

Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

From Bing to Sir Rudolf In Twenty-one Lessons

THIS YEAR'S opening performance at the Metropolitan Opera was one of the most enjoyable in decades, not because it marked the beginning of the end of the long stretch of time in which a general manager who came in as Mr. Bing departs as Sir Rudolf (in a similar situation, Bernard Shaw wondered how an impresario known to all musical London in the Nineties as "good old Gus" should be addressed after he had become Sir Augustus Harris) but because it was a well-rehearsed performance of a memorably fine production of an outstanding work.

Appropriate to the occasion, the general manager had elected to open his last season with the version of Verdi's *Don Carlo* with which he had introduced himself in 1950. He has done some fine things since, but none better. Needless to say, there have been ups and downs along the way, some of the downs including this same *Don Carlo* when it was pitched onto the stage with no more consideration than still another *Pagliacci*. This was the first time since 1950 that it had opened a season, meaning that it profited from proper musical preparation under the well-informed Francesco Molinari-Pradelli, the wrinkles and creases in Rolf Gérard's admirable décor had been ironed out or patched over, and an air of an event filled the theater, as it had not for *Don Carlo* in too many years.

In place of the absent Montserrat Caballé (at home in Spain, awaiting the birth of a child) was Martina Arroyo, whose assets do not include a face or figure to rivet the attention, but who did sing much of Elisabetta's music beautifully, especially in the third-act ensemble. Plácido Domingo's appearance as Carlo, despite a vocal malaise, permitted a surprise appearance by Sir Rudolf (where was Mr. Osie Hawkins?) to plead clemency before the jury was even seated. Domingo bulled his way through the part by sheer physical impact, a bigger belt line than ever, and a rather reckless disregard for caution if his cords were inflamed. Another newcomer was John Macurdy, adding a finely orotund sound for the Grand Inquisitor (looking rather more an Irish bishop than a Spanish grandee), in a notable line that originated with Jerome Hines. Grace Bumbry added, as she always does, allure to the role of Eboli, which she sings with positive purpose.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the evening was the reappearance, in their roles of 1950, of Robert Merrill (Posa) and Cesare Siepi (King Philip). Over the twenty-one years, Merrill has preserved his sound better than Siepi has. However, whereas Merrill re-created, with added authority, the action taught to him by Margaret Webster, Siepi has evolved a wholly different, much more mature character study than he was offering in times past. He now portrays Philip as an elderly, troubled man, torn not only between familial and imperial concerns but between the powers of Church and State. Siepi's theatrical instinct has always been keen, but he has added dramatic techniques that sharpen the points he is impelled to make. Amid the ebb and flow of tensions that make the first scene of Act III one of the greatest in the Verdi canon (meaning in all of opera), Siepi's well-conceived reactions to the Inquisitor, to Elisabetta, and to Eboli made him its dominant figure. The nostalgia note was sounded a little unfortunately in the assignment of the off-stage Voice during the auto-da-fé scene to Lucine Amara, who made her debut in it those years ago. Vocal purity of the sort she originally possessed doesn't endure, even less improve, over such campaigning as she has subjected it to.

As part of one of those swift transitional vignettes that typify the theater, the season's first performance of the Zeffirelli productions of *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* was prefaced by the Intermezzo from Act III of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, played in tribute to the late Fausto Cleva whose first assignment of the season this was meant to be. It was affectionately performed under the direction of Raymond Gniewek, concertmaster of the orchestra and right hand to Cleva on many an occasion.

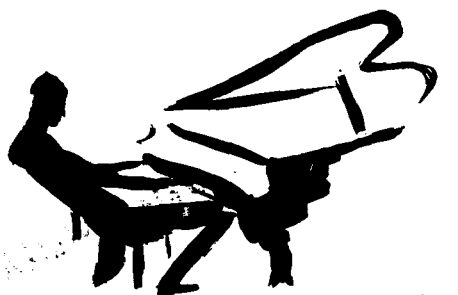
Then into the pit strode tall, bespectacled Christopher Keene, born after the end of World War II, when Cleva was celebrating the twenty-fifth of his

fifty years' association with the Metropolitan. Though Keene's progress up the ladder of opera-conducting has been rapid since student days in Berkeley, California, he has missed no rungs on the way. His varied assignments across Lincoln Center Plaza with the New York City Opera Company contributed to a resoundingly successful debut.

Some may suppose that it eased Keene's burdens—in a purely practical way, perhaps—to be working with such seasoned professionals as Fiorenza Cossotto, today's première Santuzza and the natural successor to the laurels of Giulietta Simionato in this part, Carlo Bergonzi making his first Metropolitan venture as Turiddu a rousing one, and Anselmo Colzani, an Alfio to the burly life. But they set a standard to which Keene, despite his youth, consistently conformed, thanks to knowledge as well as talent, fire as well as sensitivity. His prime collaborators in the following *Pagliacci* were Teresa Stratas (Nedda), James McCracken (Canio), and Sherrill Milnes (Tonio).

Normally, the accession of a new music director to the head of so prominent an orchestra as the New York Philharmonic would be prime musical news. But, like his immediate predecessors (Dimitri Mitropoulos and Leonard Bernstein), Pierre Boulez has been so thoroughly exposed, consumer tested, and market evaluated through guest engagements that his first appearances as music director wore more the aspect of an old friend's return than a new executive's introduction. Even the programs were Boulez-anticipatable, ranging from Wagner's *Faust Overture* and the "Royal Hunt and Storm" from Berlioz's *Les Troyens* to the first movement of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, all beautifully presented in performances of refinement and musicianly integrity. There was also a typical rendering of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* (which may become known as Boulez's *Pathétique*) and, as part of this season's Liszt cycle, hearings of that composer's *Totentanz* and *Malédiction*, with Jorge Bolet as piano soloist in the first and David Bar-Illan in the second (both replacing the ailing André Watts).

Rather more of a novelty and perhaps of even greater impact on the long-range future of the orchestra was the introduction of Rafael Druian as concertmaster, a function in which the body Philharmonic has long been hurting. His background with Szell in Cleveland (and, before that, in Minneapolis with Dorati) qualifies him uniquely for the kind of leadership the able Philharmonic strings can well use. The lean, pliant line that they produced in the Mahler was, if Boulez-inspired, Druian-drawn.



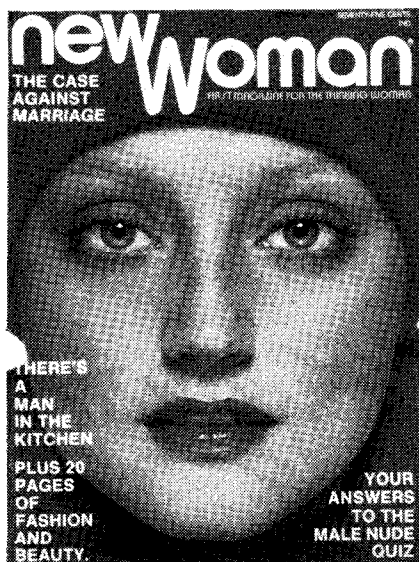
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THE DOLLARS AND LOGIC OF REORDERED PRIORITIES

As American involvement in Vietnam tapers off, there is general agreement that fiscal resources previously allocated to the war should now be shifted to domestic problems. But there is less agreement on how much the remedies will cost or how much the postwar "peace dividend" will actually provide. This week *SR* examines the situation in a two-part report. First, Lawrence S. Ritter estimates the price tags of our reordered priorities and discusses how the payments for them can be met. His approach is based on the premise that no essential changes will be made in our non-Vietnam military expenditures. Seymour Melman, on page 26, approaches the question from a different standpoint. In his article "All the Muscle at One-Third the Cost" he suggests ways to loosen the grip of our most rapacious parasite: the military and its 64 per cent share of the tax dollar.

Battling the Balance Sheet

by LAWRENCE S. RITTER

With the Vietnam War stumbling toward what appears to be a conclusion, it is time for "reordered national priorities" to become a reality instead of an empty slogan. That the phrase is presently little more than a catchword is best indicated by the paucity of answers to the simplest questions. What dollar amounts are involved? Who will foot the bill? Priorities are relative; if some are ranked higher, then others must be dropped lower. But which ones and how much lower?

For many advocates of reordered priorities, these are irrelevant or even hostile questions. They seem to think that the end of the war will solve all

such problems by releasing more than enough resources to heal the inflamed tissues of a divided country. Others count on economic growth as their Aladdin's lamp, while simultaneously urging that growth be de-emphasized as an objective of national economic policy because of the congestion and pollution that are often its by-products. And no one, least of all those running for public office, appears willing to acknowledge the reality that if there is to be any substance to reordered priorities, they will have to be accompanied by higher, not lower, taxes. There will be costs, and they will not be negligible. We blundered into Vietnam without knowing where we were going; it would be tragic indeed if we were to do the same thing all over again on the domestic front. A day of reckoning before the fact is surely preferable to a body count afterward.

The size of the post-Vietnam peace dividend, for example, is sure to prove a

severe disappointment to those who have been counting on it so heavily. Such a dividend can be defined as the resources that would be released by a fall-back in defense spending to 1965 levels, prior to the massive build-up in Southeast Asia. In 1965 defense expenditures were \$50-billion. Last year they were \$77-billion. On the basis of those figures, one would expect \$27-billion a year to become available.

However, calculations of this sort are misleading. They fail to consider inflation. If the government today were to try to buy the same defense package it paid \$50-billion for in 1965, the price tag now would be approximately \$64-billion. Relative to last year's \$77-billion, this would release only \$13-billion a year for alternative uses. That is the maximum that a post-Vietnam dividend, per se, can be expected to provide.

This amount is not much when set against the sums needed to make a

LAWRENCE S. RITTER is professor of finance at New York University. The above article is based on a report that appeared in the July 1971 *Morgan Guaranty Survey*.