

The All-Moussorgsky "Boris"—Ligeti, Carter

Any time an event that has been 60 years in the making occurs in the world of the arts, it tends to overshadow other happenings. The long-awaited event was the Metropolitan Opera's first new production (ever) of Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. (Its predecessor, in use since 1913, had seen previous service in Paris.) It brought with it the first hearing in New York of the score as Moussorgsky wrote it, with every performable part of the great score included (in the correct order).

This was much to bring about. It has taken three Met administrations to bring to a premiere a project that began with Rudolf Bing, was passed on to Goran Gentele, and now has been realized by Schuyler Chapin with a range of talent in its many roles that merits a mass accolade.

Essentially it is a triumph for conductor Thomas Schippers. His task—even more difficult than rehearsing a cast, chorus, and orchestra in a work they had not previously performed—was to re-indoctrinate them in a work they had performed countless times before but always with some editorial alterations between Moussorgsky's mind and the listener's ear—alterations by Rimsky-Korsakov, Karol Rathaus, Dimitri Shostakovich. Schippers not only saw this task through but also wove into the score two scenes (one in St. Basil's Square, the other in the forest of Kromy) seldom heard before in the same production. To cap it all, the production ended, not with the death of Boris (as some "effect"-minded producers have preferred), but with Moussorgsky's vision of more agony to come over the centuries as the Simpleton bewails the fate of the "poor, starving Russian folk."

Even the advent of so good a Boris as the six-foot, seven-inch Martti Talvela could not preempt the priority due the innovative use of Moussorgsky's own orchestral colorations (amended only by Schippers's measured judgment that here and there a bit of doubling would add to audibility). This introduction was, in a way, a fulfillment of Rimsky-Korsakov's own response when he was censured, even reviled, for pull-

ing together Moussorgsky's pages and publishing his own version of the score in the 1890s. After all, he had only expended precious months of his life putting his friend's best work into the form in which it became a world favorite. And he had only said to his critics (in his memoirs) that he had not destroyed the original *Boris*—that is, painted out the old frescoes forever—adding, "If ever the conclusion is arrived at that the original is better, worthier than my revision—mine will be discarded and *Boris*



J. Heffernan

Talvela—Monumental grandeur.

Fresh Faces and First Encounters

Instrumental

Chopin: Ilana Vered Plays Chopin (London). In her first solo recital for Phase 4, Ilana Vered performs with the zest, the freshness of feeling, and the sense of structure that have commended her in other circumstances. She tends to stretch metric dimensions (by excessive *rubato* and *ritards*), a tendency in need of closer control.

Liszt: Hexaméron, Trois Transcriptions (EMI-Pathé). Argentine-born Sylvia Kersenbaum is clearly a performer not only of considerable technical skill, but—more importantly—of independent mind and individual impulse. "Hexaméron" is well known to pianists as containing not only variations by Liszt on a march from Bellini's *I Puritani* but also others by Thalberg, Czerny, and Chopin. Miss Kersenbaum adapts herself resourcefully to the requirements of all and of those contained in the overside variations by Liszt on excerpts from Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* and the Polonaise from Tchaikovsky's *Eugène Onéguine* (as it is billed). The recording is distributed in the United States by Peters International.

Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez (Angel). Well known as it is in its original form for guitar and orchestra, the Concierto de Aranjuez has acquired a new identity in the transformation made by the composer himself for harpist Nicanor Zabaleta, his good friend. Some fine points are better served by the guitar, but many others are finely served by Zabaleta's masterly command of the larger instrument's resources. With it is an arrangement by Zabaleta of a G-minor concerto by Elias Parish-Alvars, a mid-nineteenth-century English-Portuguese composer, who was not quite a Vieuxtemps or Wieniawski of the harp.

Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos conducts the Spanish National Orchestra.

Tchaikovsky: Concerto No. 1 (RCA). Tedd Joselson is no ordinary (Madison Square) garden-variety of pianistic show-off, but a young man with a fine flair for generating excitement in what he performs and with the technical means for bringing it off. He could profit from a more responsive performance of the orchestra than that provided by Eugene Ormandy and his Philadelphians, but his kind of pianistic prowess and personal projection tell their own story of future promise in the Tchaikovsky concerto and the Prokofiev No. 2 with which it is associated.

Opera

Schoenberg: Moses and Aaron (Philips). The qualifications of conductor Michael Gielen to be considered the lineal successor to the late Hans Rosbaud, as the master of the intricate, the complex, and the all-but-impossible to perform, are confirmed in this scrupulously musical, fine-sounding version of a work whose only prior recording was by Rosbaud himself. It is an effort by the many talents employed that adds enormously to the comprehension of Schoenberg's extraordinary evocation of the subject to which he addressed himself. Begun in 1931, it remained unfinished at Schoenberg's death more than 20 years later, a mute suggestion, perhaps, that the Promised Land was to remain perpetually a promise. Now, with a score in hand (or the accompanying brochure), it can—after the first 20 pages of overlapping speech—be readily followed, from the entrance of Aaron to the appearance of the burning bush. Louis Devos is an exemplary Aaron, Günter

Godunov will be performed according to the original score."

Now that we have had *Boris* plain as well as *Boris* fancy, it is by no means a "conclusion" that the original is "better, worthier" than Rimsky-Korsakov's. After their first exposure to Moussorgsky's drabber, less-colorful instrumentation, more than a few people, indoctrinated in Rimsky-Korsakov's treatment of the coronation scene or Varlaam's ballade ("The Town of Kazan") or the polonaise, could be heard wishing for his peerless hand at tonal retouching.

To MY OWN immediate taste, the less-glowing sound of the coronation, of the plainer, even drab treatment of the riotous ballade, of the duller colors of

the polonaise, had one abiding virtue—it kept everything to a congruent palette throughout. Certainly the darker, less-vibrant background Moussorgsky imagined for the death scene set off the choked, faltering inflections of the bass voice better than does the plusher texture provided by Rimsky-Korsakov.

Talvela's bass voice is perhaps the richest to be heard in this music since Alexander Kipnis was projecting his brooding czar. Now approaching 40, Talvela was a schoolteacher in Finland before the claims of his massive sound and staggering size made a singing career mandatory. Following his American debut in 1968 in a performance of Verdi's *Requiem*, directed by the late George Szell, he was heard as a recitalist

Reich equally good in the spoken part of Moses. But, essentially, it is a brilliant ensemble accomplishment for the orchestra and chorus of the Austrian Radio, which Gielen holds together like performers in a Mozart opera. Superbly clear sound.

Orchestral

Bach: J.C.F. Seven Symphonies (None-such). This Bach (whose initials stand for Johann Christoph Friedrich) might be described as Johann Sebastian's opus 19—the last but one of the great cantor's 20 children. A court musician who spent much of his life in the north of Germany, J.C.F.'s three- and four-movement works fly the family house flag. It is inscribed with such words as "sturdy," "artistic," "adventurous in mind and spirit." The seven works are representative of the beginning and end of his compositional career, and well represented thanks to the quality of results achieved by Helmut Müller-Brühl from the Cologne Chamber Orchestra.

Vocal

Yuri Mazurok: Arias by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninov, Mozart, Verdi, and Leoncavallo (Melodiya/Columbia). This excellent Russian baritone has previously been heard on Bolshoi recordings of complete operas (*Eugene Onegin*, among others) but not as a soloist. The rich, pliant sound is very well suited to the excerpts from *Mazeppa* (Tchaikovsky), *Sadko* (Rimsky-Korsakov), and *Aleko* (Rachmaninov), but the *Don Giovanni* (Mozart), *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Verdi), and *Pagliacci* (Leoncavallo) material present other criteria and lesser suitability for them.

Leontyne Price Sings Richard Strauss (RCA). The effort of Miss Price to find a new frame for her vocal personality is

certainly commendable, but it is doubtful that it is the one bearing the name of Richard Strauss. She is not lacking in voice for the excerpts from *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Guntertram*, but she demonstrates very little identity with the style, the atmosphere, the inner emotions of the characters being portrayed. Of The Four Last Songs, "September" and "Beim Schlafengehen" are beautifully sung; the others, too operatically. Erich Leinsdorf directs the superbly sonorous collaboration by the New Philharmonia Orchestra.

Miscellaneous

Rachel Faro: Refugees (RCA). A graduate of the Baez-Dylan school of pop, Rachel Faro gives high promise of bringing honor to the old alma mater. She can write the "inspirational" song ("Refugees") or the jolly folkish variety ("Numerology") and sing both equally well. Arranger John Simon has soundly judged her quality in blending a solid beat with acoustic guitar, dulcimer, tabla, congas, and more conventional instruments. A quality product.

Dana Gillespie: Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle (RCA). Dana Gillespie (well known to clients of Reno Sweeney's, on the fringe of New York's Greenwich Village) writes most of the songs she performs. Like some other such self-providers, she is a better writer than a singer. Q.E.D.: She should write more and sing less.

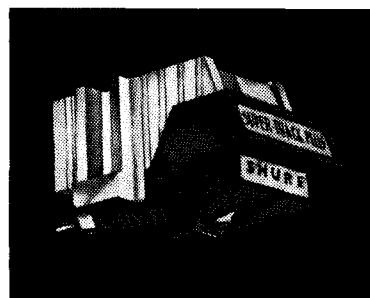
Spooky Tooth: The Mirror (Island). This group puts it all together in a special sense: All the material is written in part or in whole by members of the five-man ensemble; they perform their own backgrounds on instruments ranging from Moog synthesizer to clavinet; and much of it makes sense. I.K.



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in a scattering of other roles. He has been singing Boris publicly for only two or so years (San Francisco heard him in 1973), but he is now monarch of all he surveys, heir-apparent to the orb and scepter of an office nobly served by such predecessors as Chaliapin, Kipnis, Baklanoff, Pinza, and the more recent Christoff, London, Hines, Siepi, Tozzi, and Ghiaurov.

Talvela would be a standout anywhere in *Boris* at any time, but he is a figure of particular influence in the Met's first venture with a production sung in Russian. He strikes a note of authenticity in his treatment of the text, of grandeur and of grievous guilt on a monumental scale, that set a very high level for all the others in a mostly American cast. But he is also a tender father to his children, a Boris capable of looking the Simpleton (a part extremely well done by Andrea Velis) straight in the eye when, with idiot sincerity, he scorns him as a "Tsarist Herod" for seizing power by murder.

Talvela will undoubtedly improve with age and should reign much longer than did the character he portrays. In-

deed, when he is no longer able—by weight of years—to employ such gaudy theatrics as pulling down door drapes in simulated terror (in the clock scene) or rolling down a flight of stairs (as he did in the death scene), he will be a greater artist than he is today.

In a production of less-musical virtue, first priority could go to Ming Cho Lee's splendid succession of stage designs (more suitable to the high-living Godunovs and their co-equals in Poland's Sandomir Castle than to the masses begging for bread in their tailor-made rags), especially the Kremlin Council Chamber, in which Boris plays out his dying minutes. August Everding's direction of the crowd scenes was consistently resourceful, his treatment of individual action less so.

Thus Paul Plishka was a perfect embodiment of the scholarly monk Pimenn, as Donald Gramm was of the non-scholarly wino Varlaam. But Harry Theyard was equipped with little more than a beautiful high tenor voice and a youthful appearance for the complex role of the seminarian who becomes the pretender to Boris's throne, and Mignon

Dunn sang much better than she was directed as the Marina who aspired to become Russia's Tsarina. In similar opposition was Robert Nagy as a wily schemer of a Schuisky, and Batyah Godfrey as an awkward, vocally non-persuasive innkeeper. Taken all together, however, this is a *Boris* to which you can take any foreign visitor with little fear of odious comparison—except, perhaps, a Russian: And even he could not question the authenticity of George Balanchine's choreography for the polonaise.

SURROUNDING THE PREPARATION and advent of this major innovation was a series of others worthy of mention. Of particular quality was Gyorgi Ligeti's "Double Concerto for Flute, Oboe, and Orchestra" in Juilliard's "Twentieth Century Music Series" under the direction of Richard Duffalo. The new work of the Hungarian avant-gardist is in two movements: the first, slow and sustained; the second, more animated, with wave-like undulations. The tonal textures of the 25 or so instruments vary but minutely from one chord formation to the next: It is the rarefied skill with which Ligeti accomplishes these shimmering readjustments that makes the experience unique and ear-filling. Nadine Asin (who played bass, alto, and normal, "soprano" flute) and George Paradise, oboe, were the excellent student soloists.

Of somewhat related, but polar, artistry—what might be called "music for musicians' sake"—is Elliott Carter's "Brass Quintet," introduced at a concert in the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall series. Commissioned by the American Brass Quintet and written to its measure (two trumpets, tenor and bass trombone, and French horn), it is a further exploration by Carter into his favorite form: internal, tonal conversation among the players. It is a free-wheeling, enormously ingenious form of sonorous symposium in which each instrument challenges the others to outdo its own feats of virtuosity. The 15-minute workout (which the quintet dispatched with impressive ease) ends with a quietly harmonious expression of mutual respect, a witty reminder to the listener that Carter has not forgotten his interests either. □

Answer to *Literary Crypt* No. 25 (see page 8): As a general rule, nobody has money who ought to have it.

Benjamin Disraeli



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Digital Tuners: Threading FM Through a Needle's Eye

by Ivan Berger

FM tuners are beginning to resemble calculators, with numbers that light up to indicate what station is tuned in. But more significantly, they're beginning to work like calculators, too, with digital-logic circuits taking the place of conventional circuits that have been used, in the same basic form, since long before FM itself was invented.

The most visible application of digital technology is the numerical station readout, which makes it easier to tell whether you're tuned to 98.3 or 98.5 megahertz, even from across the room. But, easy as it is to tell just what station you've tuned in, digital readouts don't tell how well you've tuned it. Depending on the tuner's other circuits, you could be tuned to the edge of the station's signal, hearing it with noise, distortion, limited-frequency response, and little stereo separation. You could even be well into the gap between the indicated station and the next one.

A tuner's problems only start with finding one station in the jumbled haystack of signals coming through the air. Once the tuner finds the station, it must encircle that signal as snugly as a needle does its thread, passing all of the desired signal while not admitting the signals of other stations. If the station (whose channel is 200 kilohertz wide—0.2 megahertz on the FM tuning dial) is tuned in off-center, noise and distortion increase. A tuning error of just 0.1 percent of the station's frequency would add distortion of about 1 percent or more to the sound; a 1 percent tuning error would put you nearly five channels away from your target station.

Tuning accuracy can be increased through the use of automatic-frequency-control (AFC) circuits, which nudge the tuner toward the center of the channel, and meters, which measure how well centered the station is. But the ideal would be a tuner that, instead of scanning all the frequencies in the FM band, jumps from one precise station frequency to the next.

Digital circuitry moves in just such discrete jumps; and with its aid, just

such tuners are now with us: the Heathkit AJ-1510, H. H. Scott T33F, and Revox A720 (which have digital readout as well), and the new Kenwood 700-T (which has a conventional tuning dial).

But to understand how to make a tuner jump, you must first know how it tunes. Early radio-input circuits had to be tuned through the radio bands, trying to find a station they could pick up, a technique akin to corralling a stationary thread with a moving needle's eye—harder, in fact, because the electronic "eye" would be less sensitive at some points on the dial than at others.

Modern tuners shift the station frequency, instead, until it matches the sensitive opening into the tuner's later circuits—moving, in other words, the thread into the needle's eye. (Ask anyone who sews if that's not easier.) That "eye," in modern FM sets, is fixed at 10.7 megahertz, far below the actual station frequencies. But the tuner generates another signal whose frequency changes as you turn the dial but is always 10.7 MHz above some point within the FM band.

The tuner constantly compares the frequencies of its received and internally generated signals, subtracting the higher frequency from the lower. When the internal tuning signal's frequency is 10.7 MHz higher than that of a station within listening range, the resulting difference signal slips neatly through the tuner's 10.7 MHz "eye" and on to the tuner's other circuits. But if the tuning signal should be 10.71 MHz above the station, it will be mistuned and, accordingly, sound harsh.

So the trick is to jump the tuning signal 200 kHz at a time, between only those frequencies that are exactly 10.70 MHz above the frequencies where stations can be found. In true digital tuners this is done by "frequency synthesis": A quartz-controlled reference oscillator (like that in an electronic watch) puts out a precisely regulated, fixed-frequency signal whose output can be divided digitally down to 100 kHz. Then another digital circuit can compare this frequency with the tuning signal's. If the tuning signal is a precise, odd multiple of 100 kHz (or an even multiple for European FM stations), then the tuner is ready to receive a station. If the tuning signal is not the correct multiple of the reference frequency (as it won't be, if

the tuner is off-station), the comparator sends a corrective control signal to the tuning oscillator.

Now, as you turn the tuning knob, the oscillator tries to shift frequency but can't, because the comparator won't let it—until you've tuned closer to the next channel on the dial than to the previously locked-in one. Then, the comparator takes the easy way out and kicks the tuning oscillator directly up or down 200 kHz to the next channel.

Some digital tuners, like the Scott and Heathkit, have no knobs at all. Instead, they tune by sweeping automatically from one station to the next, by reading station cards inserted in a slot, or—in the Heathkit—by having you punch in the station number as you would a number on a push-button phone. Surprisingly, though, the simple knob-tuning system used on the Revox and the Kenwood digitals is at least as convenient to use, especially when you only know a station's approximate location on the dial.

Advanced design is rarely cheap: The Kenwood 700-T is \$750, the H. H. Scott T-33F is \$1,000, and the Revox A720 (which includes a preamp) is \$1,300.95. The Heathkit AJ-1510 costs \$560—plus about 30 to 60 hours of your time to build it; if you like kit-building, you can consider that recreational time—if not, you may consider the real cost higher than the dollar price tag.

Not all of that high price comes from digital tuning alone: Such tuners incorporate other design advances, yielding more performance gains than merely easier, more precise tuning. But then, at those prices, they'd better. □

WIT TWISTER NO. 38

Edited by Arthur Swan

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word. Answers on page 55.

Quite — — — — — with his
superficial life,
Ashamed of — — — — — kept
secret from his wife,
He joins no more in dalliance or
play—
But in his — — — — — dis-
patches his valet.

A. S.

Ivan Berger, a longtime contributor to SR, is also electronics editor of Popular Mechanics.