

Singers Short, Siepi, and Silja—also Spivakovsky

Whoever at Lincoln Center had the idea of putting Alice Tully Hall at the disposal of Bobby Short and inviting his clientele to register their approval at the box office is clearly entitled to a vice presidency, or something better. The "sold out" sign was up for days before the event, providing a tidy profit for the Performing Arts Center as well as for the performing artist. In addition, the event brought out rows and rows of people that appeared to be first-time visitors to Tully Hall. They may even come back for something else.

Whatever that something else is, the pleasure content of a Short evening is unlikely to be reprised, short of a return appearance by Short himself. Effective as he is in a supper club or *boîte*, Short's musical means and personal magnetism warrant the kind of attention that only a darkened hall and a spotlighted stage provide. Whether working over the repertory of his own particular bard, Cole Porter, or promoting the works of others to the best times of their song-writing lives, Short savors words and music, tunes and tempo, in a manner wholly his own.

It is a manner based, in a couple of words, on total involvement. Who else among his song-singing contemporaries combines fleet hands on the keyboard with a throat that throbs with insinuation as the left foot pounds the beat and the body dances in place? Out of a show business background, the length of which belies his looks—Short was a child attraction at nine—he has borrowed some technics from Fats Waller, who also played piano and sang, and others from Louis Armstrong. From these and other good sources, he has updated, refined, and recast a form of entertainment uniquely his own.

Part of that uniqueness comes from the material he favors. Whether by Porter or others, it is the outgrowth of an encyclopedic knowledge sifted through impeccable taste and rarely fallible judgment. In the opening dozen-and-a-half songs by Porter, most of the hackneyed tunes were bypassed. Now and then his favor gravitated to the familiar yet choice "Why Shouldn't I?" or "Miss Otis Regrets." But there were three or four recondite others ("Hot House Rose" among them) for each song an audience could sing along with.

Familiar names abounded among the composers he favored for the second, non-Porter part of the program. But the pairings of names and songs were always adventurous, never expectable. Included were Noël Coward's "We Were

Dancing" (*Tonight at Eight-Thirty*), John Green's "It's Only Love" (*Something in the Wind*), Kurt Weill's "Thousands of Miles" (*Lost in the Stars*), and Jerome Kern's "Bojangles of Harlem" (*Swing Time*). One had hardly absorbed the exuberant "Cake Walkin' Babies," which finished the printed program, before Short was off on a series of encores in which he registered his deep devotion to Vernon Duke's "I Like the Likes of You" as well as the perennial "I Can't Get Started." Together they generated a lingering sense of sufficiency from which the applauding audience turned away as appreciatively as it had been turned on. Some may remember it was in Tully Hall that they first heard Erwin Drake's lovable "Just for a Day."

The Easter season that brought one audience the pleasures of Bobby Short in Tully Hall provided another with the regenerating powers of Wagner's *Parsifal* at the Metropolitan. As for Cesare Siepi, in the key role of Gurnemanz, the reappearance of the beautiful production by Robert O'Hearn introduced last season showed him to be even healthier in sound, more comfortable with the German text than he had been a year ago. He put all the Wagnerian values of a sometimes static part firmly in place, and with purpose. This accomplishment would have been highly creditable for a Central European born to the idiom and the language. For a native of Milan, an accomplishment of this order was doubly difficult. After years of expounding the art of *bel canto* in Verdi, Bellini, and other Italian masters, Siepi is demonstrating that a command of *legato* and beautiful sound is no less applicable to Wagner.

Leopold Ludwig's conducting could hardly be called pulsating, but it had more animation and a steadier flow than were heard when the production was new. Sándor Kónya as Parsifal responded with a freer, less constricted sound than has been heard from him for several years. Of equal quality were the sure, authoritative Kundry of Irene Dalis, the expressive Amfortas of William Dooley, and the intense, agonized Titirel of John Macurdy. A complement of youthfully believable Flower Maidens included such first-rank singers as Joann Grillo, Shirley Love, Jeanine Altmeyer, Joy Clements, and Frederica von Stade.

For Anja Silja, the opportunity to perform in New York the title role of Richard Strauss's *Salome*, for which she is celebrated in Europe, comes

about half a decade late. For something more than half of the one-act opera's playing time of ninety minutes, Miss Silja is as believable to the eye as she is provocative to the ear. Tall and well formed, she pursues an intelligent plan of action derived from the staging of the late Wieland Wagner. It spells out the willfulness and the perversion that cause Salome to concentrate her sexual appetite on the head of the dead John the Baptist after he has refused to let her touch his living flesh. By some criteria, Silja's "Dance of the Seven Veils" is tame. But it is responsive to the composer's preference that it be erotic, not lascivious, and that it be addressed to the cistern where the Baptist is incarcerated, not to Salome's prurient stepfather, Herod. These things Silja did, as a responsible, well-motivated Salome should.

All this made a proper prelude to Salome's petulant insistence that, she having filled her part of the bargain, Herod was committed to giving her anything she requested in return. The unfortunate anticlimax is that Miss Silja doesn't now have, if she ever did, the range and reliability of voice to convey Strauss's contention that, to Salome, necrophilia is a beautiful, fulfilling experience. She chose to perform the final scene on her back with her face toward the head of the Baptist rather than toward the conductor, Karl Böhm. It would have meant more, dramatically, had she been better able to meet the composer's vocal challenge. The Baptist this time was William Dooley, who put his own mark of character on a part previously performed by Thomas Stewart.

Tossy Spivakovsky has long been a violinist par excellence whose mastery of the instrument drew fellow performers to hear him play, even if they did not care much for the work he happened to be playing. At his recent appearances with the New York Philharmonic, it was distressing to hear, in even so uncomplicated a work as the D-major Concerto of Mozart (K. 218), that the old coordination had diminished, and correct intonation was more of a problem than it should have been. There were, however, more than a few interesting innovations in Spivakovsky's treatment of the text for which he wrote his own cadenzas. These were brief, well shaped, and altogether appropriate. Dean Dixon's conducting was all consideration and cooperation. He began his evening with Liszt's *Prometheus*, a work whose quality is not at variance with its infrequency of performance, and followed it with excerpts from music for a ballet on the same Grecian subject. After these restricted exercises, Dixon had a free hand in the First Symphony of Sibelius, which he directed extremely well. □



John Dornberg is a first-class journalist who has served as Bureau Chief for *Newsweek* in Bonn and in Moscow. What he saw and heard during the three years he spent in the Soviet Union convinced him that most Americans are abysmally misinformed about a country they fear and distrust. Hence, his new book, *THE NEW TSARS: Russia Under Stalin's Heirs*.

In *THE NEW TSARS*, John Dornberg shows how the downfall of Khrushchev signalled the re-birth of new and cruel Stalinization. He details how this so-called great power lags incredibly in technological advancement (their space program is a kind of Potemkin's Village). He shows that Soviet bureaucracy makes our civil service seem the very model of efficiency, and that even in agriculture the land of fabled Mother Russia is not properly exploited. What he really seems to be saying is that the USSR is no longer a first-rate power and that if Americans understood the drab and backward nature of Soviet life and the deep insecurity of Soviet leaders, it would be possible to develop a more productive and realistic foreign policy.

Dornberg is tough on the Soviet leaders whom he sees as true heirs of Stalin, but he has a deep and abiding affection for the land and its people, and particularly for that struggling band of dissidents who want to see their country survive beyond 1984. His portraits of those men and women (including Solzhenitsyn, Bulgakov, Amalrik, Kuznetsov, and others) are vivid and moving and set the tone for an enormously rich and informative panorama of *THE NEW TSARS: Russia Under Stalin's Heirs*.

L.L. Day
Editor-at-Large

THE NEW TSARS: *Russia Under Stalin's Heirs* by John Dornberg is published by Doubleday & Company, Inc., 277 Park Avenue, New York 10017. Copies may be obtained from your own bookseller or any Doubleday Book Shop, one of which is located at 724 Fifth Avenue, New York 10019.

Trade Winds

Cleveland Amory

Headline of the Week—from Roger Eveleth of Bar Harbor, Maine, who found it in the *Lewiston Daily Sun*:

IRVING, WIFE
ARE INDICTED
IN BOOK CASE

Caught, we presume, by a library detector.

Want Ad of the Week—as discovered by Mrs. William Boughton of Troy, New York, in the *Troy Times-Record*:

Cleaning Lady—Woman over
easy—and fun

No windows?

Protest of the Week—as located by Stephen Voysey of Philadelphia in the U. of P.'s *Daily Pennsylvanian*:

In addition to rollbacks in tuition, and housing rents, the protesters will demand:

—The right to a morally valid university
—The right to preparation for a meaningful vacation

We've got it, two Rs—R and R.

Notice of the Week—spotted by Hatti Prentiss of Bedford, Nova Scotia, in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*:

PLEASE NOTE
Due to the recent death of
AL SKINNER
Operator of
Inverness Ambulance Service
Business hopefully will
be carried on in the same
dignified manner

Hope, as they say, springs eternal.

Visiting in Chicago a while ago, we stopped at the office of Henry Regnery, of the publishing firm of the same name, and found him to be a very cool customer. We faced him with the accusation that his company had completely changed its character and had ceased being the bastion of conservatism that it was in happier days (or in unhappier—we did not know which). Was it just his firm, we wanted to know, or had the whole Midwest changed horses in Midstream?

"Just us," he said, smiling pleasantly. "Anyway it's a whole different thing. I'm chairman of the board, but I am no longer active in the management of the company. My son-in-law, Harvey Plotnick, is president. I published books I thought people ought to read. Harvey is more interested in finding

books that people will in fact read."

How, we asked, did Harvey get into the picture in the first place? "He was at the University of Chicago," Mr. Regnery said. "I had a good friend on the faculty named Richard Weaver. We published his book *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, and he recommended Harvey for editorial work. First he did freelance work, and then we offered him a regular job, and then he married my daughter."

Was she "liberal"? we asked. "No, not really," he said, but then quickly reversed himself. "Yes, she probably is," he said. "Northwestern was a bad influence on her. And then Harvey appeared on the scene."

At this, seemingly on cue, young Mr. Plotnick came into the room. Mr. Regnery asked his son-in-law if he would agree to the way he had phrased their differences in policy. Mr. Plotnick smiled. "Well," he said, "I'd say the company has become apolitical. We're now doing one hundred thirty new books a year. A while back, agents would say, 'Heck, you're in Chicago.' They wanted no part of us. I remember we did a collection of essays by a young writer, a book which was, as they say, 'critically acclaimed.' Then when he did another book, we weren't even thought of by his agent."

"Nowadays," Mr. Plotnick continued, "we're looking for books to make money—books on sports, movies, crafts, recreation. Everything. Books on name people and by name people. We're big on creative stitchery, creative carving, investment books, books like *Fleeing the Lambs*, or a book on investment advisory services called *If They're So Smart, How Come You're Not Rich?*" Mr. Plotnick paused. "I've just come from reading the manuscript of a book called *Silent Slaughter* by Joel Griffiths and Rich Ballantine. He's the son of Ian Ballantine. It's on the radiation hazards in the household—everything from X rays to your TV."

"Do they really know anything about it?" Mr. Regnery asked. "Yes," Mr. Plotnick said firmly, "they do." Did he, we asked, see any good in the older generation at all? He grinned. "Sure," he said, "they made the younger generation." On that fine exit line, he exited. We turned back to Mr. Regnery. Did he object to his son-in-law's take-over? "No, I don't object," he said, "but, I repeat, things are different now."

Mr. Regnery, we learned, was born in Chicago and attended MIT, where he studied mathematics. Was that good for publishing? we asked. "No," he said without elaboration and then went on