

Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

Pluperfect "Frau"; Duple Barenboim

ONCE THERE WAS an old Metropolitan Opera House where, in the course of the decades, legends took root and tall tales sprouted. Now there is a new Metropolitan, and as the first decade in Lincoln Center passes the halfway mark, there too legends are beginning to take root. Nor will there be many taller tales in years to come than the one that is affiliating itself with Leonie Rysanek and Christa Ludwig in Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, as it began its third round of performances under the indispensable direction of Karl Böhm.

Though the sequence began in the first year of the uptown tenancy, in 1966, it is only now, with all the designs imagined by Robert O'Hearn finally in place and properly lit and the orchestra completely attuned to its super-Wagnerian effort, that Strauss's achievement can be seen and heard for what it is: a sunset glow of art and craft such as even he would not achieve again. As a totality, *Die Frau* is certainly the greatest operatic "machine" of the post-Wagnerian epoch, with the greatest potential for flight if it can be propelled from the ground. This time it unquestionably was, and, for some, it may still be soaring.

If so, its twin wings were the voices of Rysanek and Ludwig, supported, in their roles of the Empress in distress and the "Frau" who has a shadow (child-bearing power) to barter, by performers to match. Neither is, of course, unknown for abundant resource; the thrust was provided by its presence, in both and in full measure, simultaneously. The vocal freedom Miss Rysanek has demonstrated in some recent performances of *Fidelio* was evident from almost her first entrance, and Miss Ludwig's always responsive middle range was matched by a top register seldom heard from any singer nominally a mezzo. Walter Berry, as the Frau's sorely tried husband, kept pace with them in every essential, closely followed by Irene Dalis (Nurse).

For additional impact, the afternoon provided a drama within drama, as Robert Nagy, long mired in the secondary tenor and utility parts, earned his stripes as a full-fledged leading tenor in the role of the Emperor. Nagy's is not a lustrous tenor sound, but it is voluminous. He has now

learned how to modulate it enough to make a swell here, a decrescendo there, that qualified him for inclusion among the extraordinary company in which he found himself. Böhm's direction was, from first note to last, authoritative and unswerving. He now has imparted the basic discipline so well to his ensemble (choral as well as instrumental) that it responds creatively to his influence. Taken altogether, with the ballet of the stage elevators added to the choreography of the turntable, and Nathaniel Merrill's stage direction complementing Böhm's musical supervision, this *Frau* showed the Metropolitan ensemble at a professional level comparable to that of any theater anywhere, operatic or otherwise.

The initial appearance in Carnegie Hall of Daniel Barenboim as pianist in collaboration with baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in a program of Schubert songs had all the ingredients of a prime mystery novel: two knowns, with an "unknown" hanging in the balance. Before long, however, it was apparent that the balanced equation was disturbed by a third, hidden factor: a program that did not include one of the major song cycles and did include a predominance of such declamatory matters as "Prometheus," "Die Götter Griechenlands," "Freiwilliges Versinken," "Totengräbers Heimweh," and "Auf der Bruck." Great songs all, and ones to which Fischer-Dieskau—within the compass of his restricted dynamic power—rose impressively. But they do tend to diminish the order of participation permitted to the pianist.

Lacking anything of cumulative character, Barenboim was restricted for much of the evening to the briefest of "takes," which came and went to the greatest mutual advantage in such lyric masterpieces as "Auf der Donau," "Der Wanderer," and "Litanei." Here the refinement of Barenboim's pianism, his acute sense of color and dynamics made for gratifying results. But they also made evident how hard an act Gerald Moore, who was affiliated with Fischer-Dieskau from his first New York appearance in 1955 till 1967, is to follow.

Fortunately, the unbalancing element in the equation was subtracted, and the best qualities of Barenboim and Fischer-Dieskau flowed irresistibly together, in the last phase of the program in which "Nacht und Träume," "Wanderer an den Mond," "Des Fisch-

ers Liebesglück," and the ineffable "In Frühling" made a match of what had been an uneven competition. If Fischer-Dieskau is of a mind to venture one of the great cycles, whether *Die schöne Müllerin* or *Winterreise*, Barenboim is clearly a companion for the journey.

It was, altogether, a vocal week for Barenboim, with two major works with voices in his Philharmonic program. Janet Baker was involved in both, as solo voice in the *Nuits d'été* of Berlioz and one of the vocal quartet in Bruckner's *Te Deum*. A generous and well-conceived program, which began with a tidy presentation of the Haydn C-minor (No. 95) Symphony and prefaced the Bruckner with an air-clearing performance of Webern's Five Orchestral Pieces, it also found Barenboim better possessed of the means to deal with the choral masses of Bruckner than the pastels of Berlioz. The latter pioneers a refined, closely calculated kind of orchestral writing that is not so much an accompaniment to the voice as it is its instrumental counterpart. Barenboim tended to defer too much to the singer, whose imaginative resources are hardly varied enough to carry such music on her own. Miss Baker is a fine technician and a conscientious interpreter, but I didn't hear the kind of imagery, imagination, or vocal coloration to complete the creative composite. Nor, for that matter, was the Philharmonic's orchestral playing of the kind commanded by Dimitri Mitropoulos for his memorable version of the Berlioz with Eleanor Steber. In the Bruckner, the most able vocalist, for my taste, was soprano Sheila Armstrong, with tenor Stuart Burrows laboring somewhat in his part, and Paul Plishka not quite possessed of the bottom notes required.

The Boston Symphony's conductor for its January visit was young Michael Tilson Thomas, in a Philharmonic Hall program of meager substance. Included were the Six Orchestral Pieces of Webern, which were, without question, well played; the third of Bach's *Brandenburg* Concertos, performed by an ensemble of a dozen strings; a facile but lightweight concerto for alto saxophone by the late Ingolf Dahl, for which Harvey Pittel was the excellent soloist; and Debussy's *Images*. Least productive in surroundings of Philharmonic Hall's size was the *Brandenburg* Concerto, which may have been conceived as chamber music, but not for a chamber seating 2,800. As presented by Thomas, the small string group was impelled to produce a sound both rough and undersized. The Debussy had a "breezy" performance, meaning more spirited than proficient.

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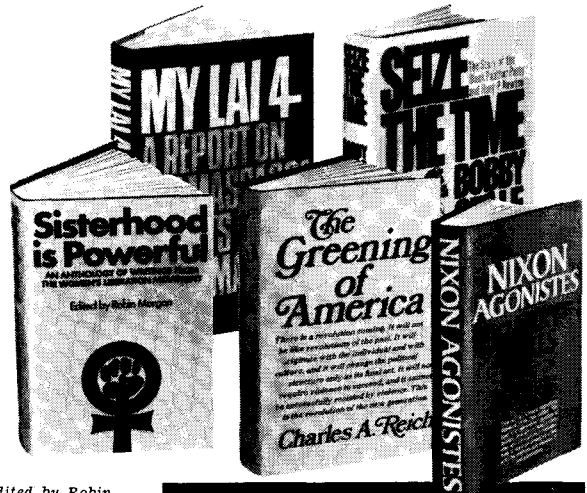
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The Biology of Behavior

"If students and other intellectuals were well aware of the biological roots of their existence, it would be taken for granted that conformity is not a rule of life."

by ROGER J. WILLIAMS

The prevalence of student rebellions throughout the world makes one wonder just how effectively modern education relates to real human problems. To approach the problems of generic man from a biological standpoint may be far too superficial in this scientific age with its tremendous advances in technology; yet, could not the general weakness of human science be the basis for the comment by Robert Frost: "Poets like Shakespeare knew more about psychiatry than any \$25-an-hour man"?

Biologically, each member of the human family possesses inborn differences based on his brain structure and on his vast mosaic of endocrine glands—in fact, on every aspect of his physical being. Each of us has a distinctive set of drives—for physical activity, for food, for sexual expression, for power. Each one has his own mind qualities: abilities, ways of thinking, and patterns of mental conditions. Each one has his own emotional setup and his leanings toward music and art in its various forms, including literature. All these leanings are subject to change and development, but there is certainly no mass movement toward uniformity. No one ever "recovers" from the fact that he was born an individual.

When a husband and wife disagree on the temperature of the soup or on the amount of bed coverings, or if their sleep patterns do not jibe, this is evi-

dence of inborn differences in physiology. If one child loves to read or is interested in science and another has strong likings for sports or for art, this is probably due to inborn differences in makeup. If two people disagree about food or drink, they should not disregard the fact that taste and smell reactions often widely differ and are inherited. If we see a person wearing loud clothing without apparent taste, we need to remember, in line with the investigations of Pickford in England, that each individual has a color vision all his own; some may deviate markedly from the pack.

The inborn leanings of Mozart were evident by age three, and he began composing when he was four. Capablanca was already a good chess player—good enough to beat his father—when at age five he played his first game. For many centuries, Indian philosophers have recognized innate individuality, which they explain on the basis of experience in previous incarnations.

Biology has always recognized inborn individuality. If this inborn distinctiveness had not always been the rule in biology, evolution could never have happened. It is a commonplace fact in biology that every living organism needs a heredity and a suitable environment. Unfortunately, in the minds of most intellectuals biological considerations have been pushed aside.

Professor Jerry Hirsch, a psychologist at the University of Illinois, has protested in *Science* that "the opinion makers of two generations have literally excommunicated heredity from the behavioral sciences." This neglect of the study of heredity has effectively produced a wide gap between biology and psychology. Biology deals with liv-

ing things, and psychology is logically an important phase of biology.

Bernard Rimland, director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research in San Diego, in reviewing my book *You Are Extraordinary in American Psychologist*, wrote: "Since between-group differences are commonly a small fraction of the enormous, important, and very interesting within-group (individual) difference, psychology's focus on average values for heterogeneous groups represents, as Williams indicates, a chronic case of throwing out the babies with the bath water. 'Throwing out the babies' is bad enough, but we psychologists have the dubious distinction of making this error not only repeatedly but *on purpose*."

Social solidarity exists and social problems are pressing, but we cannot hope to deal with these successfully by considering only generic man, that is, average values for heterogeneous groups. We need a better understanding of *men*.

The basic problem of generic man is how to achieve "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The writers of our Declaration of Independence were on solid ground, biologically speaking, when they took the position that each human being has inalienable rights and that no one has, by virtue of his imagined "royal blood," the right to rule over another. In their emphasis on mankind as individuals, Jefferson and his co-authors were closer to biological reality than are those of our time who divorce psychology from biology and center their attention on that statistical artifact, the average man.

Because each of us is distinctive, we lean in different directions in achieving life, liberty, and the pursuit of

DR. ROGER J. WILLIAMS is professor of chemistry at the University of Texas at Austin and consultant to the Clayton Foundation's Biochemical Institute. His latest book, *The Environmental Prevention of Disease* (Pitman Publishing), will appear in April.