

# Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

## Zabaleta at the Harp; Klara Barlow at the Met

THE VIRTUES of preserving, protecting, and promoting the activities of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center were subtly underscored at its latest exercises in Alice Tully Hall. Lacking a Beethoven or Brahms quartet or any of the other works commonly called "substantial," the program nevertheless provided substantive pleasure in the opportunity it afforded for Nicanor Zabaleta to demonstrate why many consider this Spaniard the greatest harpist in the world today, a suitable successor to such virtuosi of old as Carlos Salzedo and Marcel Grandjany.

To be sure, his art was not purveyed in anything so gross as a virtuoso work. Harpists of the Zabaleta stripe (which is, of course, the royal purple) do not traffic in the demonstrative, the overt, or the ostentatious. They are the patricians of their profession, for whom a pure harmonic, a sparkling glissando, or a glistening arabesque calls for plaudits on behalf of their deftness in the low end of the dynamic scale as a bruising *fortissimo* arouses the beast in piano fanciers. Of necessity, they do not have the same quantity of followers, but those who have heard the call are enlisted for the duration.

Zabaleta recalled the perfection he has dispensed on prior visits to this country in the warmth of sound and the richness of colors he provided for his part of Camille Saint-Saëns's *Fantaisie*, for which the violinist was Charles Treger. This is the kind of work in which any deviation from absolute fidelity to its spun-sugar artifices, its layer-cake architecture, can result either in collapse of the air-supported structure or, what is worse, tastelessness. Zabaleta's scheme of resonances spun a web of support around everything that was heard, including the superbly glossy sound produced by Treger. Later Zabaleta was heard with Paula Robison, flute, and Walter Trampler, viola, in a Debussy sonata *a tre* and, in conjunction with Treger, violinist Romuald Tecco, cellist Laurence Lesser, and clarinetist Larry Combs, in the Ravel Introduction and Allegro.

On behalf of its obligation to contemporary composers, the Society offered a world premiere of a work commissioned from William Sydemán,

entitled *Malediction*. It is a setting of an excerpt from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, described, in Harris Goldsmith's helpful annotations, as "a parody of an excommunication curse." It utilizes a tenor, who pops up periodically from a large box at stage rear to articulate some portion of the text; a string quartet that intrudes its own comments; a taped mélange of electronic and *concrète* sound; and a leather-jacketed, goggled "stage manager" who adds syllabic abrasion from time to time. The elaborate means are the most creative part of Sydemán's achievement, for the fragments of sound assigned to the quartet are uninteresting, the substance of the tenor's declamation unintelligible. This is no indictment of Michael Best, whose high, well-focused tones were suitably controlled. The evening began with an affectionate performance of Mozart's F-major Oboe Quartet (K.370) for which Leonard Arner was the fastidious master of the double reed, the Messrs. Treger, Trampler, and Lesser his string instrument associates.

The measure of the discipline Karl Böhm has imposed on the Metropolitan's production of Beethoven's *Fidelio* was tested and not found wanting on a recent occasion that presented six cast changes, all in major roles. With the exception of Giorgio Tozzi as Rocco, it was an alignment altogether different from the one with which Böhm had rehearsed the still new production only weeks ago.

By a sequence of circumstances left unexplained to the public, the Leonore making her Metropolitan debut was not Catarina Ligendza but Klara Barlow, an American soprano all but unknown here. This is not a condition likely to endure much longer, for the tall, clear-voiced Miss Barlow, who has spent most of her recent career in Germany (on the West Coast she has

sung Salome in Seattle and Leonore in Portland), survived the exacting introduction with considerable credit. Her bright, strong voice is not big enough to conquer an auditorium of the Metropolitan's size without strain, but she had sufficient assurance to bring off her big solo scene effectively. In Act II, noticeably relaxed and more able to do herself justice, Miss Barlow gave evidence of the kind of vocal qualifications to make a likely Eva in *Die Meistersinger*, or Elsa or Elisabeth. Musicianship, a well-coordinated body, and clean enunciation of the German text were supporting attributes for a Leonore much above average in physical credibility and dramatic conviction.

In the absence of Jon Vickers, the Florestan was Robert Nagy, more than a little hard pressed by the high range of the opening dungeon scene, but even more convincing, dramatically, than he had been as the Emperor in Strauss's *Frau ohne Schatten* earlier in the season. Edith Mathis, promised as Marzelline of the original cast but only just recovered from an indisposition that kept her at home in England, was a sure vocalist and an appealing actress in a part that is, really, a little undersized for her voice. As Jacquino, the American-born Leo Goeke showed the strong, light tenor sound from which superior operatic artistry can be evolved and an attractive personality for all manner of lyric German roles. Finally, Paul Plishka sustained the requirements of the Minister of Justice with suitable dignity, both of sound and demeanor. But it was the driving application of Böhm, through the *Leonore* No. 3 (powerfully well played by the orchestra), which lifted the level of the finale to an audience-encompassing fervor.

Peter Pears's inability to fulfill his engagement with Seiji Ozawa as conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra provided a second solo opportunity for Garrick Ohlsson to acquaint New Yorkers with the order of ability that won him first prize in the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw last fall. Ohlsson left some doubt that the full extent of his pianistic capacity had been exposed in the work allotted to him. This time it was the Beethoven C-major, whose requirements he fulfilled with fluency, taste, and the kind of musical flexibility that characterize the true interpretative temperament. There remained a sense of power in reserve whose exposure must await another work, another time. Ozawa's program also included a Handel Concerto Grosso (Op. 6, No. 12 in B minor), Takemitsu's *The Dorian Horizon*, and the *Ma Mère l'Oye* Suite of Ravel.



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## New Directions in Higher Education

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### 45 Editorial

### 46 Letters to the Education Editor

### Day Care: Little Children and Special Interests

47 **A Timid Giant Grows Bolder**  
by Bettye M. Caldwell

50 **The Day-Care Jungle**

52 **Oasis in East Harlem**  
by Jonathan Black

56 **The White House Conference on Children** by Thomas J. Cottle

### 75 New Books

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Higher education is in trouble today on many fronts, and the future of private colleges and universities appears particularly bleak. The most obvious—and most immediate—problem is financial survival. The most affluent universities are caught in an increasingly serious bind, while small liberal arts colleges are facing an even more precarious future. But the financial crisis is not the only problem. Issues of access to higher education, degree programs, governance, faculty policy, and graduate education are equally pressing.

The nation's colleges and universities have not lacked for perceptive diagnoses of institutional ailments, nor for learned prescriptions for their cure. Many individuals and groups have had their say in recent years. But few, if any, of these pronouncements are likely to carry the weight of two prestigious reports released almost simultaneously last month. First is the report of the Assembly on University Goals and Governance, founded in 1969 by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (reprinted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036). The second is *Less Time, More Options: Education Beyond the High School* (McGraw-Hill), a special report and recommendations by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. The two reports, prepared by quite different, but equally eminent, groups of scholars, administrators, and laymen, coincide at many points in their analysis and recommendations. Among the most interesting areas of agreement are those calling for the radical reformation of undergraduate education.

Clearly both groups are prescribing a shift in emphasis at the undergraduate level from education to learning—from educational institutions, with many certification functions, to learning centers capable of serving a far

wider public. In order to achieve this central shift in focus from the institution to the learner, both reports make numerous specific recommendations for introducing greater flexibility in the education enterprise in order to serve future needs for lifetime learning. "Education should become more a part of all of life, and less all of a part of life," the Carnegie Commission asserts. "Society would gain if work and study were mixed throughout a lifetime," the commission says.

Similarly, the report of the Assembly on Goals and Governance asserts that "The tradition that a bachelor's degree is awarded at the end of four years of formal study [should] be challenged. Certain students might obtain their first degree in one, two, or three years; others might obtain it in five, six, or seven years. . . . Students should be able to defer or interrupt college, graduate, or professional school, precisely because there is no rhythm or pattern of intellectual curiosity or social maturity that is common to all."

Both reports also tie in reform of higher education with problems of finance. The Carnegie Commission report states explicitly that the sweeping reforms it recommends "could result in a reduction of operating expenditures for higher education by 10 to 15 per cent a year below levels that would otherwise prevail by 1980."

Human institutions are marvelously resistant to change—to self-renewal—and educational institutions are, by definition, conservators of the past. But it may be that the current financial pinch offers special incentives for a realistic reappraisal of traditional assumptions and practices in higher education. If this proves to be the case, if our colleges and universities reach out boldly in their search for new directions, the current trauma could prove to be a blessing in disguise. —J. C.