

# Music to My Ears

by Irving Kolodin

## James Levine Week(s) at Lincoln Center

Into every man's life, so it is said, some rain must fall. Just now, for James Levine, it is raining engagements at the Met—of which he is principal conductor and will soon become music director—as a pianist in joint recitals, and as a guest with symphony orchestras. Recently he spent two weeks with the New York Philharmonic, during a time in which a new production of Verdi's *Aida* also required his attention. Result: 11 appearances at Lincoln Center in 14 days, including a Friday divided between a matinee concert in Avery Fisher Hall and an evening *Aida* across the plaza.

How it ended, it is too soon to tell. How it began was something special in the unfolding career of Levine (which, as it happens, rhymes with *divine*). That was a program with the Philharmonic which was, without question, the most pleasurable two hours I have thus far spent in the company of the young (33) musician. To begin, it was a program that would have crinkled the lips of a statue: a "new" Haydn concerto for cello, a provocative novelty by the late Bruno Maderna, and the ever-welcome D minor (No. 7) symphony of Dvorák.

To speak of a "new" concerto by a man who died in 1809 is clearly contradictory, but this lively, lovely work was only uncovered in a private library in liberated Czechoslovakia in the early Sixties. The score is just now coming into general circulation, a condition that will unquestionably be accelerated by a performance such as was heard from Lynn Harrell, a companion-in-arms to Levine since their days together with the Cleveland Orchestra. This was a performance long on flexibility of bowing (right hand) and artfulness of fingerboard manipulation (left hand), of a kind not commonly associated with Haydn's cello writing. However, if one projects the understanding of the cello's resources contained in Bach's earlier solo suites, the next expression is clearly to be found in Haydn. Whatever the genesis, the fulfillment was handsomely accounted for in Harrell's thoughtfully vigorous effort and Levine's uncommonly flexible control of the orchestra.

The same kind of control asserted

itself in Levine's broadly beautiful, finely phrased direction of Dvorák's D minor, which may be the third best of that modest and great man's nine (edged only by the G major and the *New World* in E minor). Its friendly melodies and drivingly dramatic developments were radiantly realized in this performance—a result, in part at least, of the apprentice years Levine spent under the late George Szell, a master of the Dvorák literature. It was an evidence of Levine's control of himself and the situation that he could turn his back on the woodwinds and brass with the conviction they would do their work unprompted, as he devoted himself to a subordinate but important phrase in the strings. A casual encounter with one member of the orchestra found him high in praise of Levine, but wishing that his definition of cues and entrances (with the baton) was a little more clearly defined.

The title of Maderna's *Quadrivium* defines a work in which the orchestra is divided into four segments, which immediately qualifies it for inclusion in the category of "Second-Generation Bartók" (*SR*, Feb. 7, 1976). Maderna's groupings tended to timbral affinities, in

Levine—"The highest standards of orchestral direction."



which similar-sounding instruments in each of the four groups—metal (chimes, celesta, bells, cymbals), skins (drums, tambourines), wood (xylophone, marimba, plucked strings), and reeds (oboes, clarinets, bassoons)—played together. Much of it was rather too devoid of musical substance to sustain attention, but the ending section, in which vibrations dissolved into thin and thinner air, was hypnotically evoked by Levine and his responsive players. The whole evening suggested that the young conductor's familiarity with the highest standards of orchestral direction is much closer to him than anything he has yet demonstrated in opera at the Metropolitan.

TEN YEARS' absence from public performance is a lengthy span in any career, the more so when the years are those between 62 and 72. When Erica Morini, long esteemed as one of the best contemporary violinists, passed her 70th birthday, in 1974, it might have been assumed that the concert hall would see her no more. Miss Morini erased the 10-year gap in the few hours of a "homecoming" recital in the concert auditorium of Hunter College.

The audience was large and of a mixed disposition. Some old friends were clearly impatient to discover whether their old favorite was still entitled to admiration, or merely to affection. One younger person, seated behind me, read the program and marveled, "Fifty-five years a public performer. Wow!"—little realizing that it would take Morini another decade to catch up with Heifetz, and still be well behind Rubinstein. It was very much a Morini program; one might say *the* Morini program: the Tartini G minor ("Devil's Trill") sonata, Corelli's variations on a theme of Tartini, the Beethoven F major ("Spring") sonata, the D minor of Brahms.

The first two parts of it were played with Miss Morini's own inimitable combination of incisiveness and gravity. The touch of Latin in her makeup (her father was Italian, her mother Austrian) was held in reserve, until—in the later phases of the Tartini variations—it provided the spark to make her technical display pyrotechnical. Her tone, never large, is now somewhat smaller, but penetrating in its purity.

Unchanging, too, was Miss Morini's way with the Beethoven sonata, but not to her credit. It is still her apparent con-

viction that Beethoven wrote these works as solos for the violin with piano accompaniment, though they are clearly defined, in his own words, as sonatas for pianoforte with violin obbligato. Nomenclature is of no moment, but when she inclines to play even background passages on a level with the principal matter in the piano, an artistic solecism is being perpetrated. Leon Pommers, loyal friend, good pianist, played on, having been through it before.

A formidable violinist from Korea was heard in recital for the first time, when, after several appearances with orchestra, Young-Uck Kim performed in Alice Tully Hall. He is an instrumentalist of great precision and high discrimination in the shading of the rich sound he drew from the exceptional Guarneri del Gesù (the "Lipinski") on which he performs. So far as facility and instrumental discipline were concerned, nothing he challenged in Stravinsky's *Duo Concertante*, the B minor (unaccompanied) partita of Bach, and similar matter, challenged him unduly. He also had, in Samuel Sanders, a piano partner who took full responsibility for the music Stravinsky wrote for his instrument.

But Kim's artistic stock sagged below the market opening in the Bach partita, a work of rugged musical design as well as contrapuntal intricacy. The intricacies were clarified in time and on pitch: the musical design was rounded rather than rugged, the level of expressivity restrained by Kim's much too restricted scale of personal input. A player of his accomplishments should have no problem in amending this deficiency.

Solo players of the viola are rarely able to claim a place on a symphonic program (save by being members of the orchestra), and black solo violists all but never. Marcus Thompson, Juilliard-trained, and now a professor of humanities at MIT, is one who deserved the opportunity that came to him—to perform in Walter Piston's concerto for viola and orchestra in a Carnegie Hall concert by the Symphony of the New World. Thompson has assurance, temperament, and major mastery of his instrument: with anything like the Guarneri available to Young-Uck Kim, he would have no problem holding his own with the orchestra; without one, he sometimes did. Everett Lee has made a much better ensemble of this mostly, but not wholly, black orchestra than it was when I last heard it, in 1972. □

## High and Low in Haiti



*The chapel at the gates of Sans Souci—"Resplendent enough for a shaky kingdom."*

by Horace Sutton

Although black republics have proliferated during the post-colonial years, filling the halls of the United Nations with a blizzard of names, some of which are wont to change without much notice, one of the earliest to establish independence was Haiti, which occupies a piece of a West Indian island about the size of Belgium.

Haiti is a spirited land, a quality that has attracted a special breed of traveler—those who are enthralled by the bright-colored, often fey, art; by the drums, which find their antecedents in some African backwater; by the dance, which is deeply intertwined with the murky essences of voodoo mixed with the grace of ballet; by the French overtones which lend a shade of style; and by that mix of vitality and whimsy that tints every facet of the national personality. The special breed of visitor, I might add, comprehends those who are not dissuaded out-of-hand by Haiti's poverty, for it does suffer from the limitations of a land that can scarcely support those who must seek life from it.

Most of the visitors converge in the capital at Port-au-Prince, the center of Haiti's best hotels, galleries, and shops;

the hub of political and social life; and the locale, less grandly, perhaps, of its casino and its divorce mill.

When the French were here—and they stayed from 1697 until they were overthrown in 1803—they settled the deep-water port in the north that is now known as Cap Haïtien. In the French time it was called Cap Français, a glittering city—some called it the Paris of the Antilles—the centerpiece of France's richest overseas colony. Coffee, tobacco, indigo, cocoa, and sugar cane were the flourishing crops, all of them shipped out from the Atlantic port at Cap Français.

There is little there now of the colonial time, nothing that even faintly resembles a Caribbean version of Paris. The streets are almost empty, and there is no hint of that bustling, jostling, dusty, frenetic swirl that one finds to the south in Port-au-Prince, a city that hadn't yet emerged from the jungle when Cap Français was an edition of Paris in the West Indies.

But there are ruins of the turbulent post-colonial period, and they evoke, more than anything else, the history of Haiti. Without difficulty, one could trace back the strivings for freedom to the American Revolution. Henri Christophe, who was to emerge as the self-ordained king of Haiti, fought at the Battle of