in the third of its eight-part concert sequence devoted to the piano chamber music of Beethoven in Carnegie Hall. The gain could be credited to a fervent, beautifully informed treatment of the Trio in E flat (Op. 70, No. 2), the loss to a performance of the F-major Sonata (Op. 17) that found Leonard Rose playing a cello version of the horn part with pianist Eugene Istomin.

There is, of course, such an "optional" version of the work bearing the authoritative stamp of the composer's name, but everything about it—conception, execution, and association—has to do with the hornist named Da Punto for whom it was written. To utilize the circumstances of a bicentenary "tribute" to take the easy "optional" way out is to honor neither the composer nor the spirit of the occasion. The evening began with a spirited, sometimes rough, but always communicative playing of the A-minor (Op. 23) Sonata by Stern and Istomin, and ended with Rose on sure ground in the Opus 102, No. 1, Cello Sonata.

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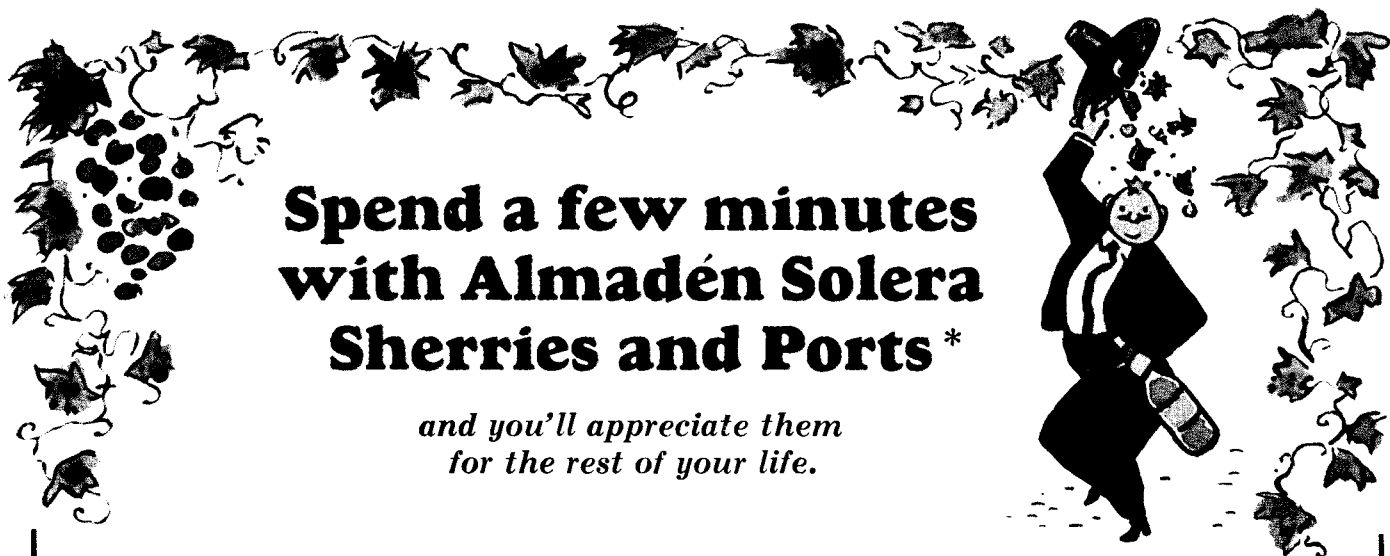
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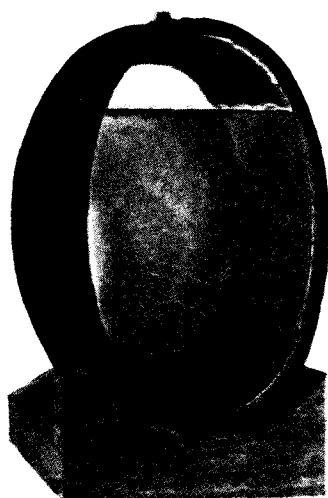
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In Mexico, a Parable for Modern Man

by ROBERT F. MURPHY

SOCIAL CHARACTER IN A MEXICAN VILLAGE:

A Sociops psychoanalytic Study

by Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby

Prentice-Hall, 303 pp., \$8.95; paperback \$4.95

Anthropology and psychoanalysis have had an uneasy and variable relationship, ranging from rhapsodic embrace to open hostility, but always returning to the genius of Freud.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud attributed the origin of human culture to psycho-libidinal developments that had their genesis in certain traumata of social life in early human groups. His thesis, which is by now almost mythic, was that the first human groups were dominated by patriarchs who exerted a jealous sexual monopoly over the women of the "horde," driving away the sons as they grew to maturity. The sons one day rose up against the father and slew and ate him. Remorseful at their crime, they renounced the women whom they had sought, and undid the parricide by symbolizing the father as a totemic animal figure, placing a taboo on the killing and eating of the species adopted. This was the origin of the incest taboo, exogamy, totemic religion, and social activity mediated by rules. The Oedipal tragedy had really happened, Freud hypothesized, and from it had stemmed culture, which is based upon the reappearance of repressed material in the collective imagery of man. In a famous inversion of St. John, Freud wrote: "In the beginning was the deed."

ROBERT F. MURPHY, chairman of Columbia University's Anthropology Department, is the author of *The Dialectics of Social Life*, to be published in the spring of 1971.

The subsequent history of the psychoanalytic study of culture has been characterized by the growth of the neo-Freudian schools, which have shifted emphasis from the erotic component of the psyche to the network of interpersonal relationships in which the individual is enmeshed. Equally important, the new movements have stressed Freud's ideas on the incorporation or introjection of the external world into the personality, at the expense of his more dynamic concept of repression.

The neo-Freudian revolution has not, however, been so complete as would at first appear. Freud maintained that personality results from the conflict between the individual psyche and the demands of the world of practical activity, while culture is the symbolic refraction of that struggle. The paradigm begins with the social setting of personality formation, proceeds to the development of a personality constellation typical within the society, and ends with a world of symbols, or culture, that bestows meaning and order upon activity. This basic scheme is



—Ursula Bernath

"... estranged from a new culture."



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