



Louis Mélançon

Sherrill Milnes in title role of Don Giovanni—An authentic baritone.

First Pinza, Then Siepi, Now Milnes

by Irving Kolodin

Don Giovanni may not be the male opera singer's Hamlet, but good new ones come along just about as infrequently—every other decade or so. Sherrill Milnes is such a good new one, and his easy assumption of the Don's responsibilities at the Metropolitan this spring promises good things to come on stages elsewhere in America and around the world.

At the risk of defaming whatever esteem lingers for the good old days, it must be said that Milnes is better, at this beginning point of his career, in the great role than were either Ezio Pinza or Cesare Siepi. This doesn't guarantee that he will go on to challenge the high distinction they eventually achieved. But if he doesn't, it will be for lack of follow-

through—a most un-Donish attribute—not of aptitude.

Milnes is tall enough to dominate the stage, though perhaps he would have to give an inch or two to Pinza. He lacks the Latin ardor to which Pinza and Siepi were heirs by birth, also the spark of electric vigor that sent a nervous shudder through every motion of George London's characterization. But he has one asset, in addition to his fine physique, for giving his effort the old college (Drake University) try that is not possessed by the others: His voice is the authentic baritone for which Mozart wrote, not the bass-baritone to which recent custom has been partial.

As a result, Milnes is comfortably in the middle of his range throughout, undeterred by the necessities either of the "champagne" air or the Serenade. The casting, which brought on, as Leporello, the solidly substantial bottom sound of Walter Berry (celebrated as performer of such basic roles as Wotan, Baron Ochs, and Dyer in Strauss's *Frau ohne Schatten*), provided the proper sonorous spread for ravishing tonal blends in the ensembles with Donna Anna (Leontyne

Price), Donna Elvira (Teresa Zylis-Gara), Zerlina (Teresa Stratas), and Don Ottavio (Stuart Burrows). As disciplined by the lightly flexible hand of James Levine, the totality of timbres can stand for years as a new Mozartian standard.

By an accident of economics, which forbade the planned investment in a new production, Eugene Berman's classic designs were reinstated. This was in every way welcome, for they have attained, through years of careful usage, a patina that provides a lustrous background for the vocal sparkle of Price, Zylis-Gara, and Burrows in the Mask Trio. When such a relatively brief but dazzling episode arouses the audience response it deserves, the star of Mozart is high in the evening sky.

This is not to say that the Met's general manager, Schuyler Chapin, can sit back on a cushion of self-esteem, under the illusion that another masterpiece has been wholly accounted for. Act 1, which may be the longest sustained flight of musical fantasy in operatic history, was dead on target from the propulsive overture to the ball in the Don's castle an hour later. But Act 2, which is not so consistently director-proof, stumbled from time to time for lack of positive intent in the action supervised by Patrick Tavernia.

Librettist Lorenzo da Ponte left a series of hazards and obstacles along the way to the Don's confrontation with the statue that provides an unexpected answer to the question, Guess who's coming to dinner? Tavernia did not sidestep any of them: Indeed, whether the problem was the impersonation of Don Giovanni by Leporello or the masquerade of the servant by the master, each was stumbled over, kicked around for laughs, and left for deadweight in this staging. Given the option between fake comedy and dramatic truth, platitudinous sentiment and affecting emotion, Tavernia's instinct led him unfailingly to the wrong choice. The conclusion would have to be that he didn't believe that the Mozart who wrote Act 1 also wrote Act 2.

FORTUNATELY, this was not an attitude shared either by the singers or conductor Levine. Miss Price doesn't command the flexibility to make her performance of *Non mi dir*, late in Act 2, as memorable a moment as her vengeful "Honor" aria in Act 1, but the effort expended on one emanated from the same sense of serious purpose as the other. In the ensembles, the shining sound she produced was a

guiding star to which Burrows's finely controlled tenor, Zylis-Gara's rich middle register, and Milnes's complementary lower compass were always reliably related. To my taste, Berry's Leporello was a more vulgar servant than Milnes's Don would have tolerated (Sir Geraint Evans made a proper gentleman's gentleman of him long before he was personally knighted), and the Masetto impersonated by Raymond Michalski did not deserve a Zerlina of Stratas's charm. Withal, it has been rare in recent times to recommend a revival of Don Giovanni in which vocal resource, physical favor, and musicianship have been so evenly distributed.

"People pay to hear Beverly Sills perform vocal miracles, and she responds to their expectations with an almost intemperate generosity."

A recent reference to Julius Rudel's success in evolving a style suitable for the restoration of so static an operatic "classic" as Cherubini's *Medea* may now be extended to include the New York City Opera's venture with Bellini's *I Puritani*, in which Beverly Sills is Elvira. The production was launched last fall in Los Angeles and thus comes east with a degree of polish not commonly attained by rehearsal alone. In the lighter *leggiero* music of Elvira, Miss Sills is even happier than she was in the excellent embodiments of Donizetti's Tudor trio—Anna Bolena, Maria Stuarda, and Elizabeth—which have given new luster to recent evenings on the south side of the Lincoln Center Plaza.

Her degree of mastery was sometimes penalizing to the more ordinary aptitudes of Enrico di Giuseppe (Talbot), Robert Hale (Walton), and Richard Fredericks (Forth), but this did not deter Rudel from persisting with the steadily productive practice he has evolved for dealing with such works. That consists, simply, in honoring the great music they contain; of indulging, so far as honest effort can, every generation's love for fine singing; and of suppressing, insofar as possible, the absurdities that sufficed for subject matter when the greatest of Italian melodists were pouring out operas spring, summer, fall, and winter, and posterity was something that only Germans worried about.

This generation's love for fine singing is also being fed by Miss Sills as a recitalist, a phase of human endeavor in which her popularity was both tested and attested to at a recent matinee in Fisher Hall. Empty seats were as scarce as in a subway car during rush hour, and applause ranged from ecstatic to hysterical. Neither means that the results Miss Sills achieved were as artistic as they were popular.

LACKING THE IDENTITY provided by the story line of an opera, every recitalist must invent a character of his or her own. Miss Sills's character, plainly, is that of Much-Admired Prima Donna. People pay to hear her perform vocal miracles, and she responds to their expectations with an almost intemperate generosity. Hardly an item in the printed program, which began with Handel and ended with Rossini—with some time-defying excursions along the way to Rachmaninoff before Mozart, and Bellini after Saint-Saëns—was lacking in a trill, a rouiade, or some other clang of the vocal cash register to remind the listeners they were getting what they had paid to hear. Her French group, with its seldom-heard *Si tu le veux* of Koechlin and Saint-Saëns's *Le Bonheur est chose légère*, embodied the most consistently beautiful singing Miss Sills offered, but here, too, there was something overtly exhibitionistic in each, as if sincerity, directness, and sheer emotional impact would be insufficient.

In a way, this represents shrewd self-analysis, for the Sills voice, as of today, is a vocal patchwork, with glints of strength, spots of weakness, and carefully cultivated bridge tones to conceal years of use. Over all, however, is a lacquer of flexibility, fluency, and assurance, which gives the illusion of a vocal glow even when it is only dimly present. Her accompanist was Charles Wadsworth. □

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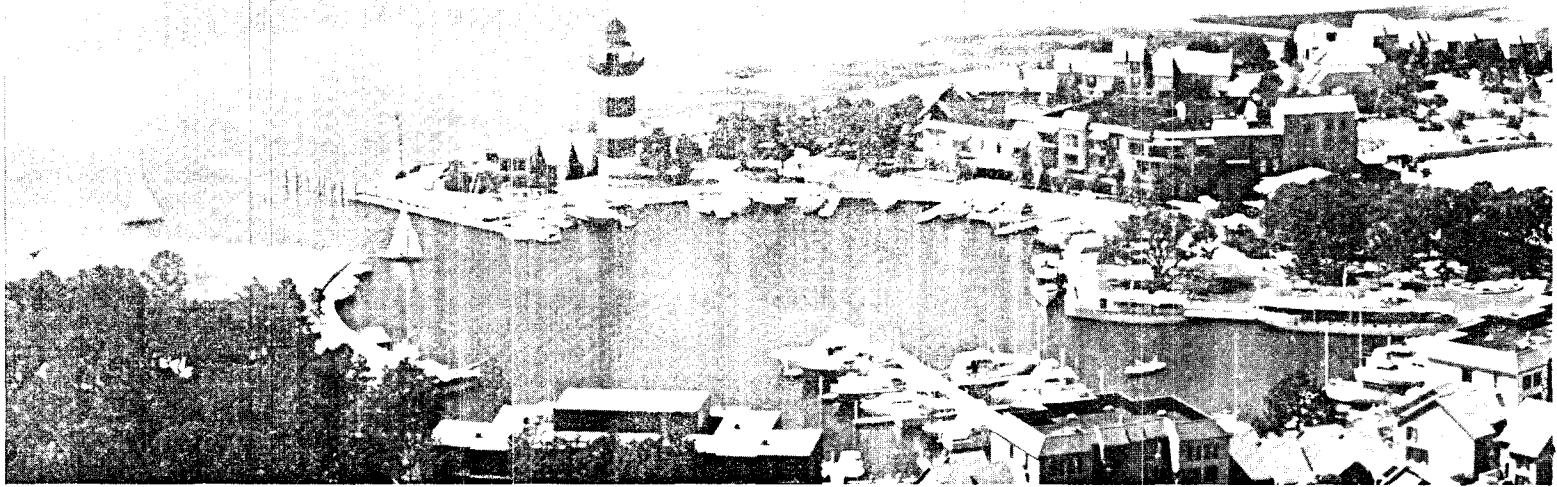
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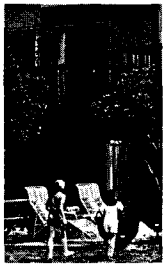
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Sojourns on a Shoestring

by Dena Kaye

The rise in the cost of living—an estimated 10 percent in the last year—has given the jitters to those who purvey places and transport. It has also given pause to those about to go on holiday. This is a second collection of ideas for moderately priced trips. The first appeared in *SR/W* March 23, 1974.

Beachcomb on Isla del Carmen, Mexico—port and shrimp center sits off the northern tip of the Yucatán peninsula. Town shaded in coconut palms, houses strewn with shrimp nets. Best beaches: Bajamita, El Playon. Lino's Motel in town set in tropical gardens, \$8 single. Jet Hotel on beach \$5.60, good seafood restaurant on premises. Daily flights from Mexico City on Mexicana de Aviacion to Ciudad del Carmen.

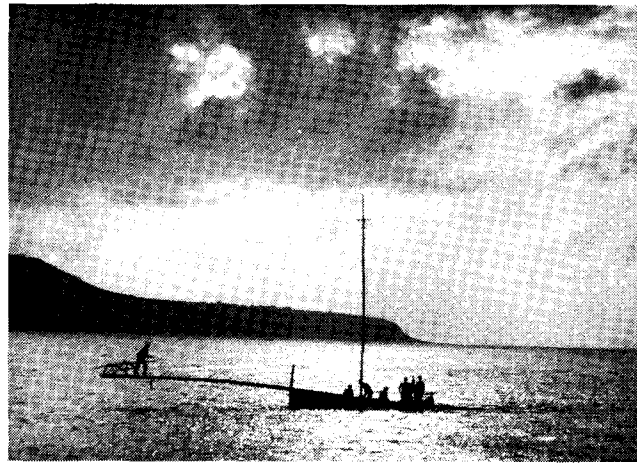
Keep House in a Houseboat in the Thousand Islands—tour 1700 islands in the St. Lawrence River, Ontario, docking at St. Lawrence National Park or Heart Island to see model of Rhine-country château. Fish, skin-dive, swim. Explorer Houseboat Rentals in Brockville, Ontario, rents thirty-six-foot houseboat for \$345 per week, six people. No boating experience needed. Food, linens, not supplied. Highway 81 from New York, over Thousand Islands Bridge to Thousand Islands Parkway, then to Rockport, Ontario, to pick up boat and supplies.

Live Creole-Style in Guadeloupe—over one hundred restaurants serve Creole cuisine on this French West Indies island. Look for restaurants with ladies' names: Chez Odette, Chez Rosette, Chez Violette. Lunch or dinner choices include *pâté en pot* (thick soup), *blaff* (poached fresh fish with herbs). Costs from five to eight dollars, including *le punch* (local aperitif), table wine, tips, taxes. Alternative: breakfast, dinner, and lodging at Auberge du Grand Large on the beach in St. Anne for twelve to sixteen dollars per person. Or feast for free, for five hours, at the Fête des Cuisinières on August 10 in Pointe-à-Pitre.

Be Stately in Britain—Open-to-View ticket costs \$5.50, permits free entry to castles, stately homes, and historic sites; Countdown Card costs \$4.00, gives sav-

ings of 20 percent on memberships to nightclubs, meals, theater, clothes, car rentals, dry cleaning, hotels; Status Card at \$15.00, saves up to 50 percent on meals at twenty-five restaurants and 20 percent in more than four hundred shops. Honorary membership in fifteen clubs, discount admission at Sadlers Wells Opera, Penthouse Club, discothèques, riding stables.

Alight on the Aeolian Islands, Italy—a series of islands planted off the northeast tip of Sicily, all connected by hydrofoil: Vulcano, smallest of main islands, has grottoes and a crater 1200 feet above sea level. Over ten hotels; prices from ten



Aeolian Islands—Black-sand beaches and grottoes.

dollars per person, with meals. Lipari has black-sand beaches, ancient fourth-century-B.C. coins, city with a cathedral whose foundations are Norman, sixteenth-century Spanish fortress, good shopping. Most hotels (over fourteen) have private beach, air conditioning, TV. Room with bath and full board from fourteen dollars. Stromboli has black- and white-sand beaches. Famous for an Ingrid Bergman film. Overnight steamer from Naples to islands under twenty dollars round trip. Hour - and - a - half hydrofoil ride from Messina. About eight dollars round trip.

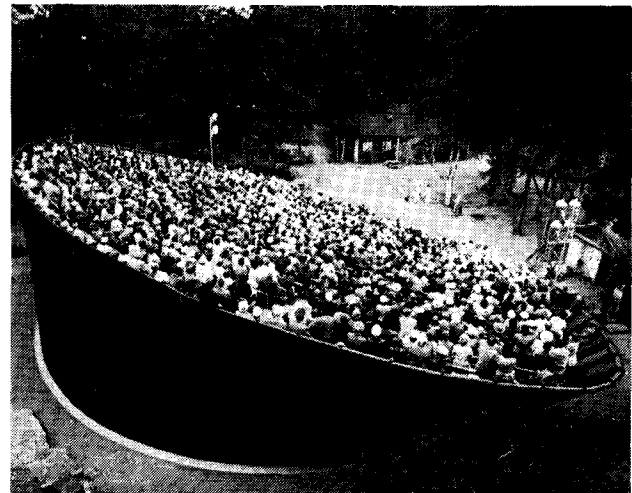
Ferry to Fish Restaurants in Lisbon, Portugal—red-and-white ferries cross the Tagus River, for eight cents per person, to seafood restaurants on the opposite bank. Grilled sardines, octopus, and lobster. Dinner with table wine about five dollars, but lobsters are no bargain. By day, the view is Lisbon's pastel-colored buildings; by night, the illuminated monuments.

Take a Walk in Norway—hike Norway's vast mountain network separating the fjords from the inland valleys, passing glaciers, waterfalls, still lakes, valleys. Tourist lodges, set about a day's walk apart (routes are marked for "leisurely" or "vigorous" pace), offer lodging and meals (including lunch for the trail) for fourteen dollars. Conducted walking tours arranged by Norwegian Touring Club in Oslo. Also available: maps showing lodges and distances in between.

Spend the Weekend in Stockholm, Sweden

—four days and three nights in choice of hotels (for thirty-two dollars, twin without bath) includes breakfast, discounts for sight-seeing tours, and admission to various monuments and museums. Free concerts in many parks.

Fly to the Finnish Festivals—Finnair offers a ninety-nine-dollar Holiday Ticket for unlimited domestic flights taken within fifteen consecutive days. Nine major festivals all over Finland from June



Tampere Theater—Finland offers nine summer festivals.