

Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

Cossotto in "Norma"; Berio, Menotti Revisited

THE METROPOLITAN has a new, welcome accent for its *Norma*, or, perhaps more accurately, it has an old accent previously missing in its present (1970) revival. It was provided by Fiorenza Cossotto, who brought not merely an Italianate sound to her Adalgisa, but more particularly an Italianate emotional commitment previously absent from the kind of Bellini shaped to the particular virtuosity in Joan Sutherland's singing of the title role.

Miss Cossotto left little doubt that her concern as a performer of Adalgisa was to convey the dilemma besetting the Druid priestess enticed into an emotional involvement with an officer of her hated (Roman) conquerors. This she did almost at once by the appearance she presented at her first entrance of a woman both in love and in distress. This much thus quickly established, she could move on, swiftly and decisively, to assert

her command not only of the p's and q's of *bel canto*, but also of the p's and f's that connote fine artistry in any form of musical expression.

As well as being a lovely sound in the middle-to-low register where much of Adalgisa's music lies, hers is a voice with that finely resonant mixture of vibrato and color that marks the ripe Italian mezzo in its prime. Its blend with Sutherland's in the celebrated duets that are the jewels in the crown of Bellini's regal score was different from that much admired in prior performances with Marilyn Horne as Adalgisa, presenting—in the political phraseology—not merely an echo but a choice. Instead of suggesting a single voice performing on two different pitches, the Sutherland-Cossotto combination established the participation of two individuals united by misery and common concern.

The most productive benefit was not to "Mira, o Norma," which is everybody's idea of the score's high point, but in the preceding "Io fui così," which wrings the changes from

the emotional core of the work—the betrayed Norma's awareness that her younger associate's dilemma is exactly the one that caused her to betray her own vows. The contrast in the vocal as well as the physical characteristics of the two women made Miss Sutherland more realistically the Den Mother giving comfort to her sister in woe than she had been before. When they were joined by John Alexander as Pollione in pursuit of a new Druid (Adalgisa) to take the place of the discarded one (Norma), the trio that climaxes this scene had the kind of fervor it deserves.

Also strengthening to the range of emotions embodied in this work was the strong sound of Ivo Vinco, an Orovoso equipped with the bass voice to function in the grand tradition. Indeed, all that was wanting was a greater urgency from the pit than was provided by conductor Richard Bonyng. He has now had sufficient exposure to prove beyond doubt that what he has to contribute to the preparatory phase of a production is far more than he has to offer when the curtain is up. The Metropolitan's best interest will be served by a return to the rule of know how rather than know who.

The first local performance of Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* since it was introduced by the New York Philharmonic just two years ago left more questions than answers. This was not for lack of opportunity for familiarity with the score in the interim, or because Berio had added a fifth, final section not heard previously, or even because it was conducted this time by Leonard Bernstein. It was, rather, that the work has vastly more reality in the much-circulated recording than it had in this concert rehearing.

It may well be that, in addition to creating the first symphonic score in which a vocal "group" (the Swingle Singers) has a fundamental part, Berio has also created the first such work that is essentially for private rather than public consumption. Basically an electronic rather than an acoustical concept, the recording renders much more clearly than the live conditions not only the constant participation by the double quintet of vocalists (whose syllabification may be meaningless but should not be unintelligible), but also the mosaic of quotations that make up its third and best movement. Bernstein applied to the latter a good deal of energy to promote a recognition factor for the audience: The point is, really, that the allusions should be perceived in a veiled, dreamlike context, which is possible from a recording but not in a concert hall.

As for the added movement, *comme*

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ci, comme ça. It adds a cyclical sense, in returning the listener to the point of beginning, much of the new section deriving from the first movement. But the quiet, irresolution of the fourth movement also has its value as a terminal point. The ostentatious departure of a number of the uninterested was matched by the ostentatious clamor of a like number at the end.

The hardest of orchestral perennials is once more in bloom, giving off the famed *élixir de Stokowski* that lasts and lasts. It was present almost with the first deep breath of sound exhaled by the current version of the American Symphony Orchestra at its season-opening concert in Carnegie Hall. Billed as the "Overture in D minor of Handel, transcribed by Leopold Stokowski," it was, in fact, a *Fantasia*-like dream of orchestral sonority which the conductor-arranger has been purveying for decades.

Fortunately, the cataract of sound abated somewhat in the premiere performance of Gian Carlo Menotti's *Triplo Concerto a Tre*. The seeming redundancy—"Triple Concerto for Three"—is not really repetitive, for the orchestra is combined with three groups of three solo instruments: violin, viola, and cello; oboe, clarinet, and bassoon; and piano, harp, and battery. The contrasting sonorities made for an engaging premise, but it may be assumed that, Menotti-like, it is not pursued at a cost to musical interest. This is made up in equal parts of rhythmic verve, melodic gaiety, and harmonic diversion, to the extent, indeed, that the work would seem predestined for the dance stage. It is infused with a festive, commedia dell'arte quality that has almost inbuilt choreographic connotations. As often as not, one had to guess at the whole character of the work, for balances were none too good, and at one point in the finale there was a strong suggestion that some inner voice had gone astray. Of course, that is Menotti's penalty for writing music where one may notice such deviations, but he sowed better than he reaped.

Between the Menotti and the Schumann Second Symphony the audience was offered a hearing of the long-dormant Concerto in A minor of Paderewski, researched, revived, and restored by Earl Wild at the piano. It provided numerous opportunities for his big hands and large style to weave tapestries of sound, some of them ingratiating, almost all of them well formed. Paderewski was, of course, an aristocrat as a composer as well as interpreter, though—like some others of that station—he tended to live beyond his (musical) means.

TV-Radio

Robert Lewis Shayon

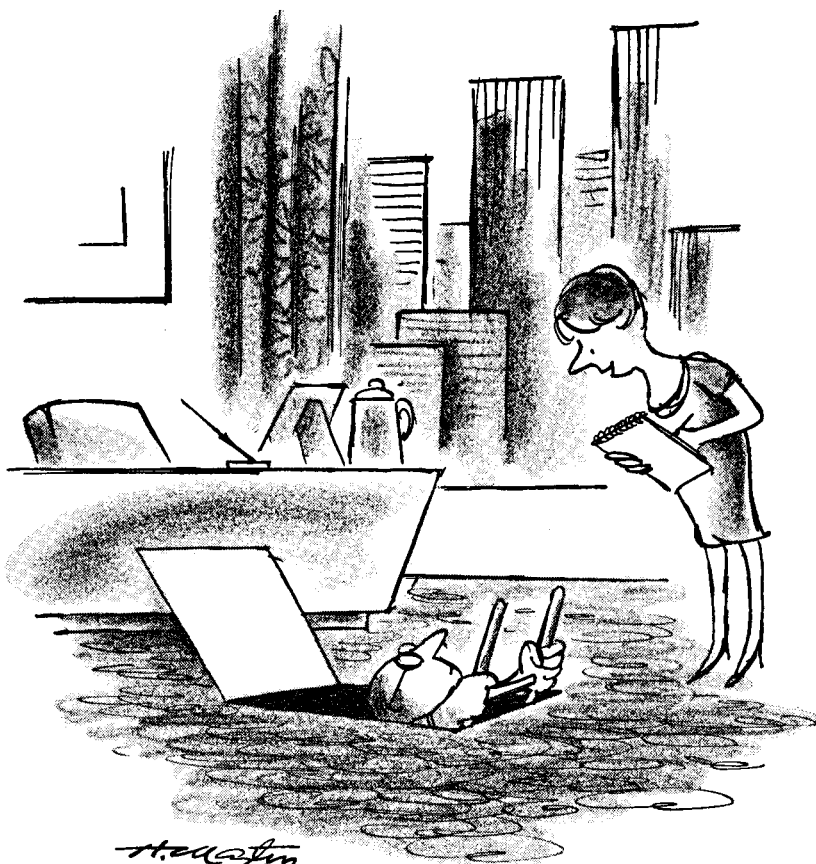
The Fantasy-Violence Syndrome

Critics' and Public Perceptions of Violence in TV Programs, a new Michigan State University study, inspires speculations that reinforce concern about the potential for aggression in young Americans today. The authors (Bradley S. Greenberg and Thomas F. Gordon) report their findings without interpretations, and the implications I draw are solely mine. They asked a sample of viewers and a small number of professional TV critics to rate prime-time programs on the three commercial networks for the amount of violence perceived (a lot, quite a bit, some, not much, and none at all). Critics and viewers agreed unanimously in their designation of the top twenty most violent shows. The first six were *Mod Squad*, *Mannix*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *It Takes a Thief*, and *The FBI*.

The critics saw more violence in nineteen of the twenty most violent shows than the viewers. Of the viewers, women detected more violence than did men, and "the younger age groups

consistently and significantly rated the program offerings as more violent." Critics, women, and youth, then, perceived more violence on TV than men and older people. Maybe the critics "see" more violence because they have clearer intellectual criteria than non-critics. Perhaps they "look" for violence in order to write about it; or they may be ivory-tower people who have little real-life experience with violence and consequently are more sensitive to fantasized examples of it. The first possibility is supported by the fact that when certain viewers were given a definition of violence they tended to see more of it than other respondents who were given no definition.

Women and youth, generally, may be said to experience violence mostly in mediated fantasy rather than in real life. It was the over-fifty segment who saw less violence than all the others. Perhaps this group, having lived through World War II and the Korean conflict, knows, from personal experience or that of family and friends, real violence as opposed to the fantasy kind. Having alternatives in mind, they are



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