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HIGH FIDELITY MAGAZINE
VERDI ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

high fidelity

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AUTHORitatively Speaking

When we asked Editor in Chief Roland Gelatt, whose account of a visit to the places Verdi frequented appears on p. 70, what we were to be allowed to say about him in this column, he informed us we could announce that he was really there. We regard this statement as remarkably unhelpful. To anyone who reads "A Discursive Tour of Verdi's Italy" it will be perfectly obvious that his author was there—and not only as a corporeal presence. In fact, we would have liked to title this article "A Passionate Pilgrim," as Henry James, but Mr. G. disapproved. We're going to risk a private confessor, though: we strongly suspect that all who labored for this gala anniversary issue were animated by a profound and personal commitment to the legacy of Verdi.

With special pleasure we present among this month's roster of authors the distinguished Italian novelist Alberto Moravia (see "The Anachronism of Verdi." p. 79). Born in 1907, Mr. Moravia became an outspoken critic of the Fascist regime, which banned the sale of most of his books in Italy, and in 1943 forced him to flee from Rome. Since the war his work has become widely known to English-speaking readers with the publication in this country (by Farrar, Straus, and Co.) of such works as The Woman of Rome, The Time of Indifference, and, most recently, The Empty Canvas. He now makes his home in Rome, writing regularly on music and films as well as producing fiction.

The translation of Mr. Moravia's article was done for us by William Weaver, frequent contributor to these pages and editor of Italy's leading record magazine, Discoteca. We also owe to Mr. Weaver the article on Verdi's librettists which appears herein on p. 109 and our obligations are further compounded by the help he gave us in planning this issue, in acting as liaison with various persons and institutions in Italy, and in acquiring many of the photographs which enhance these pages. High Fidelity's readers will be interested in knowing that Mr. Weaver's translation of five Verdi librettists was published by Doubleday-Anchor Books this summer.

To Assistant Editor Shirley Fleming goes credit for "A Noisy Bantering in Old New York," p. 82, but Miss Fleming asks that we make acknowledgement here to Leo Lerman, an authority on New York's theatrical history, who had originally planned to write this account of America's early Verdi productions but who was prevented by illness. Though his doctors forbade his putting pen to paper, Mr. Lerman was allowed to give us much helpful documentary material and good advice. Our thanks to him and to Miss Fleming—who became an authority herself on said history in remarkably short order.

Verdi was born 150 years ago, and it seemed to us appropriate to juxtapose with him that other operatic giant who shares the same anniversary—Richard Wagner. For "Class of 1813," by Peter J. Pirie, turn to p. 90. Those who recall Mr. Pirie's essay on Falstaff in music (January 1963) will welcome from him an expanded treatment of the Italian composer and will be prepared for the fresh enlightenment he brings to the German.
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In the oppressive heat of June and July in Rome, the spacious air-conditioned studios of RCA Italiana, just outside the city on the Via Tiburtina, were a welcome and relaxing haven—a haven, that is, for the visitor. For recording engineer Richard Mohr and his staff, for the artists gathered there, for the Rome Symphony Orchestra (an amalgam of the Radio Italiana orchestra, Rome's best, with elements from the city's other two orchestras, the Santa Cecilia and the Opera's) the atmosphere was almost as feverish indoors as in the sun outside. Georg Solti had flown in like a lion from Covent Garden to conduct two Verdi operas. A relentless perfectionist, Solti was bent on getting crisp performances out of the sweating musicians; and he did, thanks in part to frequent, multilingual admonitions ("Così, ce C sharp est troppo forte!"). With this kind of impetus, the first scene of Falstaff, for example, was recorded in one take. Naturally, that take came after patient, exhaustive rehearsal.

New Verdi Recordings. Falstaff was the second of the two operas recorded. The first was a new Rigoletto, with Robert Merrill in the title role. Anna Moffo was Gilda; Alfredo Kraus (still unheard at the Metropolitan, but a regular at La Scala) was the Duke; Rosalind Elias, the Maddalena; Ezio Flagello, the Sparafucile. Following the new and laudable trend in record making, the Rigoletto (like the later Falstaff) was done absolutely complete. A number of ensemble passages which are usually cut will be heard here, and tenor Kraus sings both verses of "Possente amor," the caballetta that comes after "Parmi veder le grine." Too bad that we can’t have a record of Solti’s whistling this caballetta, as he did during rehearsal, complete with vivid coloratura.

When Rigoletto ended, Miss Moffo went off to Vienna for more recording [see Kurt Blaukopf’s report from Austria in this issue, pp. 26] but Solti and most of the cast stayed on for the Falstaff. Robert Merrill was Ford, a role he has never sung in the theatre (and which is all too often sung by singers of less than star quality, though the part is a pivotal one). Kraus went from being the Duke of Mantua to the amorous, and more faithful, Fenton. Rosalind Elias was Meg. For the title role, Welsh baritone Geraint Evans came from Covent Garden, where he has often sung the role with Solti, in the Franco Zeffirelli production. Also from Covent Garden came conductor Edward Downes, an assistant of Solti’s, to take rehearsals and mold the ensemble. Another member of the London company was tenor John Laniyan, who was Dr. Caius. The rest of the cast was Italian (though, as it happens, all are Covent Garden favorites too): Giulietta Simionato, an unforgettable, rakish Mistress Quickly; Hvia Ligabue, a statuesque Alice; and Mirella Freni, a fresh and moving Nannetta. Miss Freni, after a successful season in London two years ago, made a triumphant return to La Scala last year in the Karajan-Zeffirelli Bohème.

With Falstaff representing late Verdi and Rigoletto the Verdi of the middle years, an unusual and pleasant ammoglia to the very earliest Verdi was recorded for RCA Italiana by soprano Licia Albanese, who devoted one side of a recital disc to six Verdi songs. These include one ("Non t’accostare all’urina") which was published in 1838, the year before Verdi’s first opera, Oberto, was performed at La Scala; another song, L’Escale, is from 1839; the other four (Lo Spazzacamino, La Zingara, Alia Stella, and Il Tramonto) all belong to the year 1845, which makes them contemporaries of Giovanna d’Arco and Alzira.

Verdian Byways. Except for Miss Albanese’s songs, the Verdi recordings last summer were on the beaten track; Italian opera houses, on the other hand, have been exploring the byways. After a brilliant successful revival of Atila last winter, Florence revived I Masnadieri during the Maggio Musicale (with an expressionist production—which some people deplored as hideous—by Erwin Piscator). At the end of August a group of youngsters at Venice’s "Vacanze musicali" put on II Caroso, and in September the Umbrian festival, the Sagra Umbra, mounted Gerusalemme (Verdi’s revised version of I Lombardi). Probably

Continued on page 14
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Notes from Abroad

Continued from page 10

none of these works has sufficient commercial potential to interest a large record company, but the fact that they are now creeping back towards the repertoire might encourage RCA or EMI or Decca-London to venture at least as far afield as Enrico or Luisa Miller, which are virtually standard operas in Italy and deserve to be everywhere.

And Non-Verdian Projects. EMI's recordings were post-Verdian. First came sessions for an Andrea Chénier starring Franco Corelli, Antonietta Stella, and Mario Sereni (conductor Gabriele Santini), and then a new Bohème, with Mirella Freni, Nicolai Gedda, Sereni, and conductor Thomas Schippers. The Bohème project had a long and sad history. Originally scheduled several years ago, it was canceled because of the death of Jussi Björling, who was to have been the Rodolfo. Again, in the summer of '62, it was canceled because of the indisposition of Victoria de los Angeles. Mine. de los Angeles was to have participated this year but was prevented by pregnancy. All ended happily, however, with Miss Freni (who should be a revelation as Mimì) taking over for the Spanish soprano and the recording being brought successfully into port.

While EMI was devoting its summer sessions to Verdi's successors, Decca-London was having a pre-Verdi season. In the Teatro della Pergola in Florence, with the orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. Erik Smith and Christopher Raveurn of the London staff recorded two Rossini operas (Cenerentola and L'Italiano in Algeri) and one Bellini (I Puritani) with three of the company's prime donne: Giulietta Simionato, as Cenerentola; Joan Sutherland, as Elvira in I Puritani; and Teresa Berganza, as the enterprising Italian girl who goes to the Barbary coast. There is, meanwhile, talk of Decca-London Verdi recordings for 1964: rumor mentions a Nabucco (probably with Birgit Nilsson) and a Don Carlo.

William Weaver

London

In Joan Sutherland's theatrical wardrobe at home hang three luxurious Cleopatra costumes and one Cleopatra crown with swan-neck motifs, so designed that a second crown, Ptolemy's, can be fitted into it after Ptolemy's death. I will come back in a moment to the costumes. The Cleopatra in question. Miss Sutherland's latest role for home consumption (and, as she purposes, for export), is heroine of Handel's Giulio Cesare (1724). Only a limited number of people have had an opportunity to see the Australian-born soprano as the Egyptian queen (and of that more later, too) but a good many persons will soon be able to hear her in the part.

Continued on page 20

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NOTES FROM ABROAD

Continued from page 14

Not long ago she and her husband Richard Bonynge, the latter with conductor's score under his arm, reported at Decca-London's studio, Broadhurst Gardens, to make a disc of twelve "highlights" from the opera.

I arrived at one of the recording sessions—six were scheduled, all of them in the afternoon in accordance with Miss Sutherland's well-known preference—during a full before the first take. Not only was the chamber orchestra (including lute, viola da gamba, and viola d'amore) tuning up, but a distinctly non-Handelian voice could be heard, this from a transistor radio on the second bassoonist's knee (telling us that England was 104 for four wickets in Test cricket against the West Indies team at Edgbaston, Birmingham). The alien instrument quieted, the men in their places, and the microphones adjusted, work began in earnest. In sports shirt, slacks, and sandals, Mr. Bonynge took his place on a podium with the orchestra in front of him and a stage for the principals behind—to the eyes of a visitor an unusual arrangement, to say the least, but one having something to do with the acoustics of Decca-London's big and splendid Studio 3. In any case, Mr. Bonynge wasn't troubled by this setup at all; he simply turned sideways and conducted with his left profile towards the band, his right towards the singers.

Coming Back to Handel. "Venire, bella, per un istante," opened Miss Sutherland. She was in ringing, incisive form. She wore an exceedingly un-Cleopatran, beautifully tailored black dress. The black and her pallor and the red of her hair were sheer theatre in themselves (not Handel's theatre, perhaps; Ibsen's, possibly). Out of the six numbers she was to sing, four were done in entirety, the other two cut to first sections only. Ptolemy's single aria was sung full out by Monica Sinclair. Of the "highlights" assigned to Marilyn Horne (Cornelia) and Richard Conrad (Sesto)—both Americans, by the way—Miss Horne's one number was cut. Mr. Conrad's two presented complete. Cuts were made in the sections for Margreta Elkin, the mezzo Caesar. Repeat: mezzo. Handelian opera is one of those odd worlds. Written originally for a castrato, Caesar is nowadays a baritone, a mezzo, or a contralto as whim takes or spirit moves.

At the end of her second aria, I intercepted Miss Sutherland in midflight to the control room for playbacks. She carried a green thermos flask. It contained her favorite pick-me-up: strong black coffee, unlaced and unsweetened. She said: "Coming back to Handel is a marvelous tonic for my voice. And not for my voice only. It's a tonic for my voice and me. It helps me to sing the Bellini-Donizetti repertoire better."

When Miss Sutherland spoke of "coming back" she in mind was her early success (1957) in Handel's Alcina.

Continued on page 22
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NOTES FROM ABROAD

Continued from page 20

staged by the new-fledged Handel Opera Society in an exasperating makeshift opera house, the concrete roustabout St. Pancras Town Hall. At that time Charles Farncombe, the Society's musical director, already enormously enthused by the phenomenal beauty and fluency of the Sutherland voice, had to work hard on his committee "to make them realise such a person existed." Her talents had thus far percolated through to only a handful. The Alcina first night was precarious. Miss Sutherland had not lived herself into the role. She just about knew the notes but wasn't as happy as she would have liked even about some of those. For her biggest aria, "Ombre pulvilde," at the end of Act II, Bonyng e stood in the wings beating out the notes and modeling the phrases, while Farncombe did the same from in front. Next morning several critics and music's outer as well as inner rings were in a rapt state.

Cleopatra's Price. Ever since, Miss Sutherland has had it in mind to do something for the Handel Opera Society in return for what it did for her. When Farncombe started preparing Giulio Cesare (which has had strikingly successful revivals in Germany) for production at Sutherland's Wells earlier this season, she saw in the Cleopatra role a heaven-sent opportunity. Mr. Farncombe had done a painstaking musicallography job. He had collated his working edition from the original score in the British Museum, the original conducting scores in Hamburg, and the original word-books in the Huntington Library in Los Angeles. The score was in Miss Sutherland's hands by November last. Her conclusion: "I'll do the Handel Opera Society through the caprices of Cleopatra. In production, for nothing. But if I like my Cleopatra costumes, please may I have them for keeps?"

Miss Sutherland liked her Cleopatra costumes very much and, according to bargain, claimed them in fee simple.

Continued on page 26
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NOTES FROM ABROAD
Continued from page 22

There were gowns in emerald-and-gold brocade, in gold-and-lime brocade, in unadorned white nylon, in two-tone scarlet brocade; there were cloaks, flowing scarves, headresses to match. In accordance with Cleopatra’s ups, downs, and amours, one of her costumes was called her Go-to-Prison outfit, another her Go-to-Bed outfit. Who invented these tags should be obvious. The orchestra boys, of course. In the players’ pit there’s never a yawn, even during those plinkety-plonk early eighteenth-century recitatives.

CHARLES RUMM

Die Fledermaus. Issued for the first time more than half a century ago in an “almost complete” version on twenty-one G & T discs and at present available in three monophonic and two stereo versions, was the object of a recent series of spectacular recording sessions held in Vienna’s Sofiensaal. Involved were two Rosalindas, two Adeles, two Eisensteins. The old question had come up as to whether a work of this kind should be recorded in the original language or whether some of the sparkling wit of the libretto should be made accessible to the English-speaking music lover. The answer was provided by RCA Victor’s Vice-President George Marek: it was decided to record Die Fledermaus both in English and in German.

Rumors of the impending realization of this project were already circulating last year when Mr. Marek was known to be visiting European libraries and second-hand music shops in search of a copy of the first printed edition of the score. Though he was able to inspect the autograph just recently acquired by the Music Division of Vienna’s Town Hall Library, he failed to trace a single copy of the first printed edition in Strauss’s homeland. “I finally realized that I couldn’t have saved much of my energy by going to the Library of Congress which turns out to have such a copy,” he told me during our conversation at one of the recording sessions.

Marek had himself undertaken to shorten the spoken dialogue of the German version. “Some of the dialogue we’ve retained, however,” he commented. “It’s necessary not only in order to make the plot intelligible but, paradoxically, it is also required from the musical point of view: i.e., to separate numbers in different keys from each other.” Otherwise there are no changes, except for the elimination of the part of Dr. Blind and the role of Frosche.

Straits, Echt-Wien. The German version, to be issued on three discs, boasts a stellar cast. Eberhard Wächter, the Eisenstein, was, at the time of the recording, also appearing as Don Giovanni...
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NOTES FROM ABROAD

Continued from page 26

in Karajan’s new production at the Staatsopera, and once more I had to admire this artist’s extraordinary ability to adapt himself to the vocal requirements of two scores so utterly different from each other. The part of Adele is sung by Anneliese Rothenberger, whose interpretation is calculated to reinforce Marx’s intention of recapturing something of the opera’s original lightness and gaiety. “Die Fledermaus,” he had said to me, “has in the course of time acquired a kind of patina. We should like to restore some of the original Lebenslust.” In fact, a good many people feel that the tempos usually adopted in Vienna today are either too slow and gewöhnlich or else much too fast—with an eye to the speed of transatlantic musicals, which more and more are setting the standard. For RCA’s recording, conductor Oscar Danon (borrowed from the Belgrade Opera) steered the Vienna Opera Orchestra in a middle course, with the hope of reviving the carefree spirit of the first performance.

At one point in my visit I heard a singer on the stage addressed with “Let us try again, Adele”—and much to my surprise the lady so requested began to sing the famous Csardas, which I had always thought belonged to Rosalinde. It does, of course. This Adele was not Die Fledermaus’ Adele, but Adele Leigh, a soprano from Covent Garden who is also known to the Viennese public. Also surprising to me was Miss Leigh’s ability to render the German words with a Hungarian accent, a feat demanded of Rosalinde by the plot. The explanation: Miss Leigh is of Hungarian descent.

So is Sandor Konya, who could not, however, put his knowledge of Hungarian to use in the role of Alfred. Erich Kunz is Frank, the director of the gay opera. Two other members of the cast will also be heard in the English edition: Risé Stevens as Orolofsky and George London as Falke.

Strauss, New Style. The version in English will consist of a disc of highlights, with new English lyrics especially written for this recording by Mel Mandel and Norman Sachs. In my opinion the new words somehow seem to catch the rhythm of the music better than the original German, which the composer occasionally had to bend to the flow of his melodies. Even for the onomatopoeia of the F major waltz in the second finale—the untranslatable “Dui-da” Strauss’s new libretto-partners have found an ingenious solution which it would be unfair to betray in advance.

Apart from Risé Stevens and George London the following singers are to be heard in the English version: Richard Lewis, whose Eisenstein comes in Mozarteum intonation with an operetta-know-how revealing the singer’s intimate knowledge of Gilbert and Sullivan; Anna Moffo, Rosalinde; Jeanette Scovotti, Adele; John Hauvex, Frank; and Sergio
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NOTES FROM ABROAD

Continued from page 28

Franchi, who aims at a caricature, but wittily and schmaltzily, of Alfred the singing teacher. Chorus, orchestra, and conductor are the same as in the German version.

KURT BLAUHOFF

PRAGUE

Czechoslovakia has been called the most "Western" of the Communist-bloc nations, and to judge by what can be observed in a short visit here this generalization would seem to apply in many ways to the record industry. More and more, the Czechs seem to be projecting themselves into a commercial position in the whole field of serious music — even their entire repertory as a kind of commercial and artistic launching pad. Officials of Artia, the export branch of Supraphon (the Czechoslovak state recording firm), said that serious or "classical" music accounted for more than ninety percent of exports. Anyone familiar with Czech recordings knows that giant strides have been made in technical improvement and contemporary works — most Artia items are now available in stereo. The artistic credentials of the Czech Philharmonic and the other ensembles and soloists available to Supraphon / Artia go without saying, and of late the company is presenting its disc in a tastefully packaged and with informative notes (and in some cases English translations).

On Native Grounds. Supraphon / Artia of course records the standard repertoire, and its catalogue also includes such rarities as the just issued Haydn Cello Concerto in C, rediscovered in Prague archives and given its first modern performance at the 1961 Prague Spring Festival. In the recordings, Miloš Sádlo is soloist, with the Prague Radio Symphony under Alois Klima. The backbone of the firm's list, however, remains its storehouse of native works. A number of this season's releases represent a stereophonic updating, but many new titles will also be added to the catalogue. Opera lovers especially can look forward to a varied expansion of the repertory — five complete operas from as many composers. Only one of these — Dvořák's Rusalka — has ever been recorded in its entirety before (on a mono set of some years ago). The others are Smetana's The Devil's Wall, the composer's last complete opera, conceived in total deafness and encroaching insanity and a work of dark lyricism quite removed from his folk comedies; Leos Janáček's Excursions of Mr. Brouček, a fantasy about an ordinary man's adventures in space and time; Eugen Suchon's Svitopluk, a work on a historic-legendary theme with a text in the Slovak tongue; and Jan Cikker's The Resurrection. The last two are very recent works, given their premiers in 1960.
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CIRCLE 55 ON READEK-SERVICE CARD
Aim of Survey
To determine the kinds of record playback equipment used by stereo stations across the country—in order to compare the frequency of use of Empire equipment with that of other manufacturers.

Method
A survey form requesting information on the kinds of turntables, phono arms and cartridges presently in use was sent to the chief engineers of all 186 stereo stations across the country (as listed in Sound Industry Directory).

Results
1. Completed survey forms were returned by 130 stations.
   More than two thirds of those contacted responded, representing 23 states and Canada.
2. A tally was made of the number of different manufacturers whose equipment was being used in one of three categories, turntables, arms and cartridges. The chief engineers indicate in their comments that they experiment a good deal with many makes and this is borne out in the totals. The 130 stations are presently using the equipment of 27 different manufacturers.
3. Only four of the major manufacturers are represented in all three of the categories, turntables, arms and cartridges. Of the four companies Empire ranked first in the total number of components used by the 130 stations. In fact, Empire's total of 49 components was greater than that of any of the other 26 manufacturers whose equipment is presently in use at these stations.
4. Empire was the only company that was represented ten or more times in each of the categories. And one of the three companies whose tone arms are in use in more than 20 of the 130 stereo stations in the sample.

MORE EMPIRE PLAYBACK EQUIPMENT IS USED BY FM/Stereo Stations THAN ANY OTHER BRAND
A (Sound) Room with a View. It had been about four years since we last visited the Music Room operated by Acoustic Research, Inc., on the west balcony of Grand Central Station, New York City, and intrigued by an invitation from AR—not to a sound exhibit but to an art exhibit—we stopped by recently. This room is unique on many counts. To begin with, it is (inside from a similar room maintained by AR in Cambridge, Massachusetts), as far as we know the only "permanent exhibit" of high fidelity sound that is not part of a dealer's sales room. In fact, the attendants here are instructed not to breathe a hint of sales talk, and not to approach a visitor. They will answer questions if asked—but no more than that. Inasmuch as nothing is sold here, and no admission charged, the whole operation is sheer expense on AR's part, but one the company feels is justified. In any case, the very idea of setting up a sonic oasis in the midst of one of the busiest rail terminals in the world always has struck us as a most ambitious project that took a good deal of nerve and knowledge.

But the current interest at the AR Music Room is visual as well as aural. By way of making a point about how closely high fidelity sound reproduction resembles the original live sound, Edgar Villchur has collected a series of original paintings and hung them alongside excellent reproductions in identical frames. The art comparison, says Villchur, points up both the goal of, and a manner of judging, high fidelity: the former being "accurate rather than exaggerated," the latter being "by comparison of the reproduction with the original (or memory of the original)—"such as the "live versus recorded" concerts in which AR has participated for several years.

The sound in the room itself is, of course, all reproduced—and one can only hope that visitors listening to it carry good memories of the last concert attended. At that, the point implied by the paintings in the windows—that just as fine art reproduction is virtually indistinguishable from the original, so too is fine music reproduction—cannot help but impress a listener as he stands before a battery of speakers playing a stereo rendition of (appropriately enough) Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition or the Ravel Quartet in F

The room itself was built by the late Milton Sleeper and opened to the public in mid-1958. Named "High Fidelity House," it originally served as a setting for exhibits of audio equipment from all manufacturers, a sort of "living museum" of high quality sound reproduction. The following year, it was purchased from Sleeper by Acoustic Research and renamed the AR Music Room. "We virtually rebuilt the place," explains AR's president Edgar Villchur. "Among the changes we made were new walls, improvements in sound-proofing against outside noises, the addition of windows, and the removal of so-called acoustical materials that were deadening the sound." Villchur estimates that the cost of the building, plus the repairs, came to over $30,000. Since then, Villchur has put up draperies, painted the interior, and added "our own inside plumbing." Although AR owns the building itself, the space on which it is located is leased from the New York Central System. "I have the dubious honor," quips Villchur, "of thus being landlord and tenant at the same time."

Although visitors to the AR room are never approached by a salesman (not even to be asked "May I help you?"), they are carefully counted by machine.

Zero Tracking Error? At least one of the questions we asked last month—that about true radial tone arms for stereo recordings—has been answered by inventor Jacob Rabinow, president of Rabinow Engineering, Rockville, Maryland. From his creative imagination (responsible also for the magnetic fluid clutch used in automobiles, part of the "automated post office," and data-reading machinery for feeding computers) has come the new "Servo-Line" tone arm. An elaborate and costly ($200) device, the new arm is designed to move a cartridge across a record in a perfectly straight radius, which—inasmuch as the record was cut that way—is, by definition, the theoretically ideal way to track it in playback. Attempts to produce such an arm have been made in the past; for one reason or another—excessive bearing friction, resonances, and assorted mechanical difficulties—they proved unsuccessful. In any event, the "Servo-Line" arm is the first of its kind to be introduced since the advent of stereo discs and, judging from what its designer says, it took an awareness of the special problems of the stereo groove, such as the need for high-compliance tracing of both groove walls with equal and utterly light pressure, to trigger what Rabinow feels is the perfect solution.

The new arm resembles a sliding T-square. The larger section—containing the tonearm—is affixed to the turntable mounting board, and the smaller section—the arm proper—is free to move across the record. It is suspended on a pivot gimbal and employs a rear counterweight in an oil bath. Its other end holds the cartridge which is moved across the record in a path that duplicates the radius originally described by the record cutter. To assure accuracy in accomplishing this chore, the arm uses a photo-electric cell and servomotor system. The cell constantly measures the angle between the carriage and the arm, and controls the servomotor which then corrects the movement of the arm as needed to maintain the correct tangency between stylus and record groove. Such tracking, in turn, is claimed to lower distortion, preserve the stereo effect, and reduce record wear.

According to a company spokesman, five years of research and experimentation have gone into the new arm—which, as demonstrated for us in Mr. Rabinow's laboratory, is so finely poised that the mere weight of a business card, placed on it, provided enough vertical force for accurate tracking. At this writing, Rabinow plans to make an initial dozen arms; more probably will be released later.

October 1963
For more than a decade, readers tell us, the most literate and informative writing on sound reproduction in the home has appeared in HIGH FIDELITY.

Now, for those who may have missed some of HIGH FIDELITY’s top audio articles (plus a few from sister publications) and for those who requested they be preserved in a book, we have selected 31 of them for inclusion in the First High Fidelity Treasury.

It’s not a “layman’s guide” to high fidelity, but it tells you just about everything you need to know for achieving good sound reproduction in your home.

Each piece was selected with these qualifications in mind: Will it help today’s reader understand the principles of recording and reproduction, including stereo? Will it help the reader plan a new reproducing system to suit his needs at a price he is willing to pay? Will it help the reader get the most out of that system or his present system?

This new, illustrated paper back of 132 pages, measuring 6½ x 9½ inches, will stimulate and inform anyone who has ever thought about owning a “rig” of his own.

If audio perks up your interest—fill in and mail the coupon here—before we sell out. Payment with your order, please, to prevent bookkeeping expense. But satisfaction guaranteed or your money back!

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A Mike or Two Around the House
High Fidelity Servicing
Noise—the Uninvited Guest
—and many more!

“Can serve admirably to help you derive greater enjoyment from records or broadcasted programs. It covers almost every aspect of high fidelity reproduction with special emphasis on stereophonic equipment. It will be especially valuable to the do-it-yourselfer.”

HARVEST YEARS

and 1962 respectively. All use the forces of the Prague National Theatre.

The Smetana Orchestra, and Dvořák operas actually were taped some time ago—before the death of the National Theatre’s chief conductor, Zdeněk Chalabala—as was the current Supraphon/Artia Bartered Bride. Oddly, American record collectors got first crack at the Bartered Bride set. When manufacturing problems delayed the pressing of these discs in Czechoslovakia, Supraphon made the tapes of the opera available Artia in New York, which had stereo pressings made in the United States.

Two other large-scale works are worth noting. One is a new recording, already on tape, of Janáček’s Glagolitic Mass, with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus under Ancerl. The other, planned for later this year or early 1964, is Dvořák’s oratorio, Saint Ludmila, with the same orchestra and chorus and a conductor not yet named.

“Theatres of Music.” Czech record collectors are particularly fortunate in having a varied and extensive domestic catalogue inasmuch as there are no Western recordings in the shops—a situation resulting from economic policy rather than political bias. The government has not yet allowed hard currency to leave the country to put Western records in the stores, and thus only persons with foreign connections outside the Iron Curtain can procure them. One phenomenon that has resulted partly from this state of affairs is establishment of “Theatres of Music” in Prague, and on a less elaborate scale, other cities. The Prague Theatre is a 135-seat listening room with a stage and elaborate lighting and record-playing apparatus. While it is an ancillary operation of Supraphon, its vast record library is made up in large part of Westem-made recordings. The programs range from the simple playing of records with accompanying spoken annotation (delivered, on one of my visits, by a lovely blonde actress) to theatrical presentations using live dancers, film, or other program material—all built around the music. The Prague Theatre now is more than ten years old, but its popularity is still strong. One of the main reasons seems to be that this is the only place where the average music-loving Czech can hear Louis Armstrong, Toscanini’s readings of Verdi, or George Szell’s interpretations of Dvořák.

DAVID STEVENS
The Collector's Verdi

By CONRAD L. OSBORNE

This survey of six Verdi operas—the ones most frequently recorded—differences from previous discographies in that it is intended chiefly as a critical commentary on certain significant individual performances, and not as a general consensus. I have aimed to supply a kind of guide for those who try to select performances in foreign languages and many of them now missing from the catalogue. No one (to take an example) should be unaware of the existence of Claudia Muzio's recordings of the two great Otello duets, though they are poorly recorded and not generally available—she offers values not found in any other interpretation. (Just about any recording, I should add, can be obtained through certain dealers who specialize in out-of-print items, or through the services of the many private collectors who: avocation it is to sell or swap such recordings through societies or by means of lists.) It goes without saying, in the case of some of the more popular excerpts I have had to select rather arbitrarily, I hope readers will not hesitate to defend their own choices among the many fine items excluded.

Where the same company has recorded an opera more than once, I have adopted a little code for the purpose of conciseness: thus "RCA Victor I" means the earliest of the RCA Victor editions of the work in question. The reader can consult the Schann catalogue to learn which are generally available. There are frequent references to the scores themselves, by way of illustration—I have been careful to key the page numbers to commonly available editions of the vocal scores.

I should like to express here my thanks to David Smith, Roy Koch, and Hjun Kim for their editing, and to Roland Gelatt, all of whom directed my attention to and loaned me copies of recordings not in my own library (including many out-of-print discs), and to Watson Gelatt, who kindly did without his copy of the full score to La Traviata while I followed it through ten complete recordings and a number of single items.

Rigoletto (1851)

One of the few artistic dividing lines that makes any sense to me is that between "early period" and "middle period." Verdi, it's true, of course, that a composer's development has to be gradual and sometimes roundabout thing; still, if he is to make a memorable contribution, there has to be a leap somewhere, a point of break-through. With Verdi, it is quite clear that in Piave's adaptation of Le Roi s'amuse he found the subject with which to make his leap. In Rigoletto we see for the first time that the formal structures of Italian romantic opera can be made to serve drama through the full and continuous development of character. It was this at which Hugo marveled when he first heard the quartet; it is this, in fact, that constitutes Verdi's greatest achievement.

So far as attempts to get close to the letter of the score are concerned, the interpretations of Sanzogno (London) and Gavazzeni (Mercury) have their interest. The London edition is by complete Rigoletto on records, and Mercury's cuts are fewer than those made in any of the others. Sanzogno is most meticulous, though he has his points of departure from the current Ricordi edition, most of them are defensible, and I see no cause for frowning about them. And although Sanzogno is in general a bit slow in relation to Verdi's metronome markings, the sections are in proportion (this is the one reading, for example, to define the tempo indications that divide Rigoletto's monologue; there are seven of them!). Sanzogno's reading has two failings: 1) he has allowed Sutherland to disintegrate certain passages of recitative, and has also failed to keep her to the rhythmic mark, so that the underlying pulse of a scene is sometimes compromised (as in the allegro vivof beginning with Gilda's first entrance); 2) he has neither adjusted his own literal concept to fit strengths of his singers, nor shown them a way in which to infuse life and variety into measures where they are robbed of their traditional accelerands and diminu-
patria" (p. 98 of the Ricordi vocal score) is not to be given the poco più which most conductors will allow (but which Mussorgsky intended), then the singer and/or orchestra must find some other means of bringing at least a gentle kind of life to this almost fiercely affectation piano. Rossini's and Bellini's adagio and cantabile sing along pleasantly in their soft, round voices, and the orchestra sticks to its rather plodding allegro begun two pages earlier. And it avoid the greatest short coming of this performance, which is that it sounds like a very careful reading, the singers taking great care to score all sorts of little musical points and thus having small attention left to worry about whether or not what they're doing all adds up to Rigoletto.

Just as he employed the same principle, but has interpreted it differently; he elicits more color from his musicians. In the Prelude, for example (which takes the real andante rather than the adagio or larghetto of the music heard), there is a bite in the trumpet sound and a firmness to the strings' texture, which brings out on the line that immediately establishes a dramatic key. There are many instances of happy and unusual musical decisions, of which the following are representative: first, Duke (Alfredo Kraus) does not take the traditional but unmarked slowdown on his line, "Ah, inesperabile d'unore e li dolci innamoramenti," and he sings it with great feeling at "E il sol dell' anima," which is then sung with unusual attention to musical detail, particularly with regard to the dynamic instructions and staccato markings. It's refreshing. However, Gavazzeni does encounter some of the difficulties that beset Sanzogno. His Rigoletto (Bastianini) is clearly unhappy at having to sustain "Deli, non parlare al miseror" at such a slow tempo (though that's really quite a pity); not altogether aside, while the Rigoletto/Sparafucile dialogue which opens the second scene benefits from the full value accorded its quartets and trio, the very marked interpretative filling-out—the singers here merely stretch their straight reading over a longer time period, and the result is unimaginative. And so on. Still, this is a reading to be respected, and one which carries greater impact than Sanzogno's.

Of the more permissive and "traditional" Gavazzeni's (Angel) and Molajoli's (Entré EL 2, now deleted, but available from Italian on Italian Columbia QC 16769/92) are the most successful. Sessarelli takes the "Deli, non parlare al miseror" in a way which neither Sanzogno nor Gavazzeni does (at least on these recordings); this sometimes softens the edges, but also makes for a welcome smoothness and grace. In at least one scene, he stands out from the lot. This is the Rigoletto/Sparafucile dialogue, wherein for once the ppp —marked by the crescendo of the orchestra and not altered until "Pari siamo!"—is observed, so that the whole dialogue catches the feeling of an almost whispered conversation, an effect which, as written, is underlined at the bottom of p. 77, at the lines "e muor (Demonitis)," where the crescendo is marked "extremamente p."

The least satisfactory feature of Sessarelli's reading is that it is not always filled out. In the first scene, for instance, there is no sense of change with Rigoletto's first lines (except in Gobbi's declamation), the chorus is lifeless all through, and there is no impetus with the return to Tempo I (p. 18). The whole scene with Marullo and the chorus is lacking in animation, and this happens to other productions along the way. In justice to Serraino, it should be noted that part of this occasional limpness can be attributed to Angel's curious way of approaching this duet, particularly where the chorus is involved—perhaps some needless monitoring was done.

Molajoli is more permissive yet, but within his inner manner of believing one has the feeling that he has commanded his singers to do as they do. At times, the line is too much distended—particularly at the elegance of the tenor, Dino Borgioli, is on display—but at others Molajoli's way seems highly sensitive and right. Refer to the pacing of the Rigoletto/Gilda conversation on p. 89, or the phrasing of their duets, or the playing of the English horn solo just before "Tutte la feste" (the treatment is peculiar); it is vocally conceived—the player is really singing his lines), and you will hear what I mean. Molajoli's interpretation is difficult to define, but it seems very directly on the performers' personal feelings for the emotional content of the music. It is perhaps the most likable of all the interpretations and always executed with conviction (the prelude really follows the instruction, sostenuto). Unhappily, this version is the most liberating.

So so Now to the singers. The title role is, of course, the most interesting and most challenging in the opera, and constitutes one of the most creative opportunities in the lyric repertoire. Vocally, it is demanding in that it requires both the capacity for long-phrased, high-lying cantabile singing and that for highly inflected dramatic declamation. Only one baritone on records really fills the vocal bill—Serafin set Entré. His voice is at once bright and darker, softer and more biting, than those of his competitors. "Pari siamo!" is enough to demonstrate; he captures the crescendo/descrescendo of "Quando vecchio maledivami!," the mutterings of "Questo padre mio," the full rage of the outraged Gilda, and the melting legato of "Ma in aria" to "qui mi cangi;" then he tops it all with a brilliant high G on "E follai!" Throughout the opera, he sings with a command of true legato, a showed sense of the importance of words, a noble strength of declamation—a great performance.

The three Americans—Warren (RCA Victor I), MacNeil (London—I), and Merrill (RCA Victor II)—are worth listening to. Merrill's "Pari siamo!" is enough to demonstrate; he captures the crescendo/descrescendo of "Quando vecchio maledivami!," the mutterings of "Questo padre mio," the full rage of the outraged Gilda, and the melting legato of "Ma in aria" to "qui mi cangi;" then he tops it all with a brilliant high G on "E follai!" Throughout the opera, he sings with a command of true legato, a showed sense of the importance of words, a noble strength of declamation—a great performance.

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$6800 complete with arm, oiled walnut base, and dust cover, but less cartridge. 33 1/3 and 45 rpm

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_Acoustic Research, Inc., 24 Thorndike Street, Cambridge 41, Massachusetts_

_Circle 2 on Reader-Service Card_
Lucas's the better recorded and more easily sung—an exemplary rendition, in fact. In a wildly accelerated version of "E'insem" (RCA Victor 6705, double-let but reissued as part of Eterna 752) the unassuming Battistini sings his music out with extraordinary high Fs, his pizzicato is perfect and his taste is marked by the lowest intonations, which starts well enough, but disappears in the scramble. It doesn't matter. And the excellent German baritone Joseph Schmidt (Victor 100, also contributing Claire Vautier on Rocco 25 in the two duets "Son gio tre luce" and "Ah, sol per me l'infamia.") These are rendered in German, and in a mannered style, but extremely well sung, particularly by Schwarz.

Gilda is a much less interesting character than Rigoletto, but not the nunny she is assumed to be. Her abilities are perfectly clear, her actions absolutely logical. If one only assumes that she is genuinely innocent, in every sense of the word. Alas, innocence, which does not mean vapidness or emotional blandness (a naive person's reactions are liable to be more extreme than those of a sophisticated person) seems to be the one quality despised of operatic sopranos; it is missing altogether from the urbano, mannered singing of London's "D'Angelico." She is a girl in love as that often is in terms of sound) and only hinted at here and there in the work of Angel's Callas (where, for example, is the impulse present in "Signor mio, non mi cipice")? Callas at least lends rhythmic strength to her music, and realizes such moments as the change in mood when Gilda tells of her abdication in "Tutte le feste" ( . . . quando impravissi appenneto) at the bottom of p. 232). D'Angelico, on the other hand, makes limited sound and contributes a most beautiful "Caro nome," but delivers much too much of her music in a lifeless, meaningless way, as if she did not appreciate the character's emotional situation—"Tutte le feste" could not be less interesting, though part of the blame must fall on Molinari-Pradelli's slackness. Peters (RCA Victor II) is betrayed by much thin, wiry tone and by a lack of distinction in phrasing. Pagliughi (Cetra) is much more sensitive in the music; she projects a pleasant, conventional Gilda of some charm, though she was not past her prime at the time of recording. She is a vocal comedienne, and the same can be said of Entrè's Capsir, also a good stylist and understanding musician, but a vocalist of such shrill, edgy tone and such messy articulation that one can only respect, not enjoy, her work. Mercury's Scotto is satisfactory where bile and punch are called for, as in "Addio" or "La Donna è mobile," or the Duke, or the last-act trio; she also does a good job in building "Tutte le feste." But her tone is often harsh, the end of many of her notes is awkward, her treatment of recitative usually four-square. Gueden, on the older London set, contributes an efficient, musically charactzetization without warmth.

If one wants a real Gilda, one must turn to Caruso (RCA Victor I) or Bori (RCA Victor II). It is not merely that her voice stays fresh, round, and free throughout the role, or that her musical taste and sense of phrasing are perfect. Berger is the only singer on records to take Gilda's feelings seriously throughout the score and to place them ahead of vocal idioms. In general, it is able to capture the girliness of the character, without being insipid; she alone sounds as if she means it when she cries "Iniqua" at the Duke's pass at Maddalena. Gilda's sacrifice becomes believable, her death extremely moving. Caruso's Gilda has been recorded in innumerable times, and I can here only mention a few of the more interesting. Sutherland's on London OSA 1214 is a bit brighter and more cleanly enunciated, if not quite as round-toned as her singing of the aria on the complete set; I think it is preferable. Among historical recordings, Boronin's (Rocco 28) is interesting for its fragile, floating sound and beautifully clear vowels. Kurf's gorgeous vocalism and surprisingly literal reading are worth having, even though her version is cut and rushed towards the end, where her final little run on the cadenza is identical with Sutherland's in the complete set. Don't overlook Pon (RCA Victor I.M 6705), who captures the pulse and contributes a beautifully controlled high ending.

The Duke is in some respects the most problematic of all the leading characters. Both vocally and dramatically, he is something of a contradiction. Much of his music is "quasi quella," "La donna è mobile," "E il sol del mar" (more than anything) is best handled by a light, elegant voice, such as Schipa's; but some of it demands a more imposing caliber. The music, for instance, leads the contralto, and there is nothing more discouraging to hear than the sound of an undistinguished lyric tenor emerging from the ensemble for the reprise of "Bellissima." (This is "affetto dell' amore"). Dramatically, he would be no paradox—just an amoral, rather adolescent adventurer—were it not for "Parmi veder," which unfortunately sounds dead sincere. About the only way I can think of to get around this is to treat the recitative and aria as a frothy expression of the Duke's obvious capacity for self-deception; not that he's pretending, but merely that he is incapable of a genuine feeling of love ("Presto spunto vita "virtu tulor mi credere," he sings in the recitative, and the key word is "quasi"). This would be perfectly consistent with his actions before and after the abduction of Gilda, and in fact the music of the aria carries no great conviction, being just a ninny, lifeting statement which even a vapid voice can make credible. "Possente amor" is Verdi's one inconsistency; it would not have been out of place in any of his earlier operas (or with an inferior tenor), and is such a wretched tune that it really is better left out, though its inclusion on some of these recordings is of course welcome for reference purposes.

None of the tenors involved goes to any great pains over creating an individual greatest interest are Bori (Entrè) and Kurf, of whom the have the sort of pinpoint control over their decorously lyric instruments that it imbues many beautiful moments. Bori is the more assured stylist, and is allowed much greater expansion of the music (Krauss is kept to an almost monotonous "Questa o quella" by Gavazzeni); he also has moments of preciousness, indulging in double or triple little diminuendos—but, like Malagari, he takes liberties with conviction. Both these tenors have splendidly free upper registers, and encounter no problems with D flat or, in the case of Kraus, D natural.

Maiero (RCA Victor II) and Tucker (Columna) are relatively stolid, though the voices are sufficiently good and often exciting in the upper reaches. They are also both American, so that their performances are likely to be "Volti," and Tucker's "Parmi veder" emerges as "In estro callo." It all adds up to a certain feeling of impression and routine, abetted by the punny conducting. Cioni, like everyone else on the second London set, is musically quite precise (he is the only Duke, surprisingly, to execute all the turns indicated in the duet with Gilda), but often sounds tight and thin above the staff and comes out badly under the passionate reading. If only Di Stefano's (Angel) upper tones were not so blatant and driven, one could recommend his Duke, for the sound elsewherewise is impressive and his delivery of the text often intense and, his opening colloquy with Borsa, for instance is unusually well defined. Tagliapietra is the least satisfactory of all, and his delivery of the text often intense and, full of linguistic peculiarities, "punne" for "punge," "schi{a}o" for "cielo," Non con esaltazione there is still much good vocalism: "Parmi vedi" recorded on the latter.

All three tenor arias, plus the tenor-led quartet, are available in myriad versions, though many are out-of-catalogue historical records. If Schipa sings an especially interesting "Questa o quella" and "Parmi veder" (on Eterna 734), both conveying an air of elegance and a hint of narcissism that is not at all from other interpretations: grace and control mark the vibrato. Caruso's "Questa" is the richest and most exuberant (the Victor 1926 version of QT 1006, now deleted, is that: the earlier pi{ano}-accompanied edition—available on Roma 753), is actually more careful and restrained. Bjerling's (Capitol G 7239, recorded considerably earlier than the complete recording) is the closest to the literal text, particularly in observance of the recitature. Of primarily historical interest are the performances of Marenco (Rocco 22), De Lucia (RCA Victor 753), and Smirnov (Sienna S-100-3).

Sander Konya's recent German language version of "Parmi veder" (Deutsche Grammophon M 13614 or SLPFM 136214), fairly well sung, is of interest in that it follows the written caption: note for note.

Among the many "La donna è mobiles" I must direct attention to Caruso's (several versions on several labels) for the creamy legato and the caressing of the words, as well as of the voice; Bjerling's early Swedish version (Rococo 31), for an incomparable buoyance and lightness; McCormack's (Eterna 731), for clarity of enunciation; and "Parmi veder" of the high ending; and Smirnov's (Sienna S-100-3), for an example of the advantages and disadvantages of extreme permissiveness with regards.

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"Bella figlia dell’anore" (the fourth, with Tetrazzini, has not, to my knowledge, been made available on LP in this country) are of interest, with the earliest (1907, with Abbott et al., Rocco 36) the easiest and, tellingly, with the tenor most prominent. The latest (1917, with Galli-Curci et al., RCA Victor LCT 1003, deleted, is the best recorded, though Victor No. 4123 added some echo), and boasts excellent partners. The version led by Roswaenge (Telefunken TH 97014) is in German; a fine performance, visually rosawhite, with a particularly good baritone (Reinmar) and contralto (Kindermann). Unfortunately, the recording sounds monitored.

Toye’s Spieltisch Scene suggests the test of the last-act trio are Tajo (RCA Victor I) and Siopi (London I and II); both are good singers, but neither is very musically-sounding. (Toyi, of RCA Victor II, sounds very fine, barring one or two low tones, but the recording submerges him in the ensemble.) Neri (Cetra) has the right timbre (touch and black), but sings ponderously. Perhaps the best compromise is Zaccaria (Angel), who, as already noted, does the second highest and extreme tenor role. Dominici on Entrée is also above average. Among Maddalenas, the most interesting is Merriman (RCA Victor I), who really makes us understand the girl’s motives; Cossotto (Mercury) sings the role extremely well.

Everyone should own the “Verdi and Toscanini on Rigoletto” (RCA Victor 1 M 6041), whose final side is devoted to the last act of Rigoletto. Here is musical precision illustrated by passion—even "La donna" has a new lift and lift. The soloists—Milanov, whose dramatic voice and temperament are welcome. Merriman, Perren, Warren, and Moscona— are all first-rate, and the retention of the original sequence of notes for Rigoletto’s final “Ah, La maledizione!” is tremendously effective, since it recalls the sequence at the end of Scene 2.

IL TROVATORE (1853)

Nearly everyone likes The Troubadour, but nearly everyone finds only critical or condescending things to say of it: of all Verdi’s post-Rigoletto operas (with the obvious exception of I Vespri siciliani), it is held in lowest repute.

It’s assuredly an easy piece to pick on, with its circumstances of its persistently loping rhythms, its splashy set of characters, and its unforgivable wealth of clumsily memorable tunes, and with the whole proven fact that Verdi mustn’t be allowed to get away with it. But with a sorrowful glance at all the points I might have made about crotchets, I feel that I should recite that recitative, I’m going to get in one or two small plugs for Il Trovatore, knowing full well that the next time there’s a production of this opera I’ll be down at the theatre to hear it again.

So far as the plot itself is concerned, allow me to refer readers to Francis Toye’s splendidly savage (and alternately the story, drawn in part from Prime- Stevenson’s essay (Toye’s Verdi: His Life and Works, currently in print as a Vintage paperback, is still far and away the best English-language source of information and elucidation on all the composer’s operas).

We tend to reproach Trovatore for its failure as a work of opera as such. If it is, what then is it? As to this, we turn to it for revelation of the natures of a complex, three-dimensional character, like Violetta, Simon, Chiari, the Council, and Azucena, and is it not then possible that we will indeed be forced to conclude that the opera is a fable? The characters in Trovatore act under a set of imperatives which, perhaps, are not always obvious—impertatives which focus mainly on certain social positions and coded symbols in honor deemed fit for them. Counts are never simply good or evil in certain ways (any and all counts, that is), and so are loyal old retainers, ladies of birth, etc. This, when Di Luna knowingly transgresses the rights accorded him by the Prince, that fact is revealed to the audience—if the audience accepts the implied premises, the dramatic situation is heightened. Count il villainy established. (By the same token, the fact that it is amorous passion which leads the Count to such a pass is a mitigating circumstance, and makes him a somewhat sympathetic, or at least understandable, figure.)

It is also assumed that the audience will accept as self-evident the proposition that “blood always tells.” Moreover, the music does not always make us regret this, since it is the gypsy, but his courtliness sticks out all over him. Manrico hates Di Luna as a rival in love; he tells us that Azucena, when Di Luna’s life lay within his power, is a voice from Heaven commanded him not to strike—clearly, the instinct of a mighty force. And Azucena is a voice to him that is unquenchable. And Di Luna’s unquenching acceptance of the honor code that keeps him from summoning his men at their first encounter—this is the noblest way of setting the matter.

It is around such questions that the entire opera revolves. They were once taken with such conviction as to be considered the subject of literal witchcraft, which also figures importantly in the story, and are very much a part of our own mythology (Hollywood has simply called in the cops, and when the showdown comes in any real Western, the hero will wave the posse back with an “Ah’ll take care o’ this man!”)

The matter of individual character becomes almost irrelevant. These people are absolutely bound to behave in certain ways in certain situations, regardless of their personal peculiarities, about which we learn nothing. The libretto’s function is to maneuver these figures into situations that will force them to fulfill their tragic destinies. This it does, and along the way it provides Verdi with a whole string of theatrical setups that play directly to his strengths as a composer during this period. Not such a poor job. I think most people will get the point if they will read the titles given to each of the acts: Act I: “The Duet!” Act II: “The Gypsy”; Act III: “The Gypsy’s Son”; Act IV: “The Torture.” And next week.

Trovatore has not been accorded extraordinary leadership on records. Of the seven complete sets under consideration here, I prefer the results from outstanding conducting—the Angel (Karajan) and the DGG set (Serafin)—and only Karajan can be said to find anything out of the ordinary.

The new things he finds are, in part, dozens of bars of music omitted from the other recorded performances. Among the cuts customarily made in this opera and the following (page numbers refer to the Schirmer’s critical edition of the full score): the repeat in Leonora’s cabaretta “Di tal amor” (bottom of p. 28 to bottom of p. 30); a silly little ten-bar cut in the conclusion of the “Squilli, e ecco l’amor” (pp. 46-47); another brief cut near the end of the Azucena/Manorico scene in Act II (p. 86); a four-bar cut in the “Squilli, e ecco l’amor” (pp. 72-74); and the entirety of Leonora’s cabaretta “Tu vedrai che amore” (pp. 191-97). In the final wedding duet between “Ah si, ben mio” and “Di quella pira” is often deleted.

The Karajan performance sticks to the usual practices of that conductor, but restores all the others. (The London and DGG recordings all restore Leonora’s “Tu vedrai,” though in all three cases only one verse is sung.) The restorations are not, in my judgment, pure gain. Much of “Di quella pira’s” impact is due to its brevity, and to repeat it is to dilute it; moreover, it’s often given in for Leonora as a bridge between the two verses are simply terrible. In any case, it’s a feeling of mine that such repeats are better dropped. The performer is not only an exciting one, but one who is willing and able to introduce some variants the second time round, and to heighten spontaneity in this way. Perhaps the most striking variant, of course these are normally introduced into the one-verse version, anyway. The bari- tone/soprano, sings the repeat of his cabaretta as a third strophe, but I think the tune loses its sense of bite and lift in mere repetition.) For the record though (not a pun), this is the most nearly complete edition of the opera, and in my own view the restoration of “Tu vedrai,” a conventional but sweeping, fairly appropriate tune, is all to the good, as is the inclusion of the snippets so often dropped—cuts of that sort are sheer pedanticism.

In addition to reinstating these ban- ished sections, Karajan’s aim is to raise the performance above the usual level. His tempos incline to the slow side here, but the result has a tautness and clarity which bring the music into a way that mere velocity cannot achieve. To cite two examples from the first act: the string staccato in the last two lines on p. 19, as the first scene draws to a close, are wonderfully lucid and bouncy—one can see the bows springing off the instruments; and the violin wings through the allegro agitato beginning on the last line of p. 35 (when Leonora realizes she has mistaken Di Luna for Manrico) are marvellous expression and lucidity which carry the scene right through. (This last is more than just good technical execution—it is brilliant accom- paniment, and the score together with the springboard they need to bring the scene alive.)

The big ensemble finale after Man- rico’s appearance is handled with as much excellence of the virtues of Karajan’s reading. The ensemble proper begins with the second stave on p. 116. Francesco’s return to La Scala after Karajan’s pace is more deliberate than that of most conductors, yet it has a pulse and strength that keep it interest- ing. Actually, then, the final scene in the music here, from Leonora’s strongly accented top line (marked “Leggierissimo"
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There is very little music of Azucena's available in individual excerpts ("Ai nostri monti" included among the tenor excerpts, below). There are several versions of "Condotta all' era," but the only major singers to have made modern recordings of it are Renzik and Gorr, and neither is at her best. Resnik being tenuous and spread-sounding, Gorr surprisingly undramatic.

Leonora is the opera's "official" leading lady—she is the love interest and the woman in the midst of a aria and cabalettas. As a dramatic figure, she is pretty lifeless (what sort of person is she, anyhow?), but she has some wonderful melodies to sing, and can create a memorable effect with vocal equipment of the required caliber and flexibility. Undoubtedly, it is Milanov (RCA Victor) and Callas (Angel) who stand out from the rest of the field. For sustained beauty of sound and finish of style, Milanov's Leonora has no peer. With her first little cantabile, "Tu vedi," she makes the piano, notes of her prime years are all there. This is the same music that fits her velvety instrument to perfection: "I tace la notte," "D'amor suo" of "Prima che d'altre veder"—magnificent moments, all of them. Equally noteworthy, I think, is the way in which phrases are carefully rounded off, completely finished, before the next one is started, lending a beauty and poise to the vocalism. One example among many is the final line on p. 23—"La veron socolta, Eglì era, eglì era decido," where the hold on the final syllable leads to a lovely portamento and then into the next phrase, "Gioja prova che ag' anelli," which is started at the same dynamic and then expanded. This is mastery.

Callas' Leonora is impressive in a different way. Vocally, it is admirable, with a few throbbing high tones excepted—the line of "I tace la notte" is firmly traced, and the restored cabaletta, "Tu veulti," is swept through with the singer's peculiar brand of fire and accuracy in passage work. But by and large, it is the incisiveness of her attack, the honest rendering of the notes, which is so memorable (this role does not offer her the opportunity for a profound character study). The Miserere really becomes a new piece of music when it is sung, as it is here, without gushiness, jerkiness, or phony drama. And if one listens to the soprano part in the second-scene trio (particularly the loping unison passage with the tenor beginning at the bottom of p. 42), one will realize that all the notes are there, on pitch and in time (this is one of the few passages in the score that finds Milanov's advantage). In general Callus is aided by Karajan's frequently slow tempo—she is able to articulate things with extraordinary clarity. In terms of sheer sound, her Leonora must rank behind Milanov's and possibly some others as well; where realization of musical values is concerned, it is the best on record. The remaining Leonoras are Price (RCA Victor II), Tebaldi (London), Stolz (DG), and Mancini (Cetra). In a sense, Mancini's is the most interesting of them all, though far from the most accomplished vocally. The voice is of considerable caliper and quality, though not by any means under the best of control—there are some wild-sounding high notes, some ragged runs, some precarious pianos. But Mancini has good dramatic temperament; the recitatives emerge with unusual life and authority (e.g., the passage beginning with "Timor di Dio" on p. 179)—she knows what kind of singer she can be when her voice is under control), and there is never any doubt about the singer's involvement in the emotional situation. Price has many exciting moments, especially in passages where the music moves along above the staff, as in the last-act duet with Di Luma—her high tones have a focus and that quick spin which makes for a rousing effect in such music. She has good emotional ideas too (her "Io salvati" to Di Luma are real please), but occasion ally she overshoots the mark a bit as with "E deggio e posso credetelo" (p. 113), where she gets in the way of the music with her attempts at dramatic projection. Such moments are rare, and...
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the only other complaint is in the lack of fullness in her lower register.

Tebaldi reveals her customary vocal lusterless, along with a certain stuffiness, partly traceable to the elastic Signor Ezeta—"D'amor sull'alii"—just isn't interestingly handled and the Marcellina is downright dull. The wealth of lovely, round tone and the polish of the singing (except in some of the runs) only partially compensate for a rather indifferent treatment of the music. Stella is in a similar boat. Vocally, she is more consistent than she has been on many of her recent recordings—and, basically, the voice is a very beautiful one—but she frequently seems to have no idea just why the music is going where it is going; she's just along for the ride. Good moments, but too often clumsy and neutral in color.

Among the many recordings of the main soprano arias, those by Bominsegna (Eterna 745) and Ponselle (ASC A 123) are especially interesting. Bominsegna was another singer whose severe division of registers did not apparently impair the vitality or flexibility of the voice. Her "D'amor sull'alii," with its beautifully suspended high phrases, is particularly lovely. Ponselle's version of the same aria is a model of evenness and control of high tones—and if you are interested in hearing what a genuine trill sounds like in a dramatic voice, this recording is the place to find out. Also worthy of investigation is the "D'amor sull'alii" of Margarethe Sems, sung in German on Rococo R 20. The controlled legato and dark tone are especially remarkable in a singer who encompassed such roles as Phileine and Zerlina (and she was the original Marschallin).

There are two historical recordings of the Misere re which should be investigated, the Alda-Caruso (RCA Victor LCT 1003—deleted) and Nordica-Janecnik (Rococo 21). The latter is poorly recorded, especially where Nordica is concerned, but Janecnik sings the tenor lines with wonderful smoothness and clarity. The Alda-Caruso version is of course a classic and justifiably so, if only for Caruso's seemingly endless legato in the tenor melody. Alda's contribution, though, is also quite fine, despite some Americanized Italian. Both versions offer an interesting stylistic sidelight, in that Nordica and Alda both interpolated Cs for the As in one of the repetitions of "Di te, di te scordarmi?"; very effective, I think.

Now for the tenors. Manrico is often classified as a dramatic role, presumably because "Di quella pira" is regarded as the big challenge—if the tenor can make it with this two-minute song, an entire evening of aural torture can be forgotten. Actually, very little of Manrico's music is of this sort; the role calls for smoothness above all else ("Deserto sulla terra."

"Ah! si ben mio," the Misere re, "Ai nostri monti"). The dominant quality of the music is melancholy, and I can say that the perfect voice for it was Caruso's, with its dark flow and that habitual little downward glide. On the complete record, it is certainly Bjoerling (A Victor 1) who walks away from the field. His "Mal reggendo" is an object lesson in legato singing, his "Ah! si ben mio" a model of balance and color (I cannot without the trill). And on the other hand, he flings out a ringing "Di quella pira." Every phrase is free and silvery, and of course his musicality, his sense of how to steer a phrase, was incomparable.

Bergonzi (DG) doesn't have the

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variety of color or the ring on top to be an ideal Manrico, but he has admirable vocal control, good taste, and intelligence. His "Ah! si ben mio" is excellent (he refrains, incidentally, from the usual high option on "e solo in ciel precedente") and does include the indicated trills; most of the other lyrical moments are very ingratiating, and he makes an interesting effect in "Di quella pira" by waiting for the chorus to finish its lines before taking the last C.

The others fall into line in rapidly descending order, roughly as follows: Tucker (RCA Victor II) is very solid and reliable, but a little stiff and thick-sounding, with many aspirated Hs and not much careening of the legato passages. A note of praise says that Tucker "stops singing between the lines," if that conveys something (it is a feeling one never gets with Björling, who maintains continuity always). His "Di quella pira" is transposed, for which there is ample precedent. Di Stefano (Angel) has a voice that is basically no lighter than Björling's, the difference being that Di Stefano is not content to use it in a relaxed, lyrical manner. He is very clear and definite with the words, which is welcome, and marks the rhythms well, but simply doesn't make pleasant sounds above the staff. Lauri-Volpi (Cetra) is something of a special case, in that he was well past the age when most tenors retire when he recorded his Manrico. He really still had quite a bit to offer; the essential ring of the voice (one of the great ones) is still there, and so is the command and stylistic knowledge marking the extraordinary performer. He is unable to sustain a real legato line ("Deserto sulla terra" for instance, is just a series of small explosions), and his piano tone is a croon. But at many points, the voice catches hold and drops its years—the high Cs in "Di quella pira" are quite remarkable, and he even launches a D-flat at the end of the second scene that is in much better focus than Di Stefano's on the Angel set. At other moments, Lauri-Volpi offers inflections that are interestingly different from the norm—his treatment of the recitative just before "Di quella pira," for example, really tells us something about Manrico's feelings. I am sure he is the only Italian tenor ever to pronounce "Castello" in the Castilian way.

The familiar tenor excerpts have been recorded so many times that I can only scratch the surface in this survey. (TAP Records, by the way, has issued a disc on which no fewer than forty tenors, from the great to the rancid, offer "Di quella pira." A prize item for the collector of operatic morbidia.) I feel I should mention Josef Schmidt's "Ah! si ben mio" and "Di quella pira" (Eterna 737). The former, in German, has unusual and wonderful, cantorial trills, the latter is rendered twice, once in Italian, once in German, both with chorus, and both with no fewer than three high Cs in six in all, each of them hair-raising. Martinelli's "Di quella pira" (ASCO A 116) is stentorian, with a fine use of vowel and consonants for dramatic effect. Among recent versions, that of Sandor Konya (DG LPEM 19214 or SLPEM 136214) is quite exciting, with excellent observance of the staccato markings. Tamagno's recording is of historical importance, and is amazingly fresh-sounding (the "fon forza" turns are thrilling). The Olympus transfer (ORL 211) is excellent.

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Homer and Caruso (RCA Victor SP 3375, a disc once briefly offered as a bonus with a recording by Mario Lanza entitled “Caruso Favorites.” RCA Victor 18-2932, which sounds a bit hollow on this recording, but it is worth having for the ease with which Caruso spits out the long-breathed phrase “Riposa, o ferri penne,” etc. Zanetti recorded it with Parni-Petinella (Olympus 209); again the contracto is not heard to advantage (the recording is poor in any case, and poorly accompaniment), but the tenor contributes smooth, even vocalism. (There is a striking similarity between the Caruso and Zanetti treatments.)

We have quite a roster of baritones for Di Luna. one of the great singing roles in the baritone literature, and one of the most demanding in its use of sustained high tessitura. The man who coped with this most easily was Leonard Warren, who on RCA Victor I sent his voice soaring through these lines with wonderful freedom and abandon. No other baritone copes with “Il balen” so swan, or tosses off the Fs (staccato eighth notes) in the scene with Leonova so gleamishly. On RCA Victor II, the voice is shaky and frequently husky, the treatment verging on the fussy—“Il balen,” though. is even finer on the later recording, with beautifully soft, relaxed high notes.

Apollo Formante, appearing with Minghini-Caitaneo on the Voce del Pad- donet gives the music a fine, dramatic treatment, occasionally a little labored (as at the conclusion of “Il balen”) but always firm and alive; he is particularly good in the cabaletta “Per me ora fata-le,” and in the big Act IV scene with Leonora. Tagliabue’s work (Cetra) is similar—a dark, round voice, a bit muf- fled, and sometimes inclined to flatness, but steady and handled in a stylish fashion. The unpredictable Bastianini (DGG) turns in one of his better recorded performance, still a bit stiff and leathery-sounding, but with relatively little of the sort of burly stumping that disfigures his Germont. He excelled in the declamatory moments, such as Di Luna’s attempt to abduct Leonora from the convent (“No, giun- nis” etc.)

De Luca’s “Il balen” and “Per me ora fata-le” (RCA Camden CAL 320, de- leted, but in print in England as RCA Camden CDN 1012) are worth looking up. straightforward, open-throated performances with lots of fat, rich tone and no nonsense. There are also two fine versions of the Di Luna/Leonora scene from Act IV: one, on Eterna 745, is sung in German by Frida Leider and Schleslinus. There are big slowdowns every time Mme. Leider’s voice has a thrilling phrase, but both voices are fresh and full, and the results are exciting. Battistini propels his varicolored voice through the scene twice (with a good many musical liberties and interpretations) in almost debonair fashion on Eterna 709, leaving his partner (someone named E. Barbiere) behind in the dust.

Two of the Ferrandos—Vinco (DGG) and Moscona (RCA Victor I) have the right combination of dark, true bass tone and low-lying, somewhat mouthy in Moscona’s case) for this diff- cult role. What problematic writing it is for a heavy voice! Tozzi (London and RCA Victor) handles it well, but is rather too light-voiced and young-sounding. and on the Victor recording distorts the music badly by shouting most of the downbeats for “dramatic emphasis.” Zacchia (Angel) offers an interestingly restrained account of the narrative. On RCA Camden CAL 401, deleted. Ezio Pinza sings most of Ferrando’s scene in an exemplary fashion, with his usual dark, rolling tone and crystal-clear enunciation.

La TRAVIATA (1853)

Traviata stands in no need of analysis or praise; yet, after several weeks of studying it and rereading it, I find myself more than ever struck by its dissimilarity to its companion works. It is the com- poser’s most remarkable pre-Otello opera. Here Verdi sets himself the task of dealing with characters who, if they are not commonplace, at least embody no extremes. Compare them with the figures of Rigoletto, who, believably human as they are, are nonetheless very much be- yond the bounds of everyday experience, existing on a highly colored theatrical level. Violetta, of course, must have seemed a shocking character to the audi- ences of the day, but there is nothing abnormal about her, save for her pos- session of that mandatory romantic ail- ment, consumption. Alfredo is a young fellow of moderately high social position, whose most dramatic moment occurs when he disgraces himself at a party. His father is a goodhearted, somewhat hide-bound gentleman, intent on keeping his family headed along an uneventful course. And these are the only characters of any consequence or dimension, all the sharply drawn subsidiary characters of La Dante aux camelias being either dis- pensed with entirely or reduced (as with the Baron) to the status of plot pawns. Every happening in the opera plays a part directly or indirectly and naturally from the confronta- tions of these characters—no empires tot- tering, funeral pyres flaming, or assas- sins assassinating.

That Verdi succeeded with these ma- terials is beyond discussion, though it was, I think, a bit of an effort for him. I’m sure it’s not generally realized how lib- erally Traviata is always cut, and one’s over-all picture of the score is a bit different when the deleted passages are considered (page reference numbers are to the Schirmer vocal score): one verse of “Ah! forse ’è lui” (pp. 61-62); Al- fredo’s cabaletta. “Oh, mia rimorso!” (pp. 76-80); Germont’s cabaletta. “Non, non udrai rimproveri” (pp. 116-20); and sometimes the dialogue beginning with Alfredo’s “Mille viri” that precedes it; one verse of “Addio del passato” (pp. 200-01); frequently, the repeat of the second section of “Parigi, o cara” (pp. 213-15); and frequently one of the vocal lines between Violetta’s final “Oh gioia” (p. 231) and the end of the opera (p. 232). This amounts to fifteen to twenty minutes of music nor- mally cut in performance. London’s sec- ond recording of the opera, under Pritchard (which I shall call London II), restores all these cuts. It is good to have a really complete recording, and listeners can decide for themselves whether the inclusion of the two cabalettas in their places (instead of, let us say, on supple- mental bands) constitutes an obstacle to enjoyment of the opera. My own impres- sion, based on limited listening to this

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version, is that a supplemental band would have been preferable—the ca- baletas are not only uninspired tunes, they are the only ones which throw believable character motivation to the winds in favor of what was then traditional structure. Apart from London, there are instances of restoration on the complete recordings: London I includes one verse of Alfredo’s caballeta; while Capitol and Angel—the recordings closest to the source—restore the repeat in “Parigi, o cara.”

So—to the performances. Four of the conductors turn in readings that are well received; Serafin (Capitol GCR 7221), Previtali (RCA Victor II), Toscanini (RCA Victor I), and Monteux (RCA Victor III). Monteux is worth noting from the start that Toscanini, while not benefiting from modern studio recording, has the NBC Symphony and the Robert Shaw Chorale to work with, while all three of the others have the Rome Opera chorus and orchestra.

It goes without saying that the dominant features of Toscanini’s performance are its dramatic strength and its selection of major cuts. Certain scenes that are sometimes sloughed off come wonderfully alive—the two little dialogues in Act II, Scene I between Alfredo and Amina, and Violetta and Annina (pp. 74-75 and p. 81, respectively) take on a whole new dramatic coloring because of the sharpness of attack in the strings; things are happening, even in such comparatively bland passages of the orchestral execution. The orchestral execution, of course, superior—once you have heard the tight, absolutely perfect trills in the strings during the Prelude, or in the woodwinds during the opening Allegro brillantisimo of the first scene (p. 3), you will realize that all other such trills are relatively loose and sloppy.

Still, this seems to me far from Toscanini’s happiest opera recording. Two things bother me—first, a tendency to overdo the incisiveness; and an insistence on maintaining certain rhythmic strides, whether or not the phrasing is really capable of the pace. As an instance of the first habit, I would cite the entrance of Germont (p. 82). The baritone is introduced by a highly accented theme in the strings, marked “allegro” and “mf.” Allegro it certainly is, if not more, but it is a good deal louder than mf, and actually, I have a suspicion—except Orestes with his ax, not Germont with his walking stick. There are other examples, but this one makes the point. For all his wonderful feeling for the shape of a Verdi phrase (listen to the lilting rise and fall of the Brindisi), the conductor has overstated the case at some pointings; “no” is not the right word for every passage.

And I don’t like the feeling of all but hearing the whip crack over the singer’s heads. I hate to be made the mis- take of hiring poor singers (he reserved that error for other occasions), but he did make demands on the very good singers he did not fire. A quick enough to sound a shade breathless—more, indeed, is the soprano’s big scene in Act II; so is “Pura siccome un angelo.” I know it will be argued that “No” is not Toscanini’s fault if the singers can’t quite finish the race, but I can’t see the point of insisting on a given tempo, however appropriate it may be, only means uncomfortable execution.

Monteux’s very different reading was at one time my decided favorite, and I think I still prefer this performance as a whole, since it is cast with artists who are not only good singers but are ideally suited to bringing Monteux’s conception of the score to convincing life. Monteux strives for grace and clarity, sometimes at the expense of impetus. It now seems to me that the whole party theme (p. 3) is really just too slow to be effective; that “Sempre libera” is too slow to sound at all feverish or abandoned; that some passages in the Violetta/Germont scene need a more urgent pulse (as was the allegro beginning at line 1, p. 98—“Tra breve ei vi fia reso”); and that the allegro, which here (as in the card playing commences, seems neither allegro nor agitated enough. But there are compensations. Several solo obligato passages are rendered with much more point and clarity than they are usu- ally accorded—take the oboe’s statement of the “cocktail music” theme previously carried by the solo violins (p. 1, line 1), or another little oboe passage, under “Dite alla giovine” (p. 94, line 3) for examples. The delicious little Act I chorus “Si rideranno (Teatro)”, sung as the guests bustle through their leave- taking, is rendered with wonderful light- ness and humor.

But the real miracle of the Monteux performance is the Act II finale, begin- ning with the Violetta/Alfredo interview (p. 154). This is marked with a very strong rhythmic underpinning which carries through Alfredo’s accusation and the chorus’ denunciation of him—all beautifully built to the point of Ger- mont’s entrance. The tremendous con- certed section beginning on p. 167—one of the greatest ensemble-finales in all opera—has a true model of lucidity and balance. Virtually every individual char-acter can be heard voicing his lines, yet Monteux never loses command over the movement of the entire line—the basic direction is always kept in sight. Part of the credit must be given the engineers, for the effect has not been surpassed even in more recent stereo editions.

Serafin (in Angel 3623 C/L) and Previta- li are less distinctive, but still noto- worthy in their handling of the music. Serafin seems to have tried to se- cure a sweeter, more affectionate sound from the Rome players than any other leader on records; the playing is always smooth, never too slow, but the decline to the slow side, though not so slow as Monteux’s and by no means lacking in tension. As with Monteux, the transparency of the reading is ad- mirable—the very opening orchestral run in Scene I (p. 3) is representative, and so is the orchestral conclusion to the Act I song “Vissi d’arte, vissi” which has a real lift. Serafin does allow the gypsy chorus in the second scene of Act II to go rather shoddily, but the lapse is temporary, the conductor is back in line with the matadors’ chorus that follows. Curiously, Serafin obtains less interesting results with a better orchestra (La Scala’s) on Act I Scene II 5745 C/L, which has such a smooth, comfortable air as to be lacking in lift. The tempos are slower, they are on the other Angel (one- time Capitol) but the air of the piece here has even less urgency to it at certain key points—Violetta’s “Così alla misera” (boattone) is quite as good as or better as the marking “animando con molta passione” is unrealized. In addition, the soloists’ work is sometimes lacking sharpness; this is a reading which I would describe as “weak.”

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scales of "De volare" in "Sempre libera" (p. 68 ff.) in a genuine staccato, as marked—most unusual.

Sutherland (London II) is a singer of such attainments that it seems hard to rank her behind anyone else—but yet her Violetta does not strike me as convincing. Her round tone and amazing coloratura facility are certainly welcome in "Sempre libera" and I have no objection to the extra turns and embellishments which she takes in emulation of some of her high soprano predecessors (the chromatic run in the middle of "Ah! forse è lui," though, sounds to me like something Verdi would never have devised). But so much of her singing sounds affected and tricky that we really get a picture only of the singer, not of Violetta. Her mannerism of gliding onto and off of notes is especially noticeable in the complete recording than in her previous recital version, London OSA 1274). This reaches an almost ridiculous climax during the run on the top of p. 67, where she selects a high option, then swoops on and off as if she were singing Adele. Again, in "Addio del passato" she adopts the interval of leaping the notes fall off into a parlando, as if Violetta’s strength were failing. Other singers have used this device very movingly, but she does it so perfectly and consistently that it sounds mechanical. There are passages where she slashes through these peculiarities, to good effect—"Non so più," her guile and affections, and the succeeding "Ah, il supplizio è sì spietato" (pp. 87-89) or the allegro assai mosso of p. 106 (where Violetta begs for Alfredo’s reasonings) are examples; if the whole interpretation were this direct, this emotionally honest, it would be a great one.

Callas’ early effort (Cetra) is simply not as penetrating or exciting as her later ones—certainly her Violetta acquired an interpretative stature only suggested here. She is, of course, double-crossed by the faint, dull sound, and by Santin’s limp leadership. Vocally, her performances is interesting in that it bears only very occasionally the rawness and wobbliness which later invaded her singing.

There have been innumerable recordings of Violetta’s big Act I scene. Moffio’s Angel recital version (Angel 35861) of the scene is quite different from that on the complete recording (RCA Victor LM 6154), which came later (by about two years). Her voice has more body and, it seems, size in the Angel version, and the vowels are noticeably darker in color. I’m not sure I don’t prefer this performance to the later one. Eleanor Steber’s version on her Verdi recital for Columbia (ML 2137, a 10-inch L.P. long deleted and never reissued or transferred), in most respects dispensable, is, however, noteworthy for its musical accuracy—the precise articulation of the staccato sixteenths in "Ah! forse è lui" (p. 59); good execution of the runs, which have accuracy and velocity; and observance of genuine trills where Moffio (in "Sempre libera") is a admirable instances of a rare fidelity to the text.

Three historical versions: Sembriich’s, Melba’s, and Corelli’s (like Sembrich’s (of "Ah! forse è lui") only much the best—they are all in a tradition which opts for pure vocal display, and which discards all present stylistic conceptions, but Sembrich goes through it all with such panache and vigor that it wins me over. Columbia 7-M (283) makes use of its own 1903 version with piano, while Olympus and Rocco use the later orchestral edition. My choice is Columbia, for the recording is much more alive and forward, giving a real idea of the singer’s ease and power in the high range. Melba’s recording (Angel COLH 125) does her such scant justice as to be almost unpleasant to listen to. Her power and speed of her runs in "Sempre libera" are worth hearing. (Both Sembriich and Melba, incidentally, make use of a high variant of the middle of "Ah, forse è lui," it is quite lovely.) Galli-Curci (RCA Victor LTC 1037, deleted) is clearly recorded, and one can marvel at the beauty of the voice, although her rendition is almost in the nature of a vocable. Muzzio’s incomparable performance of "Addio del passato" (Angel COL 101) is a must for the library of anyone who cares about great vocal acting—listening to the reading of the letter alone is a tremendous experience. And the Bori/Mccormack "Puritani" (RCA Victor LTC 1037, deleted) gives us two lyric-voiced virtuosos who can sing the music with relaxed tone and absolute ease. Alfredo is usually regarded as an uninteresting part, but—to recite a phrase—there are no uninteresting parts, only uninteresting singing. Muzio’s lines are difficult to put across. When, after the emotional climax of "Amami, Alfredo," Violetta rushes away from Alfredo and again and again ("mio cara," "Tu: mi dolce..."") Galli-Curci seems to share Monteux’s views as to temps and phrasing, and etches moments of great beauty out of passages which for other tenors, would be much too slow. "Un di felice" is exemplary in the musicality of its phrasing, the inflections of the text, the coloring of the tone. He actually observes dynamic markings (e.g., the sudden ppp on p. 73, line 1 and again line 3, during "De' miei bollenti," which I’ve never heard taken by any other tenor), and during the accusation scene he achieves through sharpness of attack and clear declamation of the text versus other tenors of more generous voice cannot attain. I would wish only for a more solid tone in the high-lying phrases of the last scene (MC 125, "Non mi morrai!" etc.), where he does sound thin.

Next to this sort of treatment, I like best the firmness and security of Tucker (RCA Victor 1037, deleted, a 10-inch L.P. long deleted), and the soundness and reserve of Coolidge (RCA Victor 1). It is certainly a pleasure to hear the Brindisi, "De’ miei bollenti," and other easy-flowing passages rendered with the air of ease and strength with that Tucker is able to bring to them; and the sheer ring and power of the voice make the accusation exciting. Peirce’s in performances of pre-1903 recordings was fresh and spinning on top; his treatment is straightforward and musical. In both cases, more elegance and, par-
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particularly, an ability to sing at truly soft dynamics would upgrade matters.

Bergonzì (London II) turns in a very likable, well-shaped piece of singing, sometimes marred by slurring and by a rather showy use of high piano tone—as with the held piano A flat on “ho disfogato,” p. 166. By and large, however, his work is put to dramatic and tasteful. Unfortunately, he does not have the ringing B flat and C necessary for making something out of his restored cabaletta. Di Stefano’s effort (A and Angel) is one of his more enjoyable ones—the music does not lie so high as in some of the other Verdi; tenor parts and does not make excessive demands on the listener. Musically, he is sloppy, particularly with lines of recitative (refer to “Tho già in cur,” on p. 16, or to “d’avor regenerato,” p. 71), and he tends to throw everything out (omitting the acciacature in the Brindisi, for instance). But he phrases well and enunciates well, and—despite the unpleasant openness of his upper register—is fairly satisfying vocally.

Among versions of the tenor aria, I recommend Helge Roswaenge’s German-language performance (Telefunken TH 97014)—suave, clean, secure. Schmidt’s, also in German (Telefunken 97007), is more perfunctory—sounding; Gigli’s singing of the aria (RCA Victor LM 6705) is sumptuous, but not especially well-phrased, with a really tasteless botch of the preceding recitative. There are no great characterizations of Germont on records, but there are several performances that are very well sung, among which I rank Warin’s (RCA Victor II) and Merrill’s (RCA Victor III) as especially interesting. Warren is shuddery on some of the more declamatory lines (his opening “Si, dell’incanto,” for example, and part of the address in the scene at Flora’s). But he is unsurpassed in the ease and polish of his singing of the long-lined melodies in the great scene with Violetta: “Pura siccome un angelo,” “Un fi, quando le vene,” and, of course, “Di Provenza” are all ravishing song with every phrase finished off, every turn rendered with all the smoothness of that plump, soft voice. Merrill’s second try is almost the equal of Warren’s performance—in fact, in warmth and steadiness of tone, it is the best-sung Germont on records. Merrill is much more knowing and flexible in his handling of the music than was in the Toscanini performance, the phrases are much more sensitively rounded off, the dynamic shifting far more varied (he sings a genuine piano during the “Dite alla giovine” duet). His performance for Pritchard on London is marginally inferior, the words being given less careful attention, and a somewhat mean sound being allowed to invade the voice at times. I’d like to enter a word on behalf of the very effective P. Paolo Silveri, the only outstanding feature of the Columbia recording under Vincenzo Bellezza (SL 103. long departed from the domestic catalogues, but available on Italian Columbia XQC 100008/09). His voice is steadier and brighter than on any of his Cetra recordings, and his handling of the music truly beautiful—listen to the sensitively molded piano of the duet portion of “Dite alla giovine” the fine phrasing in “Di Provenza,” especially on the climactic “sauela.” I must also not omit mention of two versions of “Di Provenza”: De Luca’s (RCA Camden CAL 320, deleted but available in England as RCA Camden CDN 1012), which is splendidly open-throated and steady, and Schlusnus’ (Urania URLP 7027, deleted), which, although somewhat cut up by the German text, is sung with brilliance, warmth, and, excellent control of dynamics.

There are several good Gastones—Garris (RCA Victor I), De Palma (RCA Victor II), London I and II, on the last of which he sings the “E Piquillo” chorus as a solo), Ricciardì (Deutsche Grammophon); several good Flavias—Vencelli (London I), Anne Reynolds (RCA Victor III), and Tavazzoni (DDG); two good Marcheses—Monreale (RCA Victor II) and Zaccaria (Angel); and even a mentionable Doctor— Ventriglia (RCA Victor III). Curiously, there is only one adequate Annina—Dora Carral (London II). This character has only a few simple, “parlando” lines within a narrow range, which should be clearly stated; but apart from Miss Carral, recording companies have engaged in a successful, world-wide search for singers who are incapable of doing just that.

LA FORZÀ DEL DESTINO (1862)

No one seems satisfied with Forzà, least of all the gentlemen hired to design, conduct, and transcribe it. They cut it to ribbons, they transpose scenes, they omit key arias and duets. One can’t blame them—Forza is a poor construction job, and there are passages of very ordinary music. The Intermezzo scene (not performed at the Metropolitan) is simply a paste-up, what with Prezioso’s undistinguished song in praise of war, the passing pilgrims dragged into the story for the sake of an effective ensemble (and it is effective, particularly in the soaring lines given to Flora as she pleads for salvation from her vengeful brother), Carlo’s uninspired entrance song, and the fairly silly “Buona notte” business being strung together in an unnatural progression. And the series of fragments that constitutes the latter half of Act II (from the chorus “Lorchè pifferi e tromburi” through the “Rataplan” chorus) is open to the same criticism; it seems dashed together and overextended. The work underwent extensive revision after its St. Petersburg premiere, and several of the problems date from the revision. The key scene between Alvaro and Carlo (“Alla chiusa, di segreto tu danze violato,” originally ending Act III and Alvaro’s “… fobilo, la pace chiega il guerrier” is an obvious tag line), was shoehorned into the middle of the act, which thus ended the focus off the personal drama and on a badly written chorus led by a secondary character, apropos of very little. Moreover, Melitone’s two principal scenes are now placed practically side by side; in the opera house, they are separated by an intermission, but on records they are very closely spaced. Perhaps the discovery of the manuscript of the original (one of roughly two hundred Italian opera manuscripts found in neglected ar-
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chives of the Leningrad opera house) will lead to a new edition.

The recordings of Forza reflect the wide variety of opinion as to which sections should be omitted or shortened. I feel it important to note that the cuts here, since they may, to some collectors, represent a key consideration. Page numbers here refer to the Boosen & Hawkies edition of the vocal score.

ANGEL: A brief cut in Preziosilla's first song: a one-page cut in the caballeta of Carlo's aria (173); a cut of the final chorus of Preziosilla's "Venite all' indis- vino" (pp. 246-47); omission of Preziosilla's toast to Alvaro and Carlo (by their pseudonyms, Don Pederico de Hervero and Don Felice de Bornos) and the choral responses (pp. 250-51)—this omission makes sense, for with the big duet left, it's absurd to have the chorus tolerate these "worthy friends" when they have just finished trying to kill each other; and the entire first scene of the last act, including Melitone's scene and comic aria with the mendicants and the Guardiano/Melitone duet (pp. 301-30).

UKRAINE: A cut in Preziosilla's first song: a cut of the second verse of Carlo's "Son Pereda"; a cut-and-paste job on the final chorus of the Inn Scene (several skips between pp. 107 and 115); omission of the reprise of "E vistato il purito" in the Leonora/Guardiano duet (pp. 145-46); a similar cut at the end of the next section (152-54); a perfect little cut in the off-stage card-piano chorus, "Atteniti al gioco" (174-75) and another in the instrumental introduction to Alvaro's recitative and aria (176-77); a cut in Carlo's caballeta (p. 213); a cut in the choral rondo "Compagnie, sosti- anno" (p. 215); omission of the "Sleellet" duet (pp. 221-22); a cut of the chorus from the top of 250 to Trabucco's en- trance on 252; cut of the "Pian, pan per carino" chorus with Preziosilla's lines (pp. 258-64); a cut of roughly three pages near the end of Melitone's scene with the chorus, ending on p. 321. This recording makes more small internal cuts than any other, though only one im- portant scene is left out entirely.

RCA VICTOR: Cut in Carlo's caballeta; omission of the "Sleellet" duet (pp. 221-40); otherwise complete.

LONDON: Cut in Carlo's caballeta; otherwise complete.

CETRA: A cut of the conclusion of the Leonora/Guardiano scene (152-54); cut in Carlo's caballeta; omission of the "Sleellet" duet (pp. 221-40); brief cut near the end of Leonora's Act IV scene with the mendicants.

Clearly, London's version is the most nearly complete; only it and the Angel recording offer the "Sleellet" scene, and the Angel has made room for it by cut- ting the whole first scene of the fourth act. CETRA's edition is often assumed to be severely cut (perhaps a short- er version was at one point issued), but in fact it is as nearly complete as any other version except London's.

In comparing the performances of the conductors (all of them Italian), I will use the overture as an easy point of reference; it contains most of the contrasts to be found in the opera itself and, the opera, consists of a succession of sections very simple and unsurprisingly dovetailed. While on the subject of the overture, I must direct attention to the Toscanini performance contained on RCA Victor LM 6041. Those in search of evidence of this conductor's and this orchestra's virtuosity need go further than the three brass chords that open the work, for they have a unanimity and balance that no other group seems able to capture. But there is plenty of further evidence: the real chill invested in the string tremolando at the beginning of Section C, the blinding directness of Section D (one of the few purely "developmental" passages in the score), and above all, the proud sweep of the concluding "Scotch and Dubonnet" (p. 9). Toscanini's genius for making us believe that every soul in his orchestra is perfectly in tune, and that it is never more evident. Among other separate recordings of the overture, I am most interested by the Charles Macker- rass/Philharmonia version on a Philips LP, S 357510. It is distinguished by very crisp, clear orchestral playing, careful observance of dynamics (the changes from I to II are correct, to my mind), and unusually long held rests between sections (between B and C, F and G, J and N). Mackerrell is the only conductor I can remember hearing who takes the conclusion of Section J (bottom of p. 9) strictly a tempo—most, including Toscanini, introduce an unmarked accel- erando.

Marinuzzi (Cetra) and Serafin (Angel) seem to me to have the best of it among leaders of the complete recordings. Mar- inuzzi inclines to briskness, and there are moments throughout the score when his forces tend to sound rushed—the shortening of the Marchese's entrance and death (from "Vil sedutor!" p. 42, to the end of the scene) is a good example. Most of the time, though, the vigor is most uniform, and it is coupled with splendid rhythmic steadiness and an admirable respect for the score's instruc- tions. A sample of the former occurs in the overture at time on p. 2, page 4: in the melody, the bar consists of six eighths, a dotted eighth, and a six-teenth; and of these eight notes, three are marked with accents. And that is just what we hear from Marinuzzi—the very common failure to bring out these accents flattens out the passage, even if the dynamic markings are otherwise observed. The conductor's rhythmic steadiness pays off at any number of points, at which I might cite the well- maintained allegro brillante of Section G of the overture, the Leonora/Alvaro duet in Scene 1, and the beautifully phrased, strictly timed attack, just before Alvaro's aria (p. 177). Marinuzzi also secures an unusually attentive reading of the score from his singers, and surely deserves particular consideration for his air of authority and good style which gives to this excellent wartime performance.

Some of that same air surrounds the Serafin edition, although it does not seem to me as consistently fine as Marinuzzi's. He shapes most of the big- ger of more vigorous passages admirably: the recitativo marcato in Section C of the overture elicits a response that almost rivals Toscanini's, as does the più animato of the overture's final bars (p. 12). Another passage in which the conductor's special command was the entire Convent Scene—and almost any line calling for real momentum (as with the little motor figure in Carlo's entrance, "furor," on pp. 339-40) gets its due. But Serafin tends to go slack with markings of andante or slower, with as the 2/4 notation in Section C of the overture, or the introduction to Alvaro's aria (pp. 177-77), or Alvaro's "Le minaccia, e fieri accenti" (pp. 336-37). It is this tendency that led one to dub the plater's reading a notch below Marinuzzi's; sev- eral splendid passages will be followed by
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A passage in which the participants don't seem to have any idea of what they're doing. The sound is not comfortable, and the orchestral execution is nearly always

Molinari-Pradelli's reading (London) is just plain sloppy—the overture, for instance, will disclose some very approximate runs. It is a murky sound from the brass at the beginning of Section 2. In general, there is too little sparkle and precision in this performance, and very little imagination. From the purely technical point of view, Molinari-Pradelli is not entirely to blame, for his orchestra—that of L'Accademia di Santa Cecilia—it bears no relation to the part written (successor to the continued quality.) Victor's Preludio, working with the same orchestra, gets slightly cleaner results, though the execution fails down at some of the same points as it does on the London recording—the violins in Section 6 of the overture, for instance (p. 7). The performance has, on the whole, more life than Molinari-Pradelli's, but it still tends to go limp at some important points (the return to Tempo in the first movement, p. 145; or the Alvaro/Carlo duet in Act IV, which has no drive at all). I have the impression that this album has not received the attention it deserves. Victor's engineers: there are odd little gaps between certain sections, and some spots really should have been given a better take—the chorus (a good one, it must be said) is terribly inaccurate in the scene of Melitone's sermon in Act III, and should have had a chance to correct itself. There is not a great deal that can be said about La Rosa Parodi's effort (Urania), since it was obviously made under adverse conditions. I know that some of the Urania complete operas were recorded with no retakes at all, and this sounds like the case here). Parodi seems to have some interesting ideas about the music—in the overture, he gets a card, firm effect at relatively slow tempos, and observes the accent markings carefully. His singers, though, are not an accomplished group (the soprano's very first line, "Oh angoscia," is musically at fault and third syllables being rendered as two flabby eights instead of a dotted eighth and a sixteenth), and he undoubtedly had all he could do to get things safely through in a fairly traditional, often spirited way. Much of the performance sounds precarious.

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At least two other versions of "Pace" attain a very high level: Muzio's (Angel COLC 101) and Farrell's (Columbia M 7203). Most interestingly, Farrell features a floatingly piano of all sopranos, and offers an object lesson in the inflection of words for dramatic effect. She is a bit under the arch in the middle sections, is flat, but makes us forgive it. Her version, incidentally, does not include the little postlude, starting with "Misero pace", which was not part of the aria. Farrell makes two mistakes: she simply roars "invan la pace", presumably to avoid the difficulties encountered by other sopranos, and she overdramatizes the first part of the postlude, indicating an overwhelming fury at the provisons Guardiano has let her, rather than the flat acceptance that is clearly intended. Otherwise, her performance is full-toned and warm, nicely phrased, and altogether a pleasure to listen to.

An extended selection of the tenor-baritone music was contained on the long deleted Urania URLP 7027, and featured Helge Roswaenge and Heinrich Schlusnus, who of course sang the music in German. The first and second of the three Alvaro/Carlo scenes are included on this recording, with the off-stage fight over card playing (p. 184) and continuing through "Amici, in vita e in morte," the battle scene, and the final duet scene in the postlude, starting with the scene comprising the entire "Sleue!" duet, pp. 221-39. The recordings date from the Thirties, the transfers are harsh-sounding, and the use of German frequently chops the line. All the same, both these great singers are in prime form, especially Schlusnus: there is not much agility in his approach, but both sing genuine legato, and Roswaenge does "Ne, d'unime il vincolo" very smoothly, but when both these ringing voices get going the "Sleue!" scene the results are most exciting.

We must mention the best-known of all Forza recordings, the Caruso/Scotti "Solemnite in quest' ora" (RCA Victor LM 6056). It has been called the perfect example of duet singing, and so it seems to me. The voices are perfectly matched, and many listeners have shared my own experience on first hearing the recording (before, of course, becoming at all well acquainted with the arias) that of not ever being quite sure of which of these two remarkable vocalists is singing. Caruso's treatment of the phrase "Or musio tranquillo," is a model of velvelty and perfect legato, and the final "addio" are perfectly declaimed by both singers. The Gigi/DI Ria version of the same duet (RCA Victor LM 2337) is lushly vocalized, but Gigi's legato is not as firm as Caruso's, and his style is unaffected.

Now to return to our consideration of the complete recordings. The role of Alvaro is, potentially, one of the most interesting in the opera. One can view of the character can become bogged down in farfetchked detail—"Son of the Last of the Incas," his case might be told—but there is an hope in the character of the best of the noble blood who aspires to the hand of the daughter of a Spanish Marquis, feels both pride and shame at the same time, and is poweredly affected by the idea that Destiny is arranging things rather badly for him and that there is nothing he can do but stick things out, waiting and wishing for death. "La vita è un inferno all' infelice..."
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GIUSEPPE
VERDI

A special issue on the 150th anniversary of his birth
Logically and ideally, the Verdi itinerary should begin in the flat country northwest of Parma, where the composer was born and bred and to which he returned with obstinate devotion during the whole of his long and crowded life. The focal point of Verdi's Italy is the little market town of Busseto deep in the Plain of Parma. But one cannot fly directly from New York to Busseto, or even to Parma. The choice for the jet-borne traveler is between a flight to Milan or to Rome. I opted for Rome and arrived there early in April, 118 years and six months after Verdi's first visit to that city.

He had gone to Rome, in the autumn of 1844, for the first performance of his sixth opera, *I due Foscari*, a gloomy entertainment based on a gloomy tragedy by Byron. The trip from Milan took five days—over miserable roads in cramped and stuffy diligences, with tedious delays at the borders of all the intervening states and principalities (Italy was not yet a nation—merely, as Metternich observed, "a geographical expression") and with vexing overnight stops at indifferent wayside inns. By comparison, the Alitalia DC-8 in which I traveled touched down in Milan after an eight-hour hop from New York and then completed the flight to Rome in seventy minutes. The disparity of traveling times is symptomatic of other radical contrasts. Rome in 1844 was a city of 180,000 population (today it is about two million), as backward in its civic amenities as in its ideas of liberty and justice. Its resident Jewish population was still compelled to live in the Ghetto, near the Portico of Ottavia—"a barbarous system," according to Murray's Handbook for Travellers of 1856, "only now to be met with in the states of the Church, although a relaxation of that rigid rule has been recently made, by allowing some of the most respectable Jews to have shops and countinghouses beyond the precincts of their filthy quarter." Every office of importance—diplomatic, financial, judicial—was in the hands of the clergy, a succession of Baron Scarpias ruled the police force, and the administration of justice knew few mercies. Capital punishment in the form of *morte esemplare* still flourished. A particularly vile murderer would be flogged and hanged in the Piazza del Popolo, then cut into quarters and his dismembered body displayed upon stakes. Charles Dickens in *Pictures from Italy* describes a Roman beheading in that very year of 1844—a chilling vignette of indifferent spectators, of monks carrying a black-canopied effigy of Christ, of a pale-faced prisoner kneeling down under the knife with a leathern bag immediately below...
to catch his head. Before Dickens quite knew what had happened, the decapitation was over. "The executioner was holding it [the head] by the hair, and walking with it round the scaffold, showing it to the people. . . . When it had travelled round the four sides of the scaffold, it was set upon a pole in front—a little patch of black and white, for the long street to stare at, and the flies to settle on." And this was a fairly tame affair. As late as 1854 six robbers were executed on the Piazza del Popolo by being beaten to death before the crowd. All this seems a far cry from the dolce vita of contemporary Rome, and it requires now a considerable effort of the imagination to think of this splendidly sybaritic city in terms of despotic injustices and barbaric cruelties. It required no effort for Verdi 118 years ago. When he composed the last act of Rigoletto, when he invoked that vein of harsh severity which runs right through his early and middle periods, Verdi was writing of things he knew.

The premiere of I due Foscari, at the Teatro Argentina on November 3, 1844, was—in Verdi's own words—a "mezzo-fasce," a half-failure, though the dissatisfactions on opening night were apparently more with the mediocre production than with the music itself. Nevertheless, Verdi returned to Milan without the tumult of a Roman success echoing in his ears. That came a little more than four years later with his second premiere at the Teatro Argentina, La Battaglia di Legnano. The circumstances were extraordinary. Italy was seething with resurgent patriotism in 1848, the year of revolutions, and the fever had infected even the Papal States. On November 24 the Pope had fled Rome in disguise to the Kingdom of Naples, and after ten weeks of dizzying uncertainty the short-lived Roman Republic was proclaimed on February 8, 1849. It was at just this period that Verdi came to Rome, carrying with him a new opera bursting with patriotic connotations—the victory of the Lombard League over Frederick Barbarossa at Legnano in 1176. The first performance took place on January 27 in an atmosphere of delirious enthusiasm. The interior of the Argentina Theatre had been festooned with the national colors. Most of the spectators were wearing them too—the men in their buttonholes, the women in their coiffures—and from the very first words of the opera, "Viva l'Italia!" the audience went into a frenzy as only an Italian throng can. The entire fourth act had to be repeated, and at the end the composer was recalled time and again.

The Teatro Argentina is no longer festooned with anything. It is a shabby derelict, but it still stands and—with the application of a little time and determination—can still be seen. The Argentina first opened its doors in 1732 and is now the only surviving eighteenth-century theatre in Rome. Probably the one most significant musical event in its long history was the first (and unsuccessful) performance of Rossini's Il Barbiere di Siviglia in 1816, though throughout much of the nineteenth century it played a notable role in Rome's operatic affairs. With the opening of the larger and more sumptuous Teatro Costanzi (now Teatro dell' Opera) in 1880, the Argentina went into decline—a secondary opera house for secondary productions. It had a brief renaissance after World War II as a concert hall, but a few years ago the city authorities closed it down altogether. When we entered the building this spring, via the stage door on a back street, we had the sense of intruding on a once great lady, now very old and infirm. The air had a moldering and earthy smell; the paint and upholstery had grown dingy with neglect; the handsomely decorated ceiling was peeling away. And yet in its dim illumination the old Argentina possessed a noble aspect, and it was easy to believe that the faded yellow velvet drapes in the corridors had been fingered by the thirty-one-year-old Verdi as he stole into a box to await the verdict of a Roman audience.

Just now the Teatro Argentina is the scene of excavations. A plank has been thrown across the orchestra pit, and below it gapes a hole about twenty feet deep. At the bottom are Roman walls, perhaps of an ancient theatre. Eventually, after the archaeologists have taken their photographs, the pit will be filled in, and one of these days a restored and modernized Argentina will open its doors again, not as an opera house but as a repertory theatre. The plans and the timetable seem somewhat vague. Meanwhile, the Argentina slumbers peacefully, a silent repository of far-off memories.

To gain admission to the inside of the Argentina requires special dispensation, but anyone can view the façade, which looks out onto a busy thoroughfare, the Largo Argentina. Except for being dirtier and dingier, the façade is as Verdi knew it. The surroundings, however, would surprise him greatly. In the 1840s the theatre was hemmed within a maze of narrow streets. Since then, the wide Corso Vittorio Emanuele has been opened up to its left, and directly in front of it there is now a large piazza encompassing some extensive excavations of Roman temples. Literally hundreds of cats—black cats and white cats, calicoes, tabbies, even some Siamese—have made their homes in and amid these ancient ruins. Wherever one looks there are cats, stretched out across fallen columns, crouching under stone ledges, or sauntering through brick foundations. Verdi, who entertained a passionate affection for animals, would surely have been pleased at the Argentina's new neighbors.

Two more Verdi premières took place in Rome, of operas that are still very much in the repertory—II Trovatore, in 1853, and Un Ballo in maschera, in 1859—but the house in which they were given, the Teatro Apollo, no longer exists. Old photographs show it to have been a bizarre, patchwork structure rising precipitously from the banks of the Tiber almost directly opposite the Castel Sant' Angelo. Theatres had occupied the site since 1671. The Teatro Apollo, erected in 1795, was the last of them, and its demolition came about, in 1888, because it stood in the way of a new river embankment that
was to be put up. The embankment was badly needed, for the Tiber used to inundate the lower parts of Rome with depressing regularity; as a matter of fact, the streets near the Teatro Apollo were inundated on the very night of Il Trovatore’s first performance. Nevertheless, it is sad that the Apollo had to bow to progress. All that remains are some old pictures, and a stone fountain on the present Lungotevere Tor di Nona commemorating the spot on which the building stood. It was on a radiantly soft spring morning that I strolled down the Lungotevere to pay my respects to the departed Teatro Apollo and to photograph its commemorative plaque. Just as I was taking the picture, a handsome ragazzino climbed up on the fountain for a quick drink of water on his way to school. He seemed equally oblivious of my presence and of the fountain’s awesome historical associations.

It is time for a side trip to Naples. In truth, Naples is not much of a Verdi city, but any excuse to go there will do when the sun is shining and the air still cool. The composer’s first visit took place in 1845 for the premiere of Alzira, a new forgotten work which had been commissioned by the Teatro San Carlo. It is, by all accounts, a thoroughly bad opera (even Verdi, in later life, called it “downright ugly”) and its reception was not especially cordial. One critic suggested that Verdi was writing too much and too quickly: “No human talent is capable of producing two or three grand operas a year.” He was undoubtedly right, but Verdi was not the first impecunious artist to keep on striking while the iron was hot. At all events, the Neapolitan press took a lively interest in the composer’s comings and goings, much to his annoyance. The papers reported on the cafés he frequented, the singers he visited, the clothes he wore, and “a thousand other trifles unworthy”—Verdi later complained—“of a serious public or a great city.” Despite his initial dislike of Naples (which he never got over), Verdi returned five years later with a much finer work—Luise Miller, a domestic tragedy that presages Rigoletto. To the credit of the San Carlo audience, the opera was applauded with rapturous enthusiasm. Nine years later, in 1858, Verdi was in Naples again, this time with the manuscript of Un Ballo in maschera. He arrived in January and immediately became engaged in a four-month struggle with the Neapolitan censors. The Kingdom of Naples, ruled by a branch of the Bourbons, was an absolute monarchy of the most reactionary temper, and a work depicting a conspiracy against the life of a king abounded with obvious perils. An instructive account of Verdi’s wrangles with King Ferdinand’s officials can be found in the 1960 Bulletin of the Institute of Verdi Studies. Suffice it to say here that the composer eventually gave up in disgust, and offered the opera instead to Rome. But by that time Verdi’s wife, Peppina, who liked a warm climate, had had her winter in Naples.

The Verdis stayed—as most tourists do—on the sea front, at the Hôtel de Rome facing the bay of Santa Lucia. The bay has since been filled in to form the Rione Santa Lucia, but otherwise the landmarks are pretty much as they were in the mid-nineteenth century. It is a short walk from the sea front to the Teatro San Carlo, the oldest major opera house in Italy still in active use. Since Charles III of Bourbon erected it in 1737 as an imposing adjunct to his palace (a private corridor connecting it to the royal quarters still exists), the San Carlo has never ceased to dominate the city’s operatic life. Dickens visited the theatre in 1844 and seemed particularly intrigued by the professional letter writers “perched behind their little desks and inkstands” who regularly congregated under its graceful portico. “Here is a Galley-slave in chains who wants a letter written to a friend. He approaches a clerkly-looking man, sitting under the corner arch, and makes his bargain. He has obtained permission of the Sentinel who guards him: who stands near, leaning against the wall and cracking nuts. The Galley-slave dictates in the ear of the letter writer, what he desires to say; and as he can’t read writing, looks intently in his face, to read there whether he sets down faithfully what he is told.” A galley slave? But this is Naples before the fall of the Bourbons, where—Murray’s Handbook informs us—the public park is open to “the lower classes, peasants, and servants in livery” only once a year, on September 8.

As late as 1912, according to Baedeker’s Southern Italy (it will be evident that we spurn such modern cicerones as Fielding or Fodor), the public writers gathered under the San Carlo’s arches “ready to commit to paper the pleading of the lover or the expostulation of the creditor.” I regret to say that they gather there no longer. Otherwise the theatre remains as Verdi saw it, a model of handsome simplicity inside and out. Everything about the house bespeaks elegance and restraint, even the backstage area, with its profusion of marble and its large, tastefully appointed dressing rooms. The Neapolitan Bourbons may have been indifferent monarchs, but they knew good architecture. It is certain that Charles III would be immensely gratified at the care with which his lovely theatre is being maintained. But if he had approached the theatre, as I did six months ago, from across the Piazza Trento e Trieste, he might have been seized with sudden apoplexy. Embazoned across the aristocratic façade of the Bourbon’s royal theatre was a strident banner exhorting the populace to “Vota Communista.”

Busseto beckons. The temptation must be resisted to tarry, Peppina-fashion, in the south, just as the heart must be hardened against contriving a stop-over in Florence, en route to the north. Florence, with only one premiere to its credit, is even less of a Verdi town than Naples. So the hired Fiat 1300 is driven ruthlessly past Giotto’s Campanile and Michelangelo’s New Sacristy, only a cursory divagation being allowed for a nod at the Teatro della Pergola, scene of the first performance of Macbeth in 1847. The Apennines are traversed, not on
The fountain commemorating Verdi's departed Teatro Apollo on the Tiber embankment (left) provides a Roman schoolboy with a morning drink. Other important Verdi theatres are still standing: for example, the San Carlo in Naples (below, left) and the Argentina in Rome.

Photographs by the author except as noted.
Verdi's birthplace in Le Roncole (above, left) looks out onto the town's main square and the parish church of San Michele, where he served as village organist from the age of twelve. The flatlands near Sant' Agata are pictured below.
Verdi’s rutted post roads, but via the spanking new Autostrada del Sole, past Bologna and on to Parma, which is to be headquarters for an exploration of the Verdi heartland. Until the unification of Italy, Verdi was a citizen of the Duchy of Parma, and he seems never to have outgrown his awe of its charming capital. “Parma,” writes Frank Walker in his invaluable and fascinating book The Man Verdi, “called up in him always a vein of fierce local patriotism. He once sent to Parma for a double-bass player, to show the musicians of the Scala orchestra how a certain passage should be performed, and in 1846 he sent word to Antonio Bareazzi that he should not come to Milan, which was ‘no place for doctors,’ but should rather go for treatment to Parma, where he would be cured.” For our purposes, however, Parma is a separate story (see page 123), and for the nonce it can be left behind. The time has come to head northwest towards the tiny hamlet of Le Roncole, where Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born at about 8 p.m. on October 10, 1813.

Much has been made of the monotony and drabness of the Emilian flatlands. “The Verdi countryside,” says Vincent Sheean, “is about as uninteresting as any to be found in the whole of Italy.” Even the composer himself, writing to Clarina Maffei from Busseto in 1858, stated that “it would be impossible to find an uglier place than this.” Perhaps it is every bit that desolate in the autumn when leaden rainfall inundates the fields, or in winter as bitter winds howl across the barren expanses, or in summer when a torrid sun parches the earth and blisters the stucco buildings. But in mid-April, with an occasional fruit tree in full blossom and the foliage shimmering in the leafy softness of early spring, the vast landscape—trailing off to a serene and limitless horizon—has much to recommend it. Or so at least it seemed on the road to Le Roncole with expectations high and the intoxication of new sights tingling the senses.

The casa natata is a disappointment, as the birthplaces of famous men usually are. The tavern-cum-grocery shop in which Verdi spent his early years is now bereft of furnishings, and one walks through the empty rooms feeling little contact with the illiterate family that produced a musical genius a century and a half ago. There is the inevitable selection of postcards for sale and the inevitable guest book, replete with signatures of celebrated visitors; the lady in charge is pleased to show these off, including the flamboyant autograph of Benito Mussolini. Even the outside of the house defies a calling-up of things past, for the wall is pocked with a profusion of commemorative plaques and the garden blemished by a mediocre bust. Across the village square is the church of San Michele, erected in the eleventh century and rebuilt in the sixteenth, where Verdi was baptized and where at the age of twelve he was appointed village organist. This is more satisfactory, for the church—though singularly unattractive—is a functioning institution and not an empty shell. The village priest, Father Rossi, who looks as if he ought to be the captain of a soccer team, lives in quarters attached to the church. He will gladly show you around the interior and conduct you up the perilously narrow steps that lead to Verdi’s organ, a dilapidated little instrument whose 780 pipes nevertheless give off a bright and cheery sound.

Busseto lies three miles to the west. Verdi was sent there at the age of ten in order to attend the local ginnasio, lodging first with a cobbler and later with Antonio Bareazzi, the kindly and generous musical enthusiast who was both patron and second father to the fledgling composer. Bareazzi’s commodious house still stands in Busseto’s main square; down the street one finds the Monte di Pietà, a local benevolent institution which helped defray the cost of Verdi’s studies in Milan; nearby is the Palazzo Orlandi, in which Verdi and Peppina lived from 1849 to 1851, scandalizing the neighbors by flouting a union outside the sanctity of marriage.

The Bussetani would probably be equally scandalized today. Busseto was and is a small town. You can cover it all by foot in half an hour. Our party wandered through its quiet streets in the company of Busseto’s genial young mayor. We had looked at the Palazzo Tedaldi—the building (now in poor repair) where Verdi and his first wife, Margherita Bareazzi, lived immediately after their marriage in 1836—and were strolling down the Via della Biblioteca. As we passed the entrance of the Biblioteca, a face appeared at one of the upper windows and hailed the mayor. It was the chief librarian, who craved a word with His Honor. We walked up the stairs into a tranquil and muffled reading room, lined with stately gold-tooled volumes and decorated—like so much else in the Duchy of Parma—in the well-ordered style of French Empire. When the librarian learned of our interest in Verdi, he turned us over to one of his assistants—a little man in a gray muslin duster—while he and the mayor went off to confer. The assistant led us into another room, also lined with cupboards and shelves of a rich patina. Here, he told us, were housed the libraries of Don Pietro Seletti and Ferdinando Provesi. Seletti schooled Verdi in Latin and Italian grammar at the Busseto ginnasio; Provesi, maestro di cappella at the collegiate church of San Bartolomeo and director of the Philharmonic Society, supervised the boy’s musical studies. For a time the two were in dispute over Verdi’s future, Seletti wanting him to become a priest, Provesi a musician. Now, in this side street of Busseto, are gathered together their books, some of which Verdi undoubtedly consulted. The cupboards were filled with Provesi’s compositions—hundreds of manuscripts written for the local orchestra, all neatly arranged in sturdy boxes and tied together with old silk ribbon. Here at last the past began to come alive. Leaping through this music so diligently accumulated by Maestro Provesi, one could build a bridge across the decades to Verdi’s youth.

The house and farmlands of Sant’ Agata, two miles to the north of Busseto, were purchased by
Verdi in 1848 with the earnings from his early operatic successes. He and Peppina went there to live in 1851, and it remained Verdi's headquarters for half a century. He was constantly improving the property—planting trees, creating an artificial lake, enlarging and modernizing the villa—but he could do nothing to improve the climate. "You know Sant' Agata topographically," the librettist Piave wrote to a friend, "and you can imagine whether I am here for my amusement... When it rains, I assure you, it's a case of looking at oneself in the mirror to see if one is still in human form or whether one hasn't been transmuted into that of a toad or a frog." Verdi warned a journalist, Filippo Filippi, that he would "find little satisfaction in narrating the marvels of Sant' Agata. Four walls in which to take refuge from the sun and inclement weather, amid the vastness of the fields; a few dozen trees planted in large part by my own hands; a dirty pool which I shall honor with the pompous title of lake when I can get the water to fill it. All that without plan, without architectural order, not because I don't love architecture, but because I detest discordances, and it would be a bad one to set up anything artistic in so unpictorial a place." Peppina had some particularly severe things to say about Sant' Agata. And yet she loved the place with that peculiar love-hate which so often afflicts city people in the country.

At Verdi's death the property of Sant' Agata passed to Maria Verdi, his second cousin and adopted heir, who had grown up at the villa and had married Dr. Carrara, Verdi's solicitor. The Carrara Verdi family still owns Sant' Agata and opens it to the public between June and September. My visit in mid-April was out of season. Nevertheless, various people of importance had written to Dr. Alberto Carrara Verdi of my impending arrival and had assured me that the doors of Sant' Agata would surely be opened. Like his ancestors, Dr. Carrara Verdi is a solicitor, and shortly before noon I presented myself at the door of the house which serves as his office and home in Busseto. Yes, he had heard from our mutual friends; yes, he well understood the importance of the publication I represented; nevertheless, it was quite impossible to allow anyone to see Sant' Agata in its present condition, with all the drapes drawn and all the furniture covered with sheets.

Come back in six weeks, he suggested, and everything would be at my disposition. I explained—in halting and ungrammatical Italian—that in six weeks I would be back in America and that pressing affairs would prohibit another transatlantic trip to Busseto. Then, waxing as rhetorical as I could in an alien tongue, I went on to say that I had traveled three thousand miles for the sole purpose of seeing Sant' Agata, that I would make due allowances for the drawn curtains and the shrouded furniture, but that I could not possibly leave Italy without witnessing the surroundings in which the immortal pages of Otello and Falstaff were composed. Dr. Carrara Verdi was unmoved. Smilingly but implacably, he assured me that a visit to Sant' Agata at this time of year was out of the question. I began to comprehend that streak of stubbornness in the good citizenry of Busseto which so infuriated Verdi—and which he himself possessed to an alarming degree.

One could at least gaze at the villa from outside the gate and snatch a leaf from a tree planted by Verdi. After that there was nothing to do but continue along Verdi's road for a few kilometers to the Trattoria Ongina, a simple country restaurant named after the little stream which flows past the Villa Sant' Agata and which provided Verdi with the water for his lake. The region of Parma is celebrated for its cooking. After a lunch of culatello (the sweetest, most succulent ham in the world), tortelli (envelopes of pasta filled with cream cheese and spinach), faraone (roast guinea hen), and a bottle of Lambrusco, the disappointment of missing Sant' Agata began to seem rather more supportable.

**TIME WAS running out. The itinerary stipulated attendance at a new Scala production of Aida four days thence. In the interim should one journey west to Genoa, where the Verdis regularly spent the coldest months of winter, or east to Venice, where five Verdi operas had their first performance? An absurd question. Genoa is a great seaport blessed with a marvellously equable climate, but Venice is one of the wonders of the world.**

When Verdi first went there—in 1843, for a production of I Lombardi—many inhabitants were still about who could remember the dying days of the Serenissima, the independent Venetian Republic which had endured for a thousand years until Napoleon put a sudden end to it at the close of the eighteenth century. Since then the Austrians had moved in, but Venice was still Venice. No city has remained more immune to the ravages of progress. In its external aspect at least, it looks now very much as it did when Verdi first rode down the Grand Canal, indeed as it did when Canaletto and Guardi detailed it all on canvas two hundred years ago. The Venetian interiors are something else. Verdi was wont to stay at the Albergo dell' Europa, formerly a Giustiniani palace and today a hostelry still very much in evidence. Viewed from a passing vaporetto, the Europa-Brittannia seems redolent with mid-

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**La Fenice's gondola entrance—"sets...typewriters...potables."**

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**Ferruccio Nuzio**
nineteenth-century charm, but the interior, alas, has been renovated to shiny perfection—doubtless more comfortable and efficient than what had gone before, but frustrating to the traveler following in the footsteps of Verdi.

There is nothing out of character about the Teatro La Fenice. "The first sight of the interior of the Fenice," says Spike Hughes in his chatty survey of Great Opera Houses, "is a breath-taking moment, for surely this is the most beautiful theatre in the world." Nobody who has been there would dispute the superlative. Like everything in Venice, it is a confection of uninhibited fantasy, a wondrously filigreed jewel of an opera house, with a color scheme—bluish green, cream, and gold—distinctively its own. And of course it is the only opera house in the world that receives all its supplies—sets for the stage, typewriters for the offices, potables for the bar—by water. On one of my days in Venice, I went around to inspect the gondola entrance (now used only on gala occasions) and found there a crew of stagehands unloading sets from the Fenice's own barge for that evening's performance.

The house was opened in 1792 and rebuilt in 1837 after a damaging conflagration. Verdi's first opera written to order for the Fenice came seven years later. This was Ernani, whose music—the Gazzetta di Venezia reported—"made such an impression that even on Sunday people came out of the theatre already humming the tunes." With this opera, which soon traveled all over Europe, Verdi began to secure an international reputation. His next work for the Fenice, Atila, is the only one of his Venetian commissions that has fallen into neglect, though the revivals in Italy earlier this year gave many commentators reason to believe that its neglect is unmerited. Atila's premiere took place in 1846, an important date in the city's history, for in that year the railway causeway linking Venice to the mainland was opened. Murray's Handbook for 1846 found it terribly impressive. "It may give some idea of the magnitude of the work to mention that, amongst other materials, 80 thousand larch piles were used in the foundations, and in the bridge itself 21 millions of bricks, and 176,437 cubic feet of Istrian stone; and that, on an average, 1,000 men were employed daily." In 1846 the railway had been built only as far as Vicenza. There were three trains a day, the journey took two hours and twenty minutes (it is covered now in half an hour), and the first-class fare was 8 Austrian Lira (about $1.50) not including luggage. The effect of the railway was to deinsularize Venice and to force the aloof city at least part way into the modern world.

Verdi returned in 1851 with an opera based on Victor Hugo's Le Roi s'amuse. It occasioned a great commotion from the Austrian censors, who were more than usually sensitive after the revolution of 1848, in which the Venetian populace rose in arms, expelled the occupying Austrian forces, and held out in a state of siege for many months. Verdi and the censors had much difficulty coming to terms, but eventually—with a change of title, locale, and characters—Rigoletto was allowed to go into rehearsal. The story of its jaunty aria "La donna è mobile" is well known. As Francis Toye tells it in his deliciously literate biography, Verdi "had not given the music to the tenor until the very last moment, and then only under the strictest injunctions to neither sing nor whistle it outside the theatre, whereof the whole staff had also been sworn to secrecy. Everything went according to plan. People came out of the theatre singing both words and music, and within a few days every Venetian gallant was teasingly humming them into the ear of his lady-love."

La Fenice had the honor of ushering in Verdi's great middle period with resounding and unblemished éclat. Two years later the composer was back in Venice with another masterpiece, but this time the launching fizzled. The premiere of La Traviata elicited from the exigent Fenice audience more laughter than applause. Verdi, at his desk in the Albergo dell' Europa, wrote to his erstwhile pupil Muzio: "La Traviata last night a fiasco. Is the fault mine or the singers? Time will show." A year later the impresario of another Venetian opera house, the Teatro San Benedetto, had the idea of reviving La Traviata in costumes of the Louis XIII period. This time it was a riotous success. To a friend, Verdi wrote: "Everything that was heard at the Fenice is now being heard at the San Benedetto. Last time it was a fiasco; this time it is a furore. Draw your own conclusion!" Since then the San Benedetto has had its name changed to the Teatro Rossini; bereft of a stage, it has defected to the films.

One more time Verdi responded to a commission from the Fenice, with Simon Boccanegra in 1857. This too was a failure on opening night, the audience showing an "almost bitter" indifference to the efforts on stage. Thereafter Verdi composed no more for Venice. When the president of the Fenice invited him in 1858 to write another opera for the theatre, Verdi replied that "it would be better for me to leave this honor to somebody more fortunate and more deserving than I of the approval of the Fenice's public." This letter, along with scores of others from Verdi written neatly on the fashionable Bath paper of the period, is filed away in the theatre's archives. The Fenice, unlike most other Italian opera houses, seems never to have discarded the slightest scrap of paper. Even the fire of 1836 spared the room in which its records and correspondence were stored. As a result, the Fenice has a mine of precious documents. The studious archivist who presides over this material in a cheerful room behind the top gallery pulled out for me all the material relating to Verdi. There are his letters to the Fenice management from the early 1840s on, working manuscript scores of all the operas, and draft versions of Piave's librettos showing his various changes made in an attempt to placate the censors ("libertii" crossed out and "veriti" substituted in its place, for one example). From this repository of ancient aspirations and long-extinguished controversies you can look out over the
rooftops of Venice and hazily re-create in the mind's eye the distant, gas-lit Lombardy-Venetia of Verdi's middle years.

The route from Venice to Milan is dotted with beguilements—Padua's arcaded streets, Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico, Verona's church of San Zeno Maggiore—but the prima rappresentazione at La Scala is inexorable. It is necessary to push on, past vast acres of pink-blossomed orchards glowing in the early sun, to our final destination: the bustlingly prosperous city in which Verdi tasted his first and last triumphs and in which he experienced his fondest hopes and his blackest despair.

Nowhere, not even in Rome, is the contrast between our day and Verdi's more acute. The motorized, skyscrapered, efficiently paced Milan of 1963 bears only the scantiest kinship to the city of Verdi's youth—a provincial outpost of the Austrian Empire whose oil-lit streets were habitually filled with prostitutes, thieves, and drunken revelers. Verdi was eighteen when he first took up lodgings there, a shy but determined student of music from Busseto. He returned seven years later, in 1839, with his young wife Margherita and their surviving infant son (a baby girl had died the year before). The boy died in Milan that same fall; Margherita lived long enough to see her husband's first opera, Oberto, produced at La Scala; then she too died. Verdi stayed on, dejected and discouraged; saw his second opera fail miserably; and then found himself suddenly the toast of Milan following the production of Nabucco in 1842. In the next few years he journeyed, as we have seen, to Rome and Naples and Venice, but his home base was Milan, and he invariably scurried back with all possible speed. The city was—then as now—Italy's musical headquarters and the place par excellence for a rising young composer to manage his affairs. But Verdi was never an enthusiastic Milanese. The standards of the much-vaunted Teatro alla Scala impressed him not at all; and after the Scala's slipshod production of Giovanna d'Arco in 1845 he was to wait more than a quarter century before writing another note for that theatre. By 1848 he had had enough of Milan. He bought his property at Sant' Agata and did not set foot in the city again for twenty years.

When Verdi came back in 1868, on a short visit to meet his idol Alessandro Manzoni, Milan had changed spectacularly. The Austrians were gone and the city had spread far beyond the sixteenth-century walls which had still enclosed it in 1848. The Scala no longer fronted on a narrow, cobblestoned street; now it looked out on a wide piazza and was connected to the Duomo by the impressive Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. Verdi liked the transformations, as is clear from a letter he wrote at the time to his publisher and agent in Paris. Little by little Milan won him back. The masterpieces of his old age—Otello and Falstaff—were entrusted to its theatre. And there he died, in his permanent suite at the Grand Hotel, on January 27, 1901, at ten minutes to three in the morning.

The Grand Hotel still stands, at the corner of the Via Manzoni and Via Borgonuovo, and its portiere will willingly show the rooms Verdi occupied—unless the hotel is fully booked and the hallowed quarters pressed into service ("Business is business," he smilingly explains). The furnishings throughout the Grand are authentically turn-of-the-century, though the rates—as I discovered on the morning of reckoning—are depressingly up-to-date. Near the hotel is the Via Bigli, where Verdi's and Peppina's devoted friend Countess Maffei held court for the intellectual and artistic leaders of the Risorgimento. Near and yet so far. It is hard to recapture the ambience of nineteenth-century Milan amid the clutter of the Common Market. Prosperity has made this city the envy of all Italy, but it is no place for nostalgia.

The Verdis—Giuseppe and Peppina—are buried in a crypt in the Rest Home for Musicians, which the composer founded in the last decade of his life and which has existed ever since on the generous endowment he left. It is a noble undertaking and the worthiest of memorials, but it is a not very attractive building in a not very attractive quarter. Though the Verdi traveler should pay it a visit, the object of his wanderings is not there. For that he must go to La Scala, to the theatre which first discovered Verdi and ultimately glorified his name.

Nothing but the outer walls remain of the structure Verdi knew. On August 15, 1943, an RAF attack on Milan turned La Scala into a shambles. But it was rebuilt soon enough, according to the original plans of 1778, and its spirit rekindled in a gala dedication concert under the direction of Arturo Toscanini—a living link with the Verdi of the 1880s and 1890s. By 1963 the living links had become exceedingly tenuous: a few old men who as boys had received a kindly put or word of greeting from the aged composer. But the essential link, the musical one, was as strong as ever.

The prima rappresentazione began on the dot of 8:45. Up from the huge pit floated the prelude to Aida. Those seventeen bars high in the strings which so often sound feeble in volume and wiry in tone. There was nothing feeble or wiry about the sound at La Scala that night. The finish and precision of the orchestral playing were such as is rarely met with in the opera house. Then the curtain went up to reveal a plushy Victorian extravaganza—an Egypt of tasseled and brocaded elegance, bathed in a dusty, golden glow. Against this sumptuous backdrop the young director Franco Zeffirelli deployed his forces to emphasize the central conflict in Aida—man versus society, private passion colliding with unyielding ritual. Everyone on stage—the magnificent cast, the hordes of supernumeraries, even the horses—knew precisely what to do. Nothing had been left to chance; evidences of imagination and forethought were everywhere. Afterwards, walking down the Via Manzoni to the Grand Hotel, one realized that a Verdi pilgrimage could not have ended on a more fitting note. Better than all the plaques and statues, Verdi would have thought, is an evening of opera illuminated with affection and care.
THE ANACHRONISM OF

VERDI

...a reinterpretation from the pen of a distinguished Italian novelist.

BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

There is something petty, provincial, worn-out about the Italian nineteenth century. It's a bourgeois century, but the Italian bourgeoisie—unlike the French or the English—was not, properly speaking, a true middle class. Its forebears had not cut off a king’s head or sparked a Reformation or worshiped the Goddess of Reason. What we see, then as now, is a timid, cautious, servile class, bowing and scraping before the nobility and falling at the feet of the clergy. It is a fact, of course, that under the inspiration of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars this Italian middle class made a superhuman effort and brought off the Risorgimento; but even the Risorgimento—undermanned, characterized by embarrassing contradictions, a latter-day tempest in Europe's history—was basically a petty affair. In any country but Italy the Risorgimento would have meant an immense upheaval; in Italy this nineteenth-century upheaval becomes small-scale. The men who made the Risorgimento were middle-class provincials; their nationalism and their liberalism are blended in a solution of low alcoholic content. Their Romantic intoxication is only a foretaste of the bombastic drunkenness of Fascism and today's Demochristian petit-bourgeois camomile.

To confirm this statement, you have only to take a look at Italian provincial cities and their architecture. Next to the medieval palaces of stone and iron stand the massive buildings of the Renaissance, the spacious residences of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among them huddle the little neoclassic houses of the middle-class nineteenth century: niggardly, cold, cramped, looking as if a local drawing master had designed them. In these houses of the petty and less petty bourgeois of the last century, there is a withdrawn, apprehensive, taciturn atmosphere. You feel, in such houses, that Italy has bartered her monumental vices and her unconventional virtues for a decorum in which everything from religion to art, from morality to literature, is reduced to the level of a timorous provincial society.

In the Italian provincial cities that have not yet been attacked by the prosperity of the industrial revolution, often some of the illustrious palaces, now decaying, are inhabited by families of workers and artisans. These humble tenants underline the decline of those once splendid houses, now in the throes of an inevitable death agony. But in this decay, this slow dying, there is something natural. Between the humble people of today and the great lords of the past there is a mysterious but undeniable connection.
Giuseppe Verdi’s presence in the Italian nineteenth century is a little like the existence of those distinguished but decrepit palaces in the center of the now bourgeois cities of our provinces. In Italy’s mean, impoverished Ottocento, the personality of Verdi—sanguine, passionate, robust, explosive—seems incredible. For that matter, it’s enough to compare Verdi to other celebrated nineteenth-century Italians to realize that he is not only an exception but an anachronism. Take Manzoni and Leopardi, for example. Both come straight from the Italian governing classes. Both are provincial noblemen, in situations typical of the Italian society of the time. But Verdi comes from peasant stock. Manzoni and Leopardi are artists of a stature not inferior to Verdi’s, and yet with what a difference! The artistic temperament of Manzoni and Leopardi is colored, in a negative sense, by the timid provincial society to which they belong. Manzoni accepted in part the pettiness of that society; Leopardi rebelled against it. But in either acceptance or revolt, and despite the loftiness of their art, both men bear the mark of what they have accepted or rejected: a mark of prudence in Manzoni, of desperation in Leopardi. In addition, both Manzoni and Leopardi are “modern” artists, completely at home in the culture of their time. And finally, Manzoni and Leopardi are both artists of rigorous, impeccable, aristocratic taste.

There is none of this in Verdi. With an origin neither noble nor bourgeois, he has nothing to accept or reject. His genius is not one that submits or rebels. His is a genius that identifies itself and expresses itself in its own creations. Abundant and impetuous, Verdi’s art is not disciplined by prudence or deflected by rebellion. At most, it is sustained by an exceptional, instinctive, artisanlike cleverness. And, the contrary of Manzoni and Leopardi, Verdi is “vulgar.”

We consider this vulgarity the most mysterious, the most problematical aspect of Verdi’s personality. At first sight it seems obvious, of no great interest. There are plenty of artists who are not vulgar, but others—in no way inferior—who are. Stendhal, for example, is never vulgar; Balzac, an equally great novelist, is. For Stendhal and Balzac, however, we have a ready-made explanation: between the former and the latter came a profound social revolution, hence a change in style. This is not true for Verdi. With no social revolution comparable to France’s, nineteenth-century Italian society is expressed in Leopardi’s desperation and in Manzoni’s prudence rather than in the rich, spontaneous “vulgarity” of Verdi.

Verdi’s vulgarity, moreover, isn’t at all the same as that of the Romantics—of a Victor Hugo, for example. Any resemblance between the two artists is only superficial. Hugo was a true European Romantic, and from him it was easy to arrive at the decadents, at Baudelaire, Rimbaud. But it is impossible to go on from Verdi’s apparent Romanticism to decadence. Another difference between Verdi and Hugo: the latter believed in history, or rather he believed that men’s behavior could change according to history, that it was historically determined. The result of this belief is that Hugo’s dramas, in which the characters are only secondly men and primarily men of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, are unreadable and unplayable today. Verdi didn’t believe in history at all, either as reconstruction or as escape. This attitude, if nothing else, distinguishes him from the Romantics. His characters exist outside of history, even in his costume pieces. Verdi’s concept of history is static, humanistic, Plutarchian. In fact, Verdi’s characters interest us today precisely because they are primarily men, and only secondly men of the Middle Ages or of the Renaissance.

What is, then, this vulgarity of Verdi? To go back to our earlier metaphor: it is the illustrious, ancient, now decaying palace, inhabited by workers and artisans. In other terms: it is the humanistic concept of our Renaissance, betrayed by the Italian ruling class after the Counter-Reformation but preserved by the common people. This explains the difference between Verdi and other Italians of the Ottocento: Manzoni, Leopardi, Cavour, Mazzini. And it explains Verdi’s resemblance to Garibaldi, who was also a man of another age. It explains too the analogies between Verdi and Shakespeare.

Let us look at these analogies. They offer another key to the understanding of the true nature of Verdi’s vulgarity. The comparison between Shakespeare and Verdi has been made often, and it is substantially correct. We find in both of them the same idea of man, the same prodigious knowledge of the human heart, the same love of life, the same remarkable capacity for splitting themselves up into innumerable different characters, dividing their autobiographies out among a thousand existences until their real lives become unrecogniz-
able. And yet this familiar comparison should be amended with an important footnote: Shakespeare is never vulgar. Unlike Verdi, the playwright is not a plebeian in whom the values of a vanished age survive as part of the folk heritage. Shakespeare is a man of his time and of the society of his time, like Manzoni and like Leopardi. The beauty that Shakespeare creates has nothing popular, rustic, or naïve about it; his is an aristocratic beauty.

But, like Shakespeare’s, Verdi’s characters are Renaissance, not Romantic. We recognize Renaissance humanism in the wholeness of the image of man that Verdi gives us. Beneath Renaissance abstractions there is always a respect for the full man, with his vices and his virtues—a respect we would never find behind the Romantic’s emphasis, which anticipates the amputations and reductions of the decadents. Verdi offers us a Plutarchian—or if you prefer, a Shakespearean—idea of man, an idea which came to him not from the decorous, God-fearing bourgeois culture of his own time but from the poor people of the Po valley. Even today, in their colorful, winning vitality, these peasants give a glimmer of the Italy that existed before the Counter-Reformation. We can imagine that the glimmer must have been even greater in Verdi’s day. Anyone who knows that region of the Po valley around Parma can easily find a Verdian aura in the monuments, the landscape, the people. Verdi is a close relation to those peasants, who knew the octaves of Ariosto by heart, or to the gondoliers who could recite strophes of Tasso. With Verdi dies the great Italy, and what Italy gave to the world, its best and most characteristic product: humanism. After Verdi, Italy becomes, once and for all, petit-bourgeois.

Along with the Verdi-Shakespeare comparison, another analogy comes to mind: that between the Duke Valentino described in Machiavelli’s The Prince and the Duke of Mantua depicted by Verdi in Rigoletto (even though the opera’s libretto was drawn from a drama of such pure Romantic character as Hugo’s). If you look at the two characters closely, the one literary and the other musical, you see that both are cut from the same Renaissance cloth; and they are probably the two strongest, most complete, and most beautiful characters ever created in Italy. But even here, as in the comparison between Shakespeare and Verdi, there is an essential difference; and again it must be traced to Verdi’s vulgarity.

The Duke Valentino is a full-length portrait painted with incomparable vigor. He is the Renaissance man seen by a Renaissance intellectual. There is no vulgarity in him; everything about him speaks the paradoxical but noble wickedness which was to please Stendhal so much, two centuries later.

The Duke of Mantua is the Verdian equivalent of Duke Valentino. But in Rigoletto the great political enterprises of the Borgia are replaced by the mean intrigues of a little Italian court; the great soldiers of fortune are now courtly wastrels, the hero, a provincial playboy. And yet this degraded world is filled with a Renaissance air, for it is seen in admiration, envy, amazement by a cloistered peasant still ignorant of modern European civilization, an artist whose touchstone remains the Renaissance. In the Duke of Mantua, Verdi has given us his Duke Valentino. If the composer had been born in the Cinquecento he would have given us the real Valentino, with his rapacious nobility and his animal energy. But, two centuries after his time, a man of the people, Verdi instead has created a provincial Casanova. If we listen carefully, however, and analyze the staggering vitality and subtlety of the character, we must admit that this Casanova has dimensions, vigor, profundity equal to those of the character created by Machiavelli.

So Verdi is our plebeian, folklike, “vulgar” Shakespeare. Stravinsky is supposed to have said that he would give a great many of his works to have written the notes of “La donna è mobile.” If this is true, it confirms the comparison to Shakespeare, even with the important footnote concerning “vulgarity.” In fact, in their immediate placement, their evocative strength, those notes are the equivalent of Macbeth’s famous soliloquy after he is told of Lady Macbeth’s death. You will look in vain for such things in the nineteenth-century Romantics. The Romantics aspired to these things, but never achieved them.

Renaissance man that he is, Verdi is still performed and will be performed always, because his knowledge of man goes back to an age when, for the last time, man loved himself, nothing but himself, and nothing less than himself. “Vulgarity” cannot alter the excitement of this concept however historically outmoded it may be. Thus the revival of interest in Verdi today is based on a fundamental misunderstanding: an attempt to discover and re-evaluate his modernity. Verdi isn’t in the least modern: he was an anachronism in the last century, and is even more of one now. His timeliness is the timeliness of poetry. This talk of a “revival” has a curious ring. It would be like talking of a “Shakespeare revival.” Verdi must be considered, instead, with the admiration and the comprehension due to the phenomena of culture—no less mysterious or powerful than the phenomena of nature.

(Translated by William Weaver.)
A Noisy Bantling in Old New York

being an account of some remarkable Verdi productions in the New World.

By Shirley Fleming

When the first performance of *I Lombardi*, in New York, introduced the music of Verdi to these shores on March 3, 1847, it could safely be said that of all the business ventures possible in a prosperous, expanding, vigorous nation, the business of producing Italian opera was the one least likely to succeed. It may as well be stated at once that the advent of works by Italy's new musical spokesman did very little, at first, to disprove the maxim.

Nearly a quarter of a century previously, Italian opera had been set off to a promising start with the arrival in New York in 1825 of Manuel Garcia's famous troupe, a family affair including, besides himself and his wife, his son (who became the celebrated teacher) and his daughter Maria Felicita, then seventeen and destined to become known to the world as Mme. Malibran. Among the most enthusiastic of New World inhabitants to greet them was Lorenzo da Ponte, who called upon the elder Garcia forthwith, announced himself as Mozart's librettist, and was treated, so the story goes, to a jubilant rendition of Don Giovanni's "Finch' han del vino." Da Ponte mentions in his Memoirs his joy over Garcia's having come to establish Italian opera in New York, and it did indeed appear that Garcia might accomplish just that. After opening at the Park Theatre (on Park Row near Ann Street) in Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, he managed a successful run of almost a year before going on to Mexico. But there were, of course, the critics to contend with. The *New York Gazette* and *Phi Beta Kappa Repository* of December 17, 1825, reported as follows: "The Italian opera has lately been introduced into this country; from what we had previously read of it, we always esteemed it a forced and unnatural bantling; seeing it has not changed our opinion."

Da Ponte, however, continued to encourage attempts at establishing this "unnatural bantling" in...
America. It was due in part to his influence that in 1832 an Italian troupe under the direction of French tenor Jacques Montrèsor settled at the old Richmond Hill Theatre and, leaning heavily on a repertoire of Rossini, eked out an existence there for thirty-five performances. On the heels of this inauspicious experiment, Da Ponte persuaded several friends of his, gentlemen of wealth, to build a bona fide opera house to provide the wandering art a permanent shelter and in 1833 an elegant new building, decorated in white and gold and furnished in blue damask, was erected on the corner of Church and Leonard streets. Da Ponte and a partner sponsored an opera company there for eight months and emerged with a deficit of over $29,000; their successors escaped financial ruin only by the fortuitous departure of their prima donna, without warning, for parts unknown. Da Ponte died in 1838, and his fine house burned to the ground the following year.

The next abortive effort to establish Italian opera in New York came in 1844, with the opening of an opera house on Broadway near Duane Street. Its entrepreneur, a restaurant owner named Ferdinand Palmo, considerately furnished his patrons not only with coach service as far up as 42nd Street but police protection as well (fashion and crime were moving northward by this time), but even these conveniences were not enough. In less than a year the sheriff was at his doors, thus ending the career of the restauranteur as impresario, but not quite that of his opera house. It was here, under other management, that the first of Verdi’s operas to be heard in America made its appearance.

In spite of the doubtful auguries, I Lombardi did very well for itself. (It was competing, at the time, with Barnum’s new Mexican War exhibit of Santa Anna’s wooden leg, “taken by the American Army and brought to the city by a gentleman direct from the city of Veracruz.”) The cast included Salvatore Patti (Adelina’s father), a step-daughter of his, Clotilda Barili, and a basso named Sanquirico, all of them well-established singers. The opera, according to the custom of the time, ran for as many consecutive nights as the traffic would bear—in this case, nine straight performances, which was no mean record. The New York Evening Post deemed the work “likely, from its showy character, and from the appeal to the popular taste in its construction, to be a favorite”; but the Alhambra (maintaining a hauteur consistent with its full title of “British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly Gazette”) dissented: “The melodies do not possess the catching popular qualities of a Bellini or a Donizetti. . . Verdi’s music, or rather his melodies, seem to us as though they were written under restraint . . . [he], like all modern Italian writers, is a victim to a passion for instruments of brass and percussion.” The last is a complaint of which we are to hear much.

But there was more to be heard from Verdi before the year 1847 reached its close. Barely had the sets been dismantled after I Lombardi’s initial run, when the steamer from Cuba deposited at the pier the Havana Opera Company, a troupe whose impetus to Italian opera in this country was to prove considerable. Managing the company was one Don Francisco Marty y Torres, whose past endeavors as pirate, fishing-fleet tycoon, slave trader, financier, and government benefactor seemed, in view of operatic conditions in New York, reasonable prerequisites for success as an impresario. Signor Marty installed his troupe at the old Park Theatre under what must have been trying circumstances, to judge by the reminiscences of Richard Grantland White (father of the architect Stanford White) appearing in the Century Magazine of 1882. “No public building,” he wrote, “could have been less suited for the assemblage of elegant people for elegant pleasure. . . . Its boxes were like pens for beasts. . . . The place was pervaded with evil smells; and not uncommonly rats ran out of the holes in the floor and across into the orchestra.” The building also harbored “a sort of booth, in which vile fluids and viler solids were sold.”

Against such odds the Havana company—a very acceptable assortment of artists, including Fortunata Tedesco—held its own. presenting not only the already familiar Norma, Sonnambula, and Mosè in Egitto, but two New York premieres: Ernani on April 15, and I due Foscari on June 9. For Ernani society turned out in force and, to judge from the frequency of the opera’s subsequent repetitions, took very kindly to it. But the reporter from the Courier and Enquirer did not: “We can only say that it is a pity such singing and such appointments should be lavished on such bad music.” The gentleman from the Alhambra remarked on the “splendid bust and exquisitely molded arms” of Signorina Tedesco, but in general enjoyed the audience more than the opera.

He did, however, manage a faint hope for the composer: “His orchestral arrangements are brilliant and effective. They are still trammled by the conventionalities and purerities, the prettiness of the modern Italian school, but we continue to observe approaches to a purer and more severe style. We could wish Verdi to be saved, for there is more in him than is yet developed.” Ernani was not defeated by the press, but it appears to have come close to being defeated by some later performances under managers less astute than Marty. One such presentation, which took place two years later, deserves description here in the words of a participant who became very much a part of the operatic scene in New York—the redoubtable conductor and impresario Max Maratzek. (So heroic a figure was he in the annals of opera that he became known, according to the American soprano Clara Louise Kellogg, as “Maratzek the Magnificent.”) At the time of which he writes, in the first volume of his memoirs Crotchetts and Quavers, Maratzek had recently arrived from Europe to take up the post of conductor at the new Astor Place Opera House for the ’48-’49 season, under the man-
agement of E. R. Fry. On the closing night of the season the unfortunate Mr. Fry conceived the notion of presenting Ernani with four new principals who had never sung together and were making their first appearances in America. It was to be a memorable affair:

The house was crowded almost to suffocation, when the curtain drew up. In order not to appear too late, I should presume, upon the stage, the tenor, Signor Ferrari, appeared five full minutes before his cue was given. Here he waited. . . . When he attempted to sing, his throat refused him its service; the perspiration washed out his painted face, and trickled over it in red and brown drops. . . .

All might yet have gone smoothly but for the appearance of the new basso. This was the vocalist rejoicing in the name of Signor Castrone. Very evidently he had never before been upon any stage. On his entrance, he tumbled over his own sword, and rolled into a terrified group of chorus singers. After this, he managed to get his spurs entangled in the dress of the prima donna, and when released by the intervention of her lady in waiting, found his way to the prompter’s box. Thence, no incident of the plot and no suggestion of the conductor could induce him to move. . . .

Unfortunately, the worst . . . was reserved for the last Act. . . . Sylvia rushed upon the stage. . . . to demand the fulfillment of the vow which Ernani had sworn. But can you imagine in what guise the unhappy Castrone brought him before the audience? No! You cannot. . . . He had forgotten what the Erse or Northern Scotch, though which it is I have suffered myself to forget, call their “gallygaskins.” In our own more fastidiously refined language, upon this continent, they are more generally and generically classified as the “unmentionables.” There he stood, representing the Spanish idea of an inexorable Fate, clad in a black velvet doublet, but with a pair of flesh-colored and closely woven silk inexpressibles upon his nether man. The horn, that fatal horn, hung from his neck, in a position which it would be absolutely impossible for me consistently with propriety to indicate upon paper.

This was, Maratzek adds, the last night of Mr. Fry’s tenure as manager of Astor Place.

This fateful Ernani, however, was fortunately not typical of the general run of Astor Place performances, and the house itself was for several years the most attractive home of Italian opera in the city. It had been built in 1847 under financial agreement with one hundred and fifty citizens who were pledged to support seventy-five evenings of opera for five years; the prospectus issued to subscribers announced, in that spirit of optimism so familiar and, one is tempted to say, so foolishly, that the building was dedicated to the “permanent establishment of Italian opera.” It survived barely its allotted five-year span, the greater part of which fell under the management of the Magnificent Maratzek, who apparently recovered sufficiently from his predecessor’s disaster to step into the directorship shortly afterwards. Astor Place had opened (with a production of the ever-present Ernani) on November 22, 1847, with most promising attendance and a “generally diffused air of good breeding,” as one reporter murmured in print next day. Presumably the attendees followed the directions displayed outside that “Carriages will set down with the horses’ heads from Broadway, and take up in the reverse order,” and once inside the ladies in particular were doubtless appreciative of what Maratzek called the house’s principal feature, “[. . .] that everybody could see, and what is of infinitely greater consequence, could be seen. Never, perhaps, was any theatre built that afforded a better opportunity for the display of dress.” The seating capacity was 1,800, and prices ranged from 50c to $1.00.

After opening night Ernani ran continuously for several weeks on end, interrupted by a brief and unsuccessful staging of Beatrice di Tenda. (By this time Verdi’s opera had become so permanent a fixture that a burlesque called Herr Nanny was drawing good business at one of the local theatres.) But the first season, under Sanquirico and Patti, closed, probably to no one’s surprise, in bankruptcy—a situation which had been relieved not at all by the first American presentation (poorly attended) of Nabucco on April 4, 1848. There was considerable distress on the part of one gentleman of the press because the opera had a Biblical subject, and the Albion was once again offended by “noise”: “The Overture . . . is literally beneath criticism; it is all pastiches, and the material is worthless. It is fury versus sense, and fury carries everything before it. Verdi loves noise, he revels in a row, and everything is sacrificed for bluster and confusion. . . .

The voicing, both for solos and choruses, is outrageous: it is tearing to every voice and is productive of nothing but consumption.” The performance itself evidently was not one to raise the spirits, and it is not difficult to detect a rather forced generosity in the observation that “Signorina Patti [this was Amalia, Adelina’s older sister] is an improving singer, and she had made much progress in overcoming her stage fright and awkwardness.”

When the Astor Place Opera House finally closed its doors, there was common agreement among the opera-goers of New York that it had been killed by competition. The competition came from none other than the formidable Signor Marty, back in town in 1850 with the finest operatic troupe yet heard in this country (Balbina Steffanone, Angiolina Bosio, and Tedesco were the prime donne), accompanied by an impresario orchestra under Luigi Arditi, he of Il Bacio. “At last we have the grand Italian opera in New York, and no, no. no mistake.” crowed the Herald with rare abandon. “They came not to make money but to make mischief,” was Maratzek’s dour but admiring comment. Their first stopping place was Niblo’s Gardens—an amusement spot at Broadway and Prince Street where a theatre was set amid spacious grounds laid out in a labyrinth of walks and groves with a fine fountain at the center. Music, ice cream, and cherry cobbler were Niblo’s special
attractions, and the drinks were "various and good." Here on April 15, 1850, the Havana Opera company presented Verdi's Attila, following it on April 24 with Macbeth.

Despite New York's warm welcome to the troupe, Attila was not a success. The first performance was crowded, but the audience next night was sparse. "Verdi's compositions," said the Albion somewhat bitterly, "have all the prestige of foreign fashionable sanction (a mighty dictum here); but we suppose we are not refined enough to understand all their beauties." There was, according to this paper, "not one pleasing melody" in the opera.

Macbeth fared much better, and was "rapturously received," according to the Post, which continued rather diffidently: "As we have our ideas of this play chiefly from the tragedy of Shakespeare it is of course difficult for us fully to appreciate a foreign version, and particularly when it is made subservient to the designs of a musical composer." (But how much more so when to the designs of an unmusical composer, one is tempted to add.) The Post's humility was not emulated by the Albion, which resorted to insult: "Macbeth is generally considered to be the best work Verdi has written. We acknowledge for our own part that we expected little and that we were not disappointed. We felt certain that the subject was too grand for his mental capacity, and we soon found out that he was floundering about helplessly in his endeavors to reach its level.... It is not sublime, because it is not thoughtful; it is not grand, because it is simply noisy." Mme. Bosio, as Lady Macbeth, was judged a charming woman and a most delightful singer.

Business was good for the Havana Company and when the hot weather settled upon New York that summer the troupe shifted operations to the coolest spot in town, Castle Garden—the great circular fort off the Battery which had been turned into a theatre five years before (and was later to
become New York's Aquarium. Castle Garden was connected to Battery Park by a wooden footbridge, and the plentifulness of lemonade, cakes, and ice cream made this one of the pleasantest places for an outing to be found in the city. The Havana company made good use of the 5,000 seating capacity, and presented operas there from July until September at fifty cents a ticket. (The company vacated Castle Garden to make way for one of the most spectacular presentations of P. T. Barnum's career—the American debut of Jenny Lind, on September 11.)

In the meantime, the presence of the Havana company had stirred discomfort in the breast of Max Maratzek, and soon afterwards he succeeded in hiring away most of Marty's principals. He was not, however, able to borrow Marty's success. After three months at Castle Garden, he had managed to lose $22,000. Yet the summer of 1854 saw him back, if this time with a far less distinguished roster of artists, and to him goes the credit for the first New York performance of Luisa Miller.

Luisa Miller was never popular, but its relative failure was symptomatic of the precarious state of opera in New York. When the Academy of Music, at 14th Street and Irving Place, opened on October 2, 1854, with a performance of Norma, the audience was disappointing and enthusiasm low even in spite of the participation of the renowned Giulia Grisi and her husband Giovanni Mario, fresh from spectacular success at Castle Garden two months before. This rather bad omen was borne out in the year to come: within the first fifteen months of the Academy's operation, five different managers fell before the fates of finance.

One of the most prominent of these casualties was Ole Bull, who for reasons difficult to fathom had laid away his fiddle temporarily in favor of a turn at management. His "season" at the Academy lasted two weeks, though he started it off promisingly enough with the first American performance of Rigoletto. His cast was a very presentable one, including, as Gilda, Mme. Bertucca-Maratzek (a soprano who had succumbed to Max's charms after coming to America under his management), and a newcomer, Ettore Barili (half-brother and teacher of Adelina Patti), as Rigoletto. Ole Bull had picked as
the date for the premiere the very evening on which Grisi and Mario were giving their farewell concert in another part of town (a fact which perhaps explains something of the briefness of his reign as manager), but the house was reasonably well filled and the critical response to the music was, for once, on the favorable side. But the New York public seems suddenly to have suffered an attack of squeamishness. According to one report, "Rumors prejudicial to the morale of Rigoletto have been most freely circulated throughout the city, inducing many, who would otherwise gladly have heard the new opera, to hide their time until the press should have pronounced its dictum upon the nature of the plot." The press conceded that the plot, despite a "superabundance of horrors," was no worse than that of Don Giovanni or Ernani. The public gathered its courage and proceeded to attend three subsequent performances in quick succession.

Rigoletto became a regular feature of opera seasons to follow, but distaste for its plot did not die out immediately. When Clara Louise Kellogg made her operatic debut as Gilda at the Academy in 1861, she had intended to sing the role the following week in Boston. But Boston would have none of it, and Lindo di Chamonix was substituted.

Less than three months after Ole Bull's retirement from the field, Max Maratzek was at the helm of the Academy and another Verdi opera was launched—this one to prove the most popular to date. Il Trovatore was produced on May 2, 1855, with Balbina Stefianone as Leonora, Pasquale Brignoli "unmatchable" as Manrico, and Amadio as Conte di Luna, appearing in America for the first time. Praise for the singers was high, and the Post liked the music, even though it was "of the well-known Verdi type." The Albion dragged its well-scuffed feet: "Verdi is the composer of the day—the interpreter of Young Italy's music—simply for want of a better. . . . We wondered for a long time why Verdi should have omitted the finale, but a pert and pretty Miss at our side suggested that Verdi would have had nobody left to sing it, as all the people were killed." Trovatore became so popular that by 1857 someone ventured the opinion that it was "hackneyed."

On December 3, 1856, Maratzek introduced La Traviata, and no doubt enjoyed to the hilt the furor that ensued. The Dumas story, of course, was already known to the more literate portion of his clientele, and there had been much buzzing in society in advance of the opening. On the morning after, the Post was indignant:

The morality of this plot has been sharply discussed and it has been urged that it is reprehensible to introduce the reader, or audience, in the opening scene, to the revels of a brothel, and after interesting us throughout the evening in the fortunes of a prostitute, to represent her dying in the odor of sanctity. We have hardly any room to speak of the music; but indeed it is not needed. We can hardly say too little in its praise. . . . The air were flat and unmusical to a degree. . . . The Albion, contrary to the end, took a favorable view, and pointed out that the opera had been viewed "without driving anybody out of the house or seriously affecting the next morning's calendar of crimes in the daily papers."

In 1858, the Italian soprano Marietta Piccolo'mini, whose Violetta had taken London by storm, carried her triumph across the Atlantic in 1858 and opened at the Academy on the evening of October 20—an occurrence which the Herald bannnered on page one as the Grand Operatic Event of the Season. Expectations were at a feverish pitch, helped along, no doubt, by her manager's gratuitous divulgence to the press that the singer was a direct descendant of Charlemagne. Tickets sold at fluttering black market rates, and on the evening of the performance 14th Street was choked with carriages long before curtain time and Irving Place "fairly floated in crinoline." But the truth was inescapable: Piccolomini's attractions were to a large extent other than vocal. According to one observer, "Her performances at times approached offense against maidenly reticence and delicacy," and it was said that when she sang Zerlina in Don Giovanni the Don himself seemed a model of rectitude in comparison. The New York public, though notified of her faulty vocal production, succumbed completely to her powers as an actress and was "charmed, fascinated, dazzled, led captive by her."

Two years later another famous Violetta came to town—one whose success in the role was of quite the opposite nature from the alluring Marietta's. This was Adelina Patti, of whom her rival Miss Kellogg said, "She never acted, and she never, never felt. As Violetta, she did express some slight emotion, to be sure. Her 'Gran Dio' in the last act was sung with something like passion, at least with more passion than she ever sang anything else."

Although the popularity of Traviata was by this time well established in New York and all scruples as to its morality appear to have been forgotten, doubts still lingered in the suburb across the river: the Brooklyn Academy, which opened its doors on January 15, 1856, had scheduled Traviata for the 22nd, but objections ran so strong that another opera (Mercaudante's Il Giuramento) was substituted at the last minute. It was a full year before Brooklyn brought itself to permit the work, and when it was finally produced Miss Kellogg, who took part, assures us that every clergyman within traveling distance was in the house.

The next Verdi opera to come before the American public was I Vespri siciliani which, while never as popular as some of its forerunners, did much to brighten a dull New York season in 1859. It was first presented at the Academy on November 7, with Pauline Colson as Elena, Brignoli as Arigo, and Gaetano Ferrì as the Governor, and ran for five nights in succession.

Early in February of 1861, speculation over the likelihood of attack on Fort Sumter was running side by side in the Northern newspapers with reports of

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Jeff Davis' triumphal tour through the South and President-elect Lincoln's slow trip by train from Illinois to Washington for the Inauguration. (There was also an additional small item in the Post: "Verdi, the composer, will, according to the Milan journals, be elected a deputy for Turin to the new Italian Parliament.") Concern over what might come had not dampened New Yorkers' appetite for entertainment, and on February 11 they attended in high fashion and high spirits a glittering premiere of Ballo in maschera, with Mme. Colson as Amelia, Adelaide Philips as the Witch, and Isabella Hinckley as the Page. During the masquerade scene "those patrons of the opera who may wish to be upon the stage" were invited to join the company in dancing a galup composed especially for the occasion by the conductor, who was none other than Emmanuele Muzio, Verdi's only pupil and lifelong friend and apostle. It was a gala evening, though at least one patron of the opera seems to have been ill at ease: Rufus Choate, the well-known lawyer, noted that he had taken the precaution of requesting his daughter to "interpret for me the libretto, lest I dilute with the wrong emotion." The Post gave high praise to the opera, though "it contains much that is heavy. It is a labored work, but then the labor has achieved a grand result... Played as it was last night it ought to draw for a month at least."

It was still drawing to capacity on February 20 when Mr. Lincoln attended (wearing, it was observed, the only pair of black kid gloves in the white-gloved house). He arrived late and left early, but when the curtain fell at the end of the first act the audience went wild with applause, which he finally rose to acknowledge. At the beginning of Act II, the whole company came on stage and sang The Star-Spangled Banner, and there was a deluge of "waving handkerchiefs, and cheers for Lincoln, for the Union, and for the Constitution."

Maratzek undertook two new Verdi productions during the war years. The first was Aroldo on May 4, 1863. But response was apathetic. The war had given rise to a new element in opera-going society, "a certain class of men," as one historian puts it, who got rich overnight. "The sensuous side of the nature of these people began to clamor for adequate food," which was apparently more bountifully supplied by Offenbach than by Verdi. As the war dragged on, however, the old society returned to the theatres in substantial numbers—it was a welcome diversion—and on February 24, 1865, Maratzek presented La Forza del destino. It was an immediate success, and now even the critics had come to take Verdi in stride. The Albion must have had a new man on the music staff by this time, for he pronounced the opera a mature work of unquestionable merit and admired the German-French style as opposed to the Italian style of Rigoletto and Ballo in maschera. Forza ran with many repetitions to the close of the season.

Eight years were to pass before another new Verdi opera made its appearance, but when it came it proved worth waiting for. Aida was presented on November 26, 1873, and the company, under the management of Maurice Strakosch with Muzio conducting, gave a memorable performance. Ottavia Torriani was Aida, and was praised particularly for her duets with Italo Campanini; but the palm of the evening went to Annie Louise Cary as Amneris. The scenes for this lavish production had been painted at the Parma Royal Theatre, and the corps de ballet included "a rather undisciplined force of Ethiopian juveniles." All thoughts of Verdi as a "noisy" orchestra were banished at last, and the Times made a point of the fact that the score was "rich in beauties perceptible at once to the practiced ear. . . . The orchestration, while full, is wherever the situation suggests it of the most delicate kind."
Max Maratzek was once again associated with a Verdi first run (not, this time, as manager, but as conductor) when *Don Carlo* was presented at the Academy on April 12, 1877. The directors prepared the opera in one week and announced with a somewhat martyréd air that they had “given unwearied attention and the most liberal outlay absolutely necessary for this great work.” The *Herald* reported that the opera roused “unbounded enthusiasm” on opening night, but the phrase did not apply to the critic from the *Daily Tribune*, whose enthusiasm was decidedly bounded. He praised the third-act finale, but found much else that was trivial and commonplace. “Don Carlos,” wrote he, “belongs to that period of Verdi’s career when he was robbing Meyerbeer and had not yet begun to piffer from Wagner. ... On the whole it cannot be said that the music expressed any poetic sentiment. ... The principal artists were not in good voice last night and it is impossible to compliment any of them.” A reduction in prices after the second performance failed to improve the singing, and after three more presentations *Rigoletto* was brought in to finish the season.

Great changes were to take place in New York’s operatic life—or at least in the exterior arrangement of it—before another new Verdi opera was put upon the boards. By 1883 the capacity of the Academy of Music was beginning to prove inadequate—that is, the people who had acquired the means of leasing boxes were becoming increasingly irritated at the lack of any available boxes to lease. The old familiar urge to build an opera house, dormant for thirty years, rose to the fore once again, and in the summer of 1883 the Metropolitan Opera House was built at a cost of $1,732,978.71. Enough of the auditorium was completed by October 22 to permit a grand opening under the management of Henry E. Abbey. (The opera was Gounod’s *Faust*.) Mr. Abbey lost nearly $600,000 that first season; what Colonel James Henry Mapleson, the English impresario then in his third year as director of the Academy, may have lost to the rival house is not known, but the opening of the Metropolitan was to signal the decline of the Academy.

The old house was to see one last Verdi premiere, however, when *Otello* was staged there on April 16, 1888. The impresario was the tenor Italo Campanini, who had secured rights for its first American performance following the Scala première on February 5, 1887. A tenor named Marconi sang the title role, Campanini’s sister-in-law, Eva Tetrazzini (decidedly not to be confused with her sister Luisa) was Desdemona, and his brother Cleofonte Campanini conducted. Attendance was poor, and the following week Campanini took over the role of Otello himself, hoping to draw the public on the strength of his own reputation, which was considerable. But even he failed to enliven the production, and the public, possibly somewhat jaded at the tag end of the season, refused to be enticed back to the old opera house in any substantial numbers. *Otello* waited for New York recognition until March 24, 1891, when Abbey and Maurice Grau launched it at the Metropolitan with Francesco Tamagno, Verdi’s chosen Otello, in his most celebrated role.

There yet remained one new Verdi opera that the Metropolitan might claim for premiere performance in the United States. With the production of *Falstaff* on February 4, 1895, a phase of operatic history came to a close. (There were still, at this date, eight earlier Verdi works unproduced in America.) The *Falstaff* performance was worthy of the occasion: Emma Eames was Mistress Ford, Sofia Scalchi was Mistress Quickly, Victor Maurel was Falstaff, and Giuseppe Campanari was Ford. As for the critics, they were swept with delight. The *Tribune* (the writer was the distinguished critic H. E. Krehbiel) sang that the story had been “plunged into a perfect sea of melodic champagne.”

The hand of the clock had turned far, and the art of criticism with it, since the first newspaperman had ventured into the Park Theatre seventy years before to take a look at that “unnatural bantling,” Italian opera.
Reflections on Verdi vs. Wagner.

by Peter J. Pirie

Their resemblances are no less striking than their differences. They were both born in 1813, in humble circumstances, and both rose to great heights, though one needed an extra eighteen years of life to achieve his full stature. Both learned rapidly and victoriously from experience, beginning in a not very distinguished way and ending in supreme mastery: both ended their careers with an opera different from anything they had done before, casting unexpected light on their true personalities. Both were concerned in the national destinies of their countries, the Italian taking part, at least as a symbol, in the Risorgimento, and the German dabbling disastrously in the mounting nationalism of Das Vaterland. Both were individualists, cranky and stubborn; but while Richard Wagner inspired the most characteristic stream of modern music, Giuseppe Verdi's influence has been much more subtle, working almost unconsciously in the music of later composers. Wagner was fiercely German, Verdi pungently Italian, both in their lives and their art.

Let us consider first their musical beginnings. Verdi was born into a flourishing operatic tradition which had for many years lived on a great school of singing; behind him stand Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini. Although the orchestra was a secondary consideration in the native Italian school of opera, Rossini had already cautiously begun to extend its role, and Verdi was to develop it still further. German opera was beginning to emerge, slowly and awkwardly, out of Italian domination; Mozart had died sighing for a German opera, Weber was presiding over its foundations, and Marschner and Lortzing were in their teens. In his student days Wagner heard the celebrated soprano Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient in Italian opera, and was impressed; Verdi as a boy composed a quantity of concert music (excelling—mark this fact—in fugue). Both quickly outlived their early experiments, and started upon the path of national opera. It is typical of their polarity, however, that Wagner's early career was vague and directionless, his first operas windy and unstageable dreams which no one wanted, while Verdi's introduction to his life's work was eminently practical.

Wagner's first attempt was Die Hochzeit, and even the libretto, which already at nineteen he very typically wrote himself, was unfeasible. He followed it with Die Feen and Das Liebesverbot, the first a watery nothing, the second garish and erotic. The first of his operas to contain music that is still heard today was the very Meyerbeer-ish Rienzi, which he wrote in 1840 at the age of twenty-seven. Contrast Verdi. While his first opera, finished in 1836 and called Rocester, was rejected at Parma, his second, Oberto, with a libretto by the same Antonio Piazza responsible for Rocester, was accepted by the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, and after some postponements was produced there, with a moderate success, in 1839. For the son of a poor tavern keeper, whose highest aspiration might have been the role of provincial music master, this achievement was staggering.

Verdi had his setbacks. Between 1838 and June 1840 first his baby son and daughter, and then his wife died, and the comic opera which he had contracted to write and which he grimly completed was a flat failure. Verdi's whole nature demanded the practical consideration of success, not as a right, but because he was a good craftsman who judged
success or failure as a verdict on his work. The fate of his opera buffa led him to resolve abruptly and firmly to compose no more. Few stories are more touching than that of how Bartolomeo Merelli, director of La Scala and Verdi’s friend, tactfully and tenderly wooed the black-visaged young man back to composition. He presented Verdi with a libretto by Solera which Nicolai had previously rejected. Verdi glanced at it against his will, happened to read, “Va, pensiero, sull’ ali dorate,” and the golden wings of the deathless melody we know began to beat at the cage until he had to open the door and take out his foresworn pen. Thus was born the opera he always knew affectionately by a diminutive: Nabucco.

During the years that followed, right up to 1851 and Rigoletto, Verdi established himself in Italy, with many an incidental success. Very different in style from the works of Donizetti and Bellini, these early operas of his are rarely decisively better: they have the dark seriousness which Verdi was always to retain, and a dramatic and direct vocal style aimed at the sudden telling stroke, but it was not for some years that his full stature made itself felt. Merelli, at any rate, was convinced of the young composer’s potentialities—and how rightly, as it turned out! Verdi was a great self-educator. But so was Wagner. His Die Feen and Das Liebesverbot are nonsense far below the very competent Nabucco; after a brief transition of one work—Rienzi—one is astounded at the prophetic nature and sheer quality of Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, and Der fliegende Holländer. Verdi was to write nothing as good as these until well into middle age.

Wagner found his direction suddenly. One can almost hear the purposeful mechanism of his spirit at last gripping the road and recognizing it and the whole complex concern that was Richard Wagner leaping forward. Rienzi had achieved a certain success, and he had been freed from the worst of his poverty; he had obtained a second conductorship at Dresden, which provided for him fairly well, but which, with his perfectionist standards, caused him constant irritation. Then he took part in the political rising of 1849, typically precipitating a wanted change with action that was needlessly violent and that seemed at first disastrous. He rid himself of his hated employment, his income, his fatherland, and his hopes, in one emotional spasm. With a warrant out for his arrest he fled to Switzerland. with his querulous wife Minna after him. These facts are well known; they are mentioned here to mark the contrast with the practical, patient Verdi, and also to illustrate an important aspect of Wagner’s character that I will develop later. There is, however, a curious moment in which the two composers come very close together: the preludes to Lohengrin (1846-48) and La Traviata (1853). They seem to have arrived at this new sound independently of each other—the sound of divided strings high in the E string. Verdi makes the effect ache with compassion; Wagner uses it for a vision of the more than human splendor of the Holy Grail. How typical of both!

Lohengrin is prophetic in a general way; Tannhäuser and Der fliegende Holländer are very different from each other, and illustrate dramatically a further aspect of Wagner’s complicated psychology. Although erotic implications are covertly present in a number of Wagner’s operas, aside from the very youthful Liebesverbot he wrote only two frankly erotic works: Tannhäuser—especially the Paris version, contemporary with Tristan—and Tristan itself. Der fliegende Holländer is quite unlike. It owes so much to Weber that one can almost say it is a continuation of that most poetic spirit, but it also establishes Wagner the consciously German and Wagner the nature poet. While Tannhäuser looks forward to Tristan, Fliegende Holländer anticipates The Ring (The Dutchman himself might be a sketch for Wotan); together they illustrate something that looks very like a cleavage in Wagner’s psychological make-up. There is on one side the erotic—and on the other atavistic—nature music, primitive and dark, often the back cloth for merciless human struggle. Few great artists have ever revealed themselves so completely in their music as Wagner. It is easy to see the licentious Wagner in Tristan, the megalomaniac and the political meddler in Siegfried and Wotan. But Verdi tends to hide behind his characters; it is not easy to see him as Simon Boccanegra, Otello, or Rigoletto.

Nor as anyone in La Traviata. But he sometimes gives himself away in his attitude towards his characters. Wagner draws huge archetypal figures that are extensions of his own odd complex character; Verdi’s characters are much more human, and he was nearly as good a musical psychologist, in the end, as Mozart. Compassion is the key to La Traviata—compassion in the tenderly drawn figure of Violetta Valery, compassion in the way the music comments on the story, even compassion for that stilted prig, Germont père, who gets the lovely melody “Di Provenza.” How surely Verdi draws the contrast between the true love of Alfredo and the glitteringly corrupt surroundings of the salon at the opera’s opening. Wagner is the great master of the erotic, but even in Tannhäuser the contrast between the two forces is not so surely drawn.

But I would like to discuss one or two lesser-known Verdi operas of this period, chiefly Simon Boccanegra and Don Carlo. La Traviata, Rigoletto, and even Il Trovatore to a certain extent, form a pattern of the popular Verdi. In spite of tragedy and dark doings common to all, an infectious tunefulness, a certain extrovert vigor, account both for their popularity and their difference from Simon Boccanegra, Don Carlo, Un Ballo in maschera, La Forza del destino. These latter have a quality difficult to describe, the tragedy is darker, hinting at things below the surface of events, and the musical means, though lacking the glorious abandon of the
more popular Verdi, is more subtle. It may be said that whereas the darkness in his more popular operas is imposed from without, in those we are discussing it comes from within. Moreover, the music contains a concern with nature painting that was something almost new; Verdi had never used a natural background before as he uses the sea in Simon Boccanegra. The darkness that pervades Don Carlo is a spiritual darkness; one sometimes has the feeling that it emanates from the Grand Inquisitor, who seems to exude it. The claustrophobic atmosphere and relationships of the Spanish court add to the effect—one is reminded of the dwarfs of Velasquez, and the faces of a later Spanish royalty painted by Goya. Verdi has caught very well the sinister atmosphere of the Spanish court of Philip II. and he has done it with means that were unusual for him.

In 1865, the year before completion of Don Carlo, Wagner had just produced Tristan for the first time. This was a mighty landmark, and for a time it left Verdi quite behind. The effects of this drama were to be enormous; perhaps no other work has so changed the face of music for good or bad. Out of it came Arnold Schoenberg and the whole atonal revolution. Wagner was not yet fifty; Tristan is by no means a late work. Its placing in time is crucial, for two reasons: first. It marked the second high watermark of Wagner’s political meddling; and second, it interrupted one of the most fantastic projects in the whole history of art, The Ring. The situation is central to the drama of Richard Wagner.

The idea of a music drama on Siegfried’s Death had occurred to Wagner in 1848, but he soon realized that Siegfried’s death was incomplete in itself, and expanded the initial idea into the vast concept of The Ring—three linked music dramas with a prologue that was itself a great dramatic opera. By 1857, however, he had taken this mammoth project only as far as the middle of Siegfried. Here he became resoundingly stuck, with him and his amorous and financial affairs also in a muddle, he abandoned The Ring, ostensibly forever. He flung himself into Tristan und Isolde. The Ring was an act of faith so great that it looks like supreme folly. A penniless man heavily in debt, with many enemies and a reputation as a dangerous lunatic, starts on a sixteen-hour opera demanding resources wildly beyond those of any opera house in Europe. One might say, no wonder he abandoned it; this was the dawn of sense. Moreover, the lyric drama of Tristan had a far better chance of production somewhere, and there is no doubt that the prospect of earning a little money was in Wagner’s mind. But this is only part of the truth, and the belief that Wagner had repented of the sheer scale of The Ring is quite mistaken. Inadequate too is the explanation that he needed to sublimate his love for Mathilde Wesendonck, and therefore poured it into Tristan. As Ernest Newman has pointed out, none of Wagner’s love affairs was real at all. He needed the stimulus to set that highly charged machine, his brain, working. The truth is that Tristan (and Die Meistersinger, which followed it) were necessary to Wagner because he had to make a technical break-through in order to proceed with The Ring. His musical language was inadequate for his last operas until he had forged it anew in the furnace of Tristan. Tristan was also needed because of the strange polarity of his nature, the erotic and the political. Tristan is erotic, The Ring political; he had been running the political vein for a long time, and needed a swing of the pendulum. So he completed Tristan, and sought performance. At that moment there arrived at his door the officers of a king prepared to lay his kingdom at Richard Wagner’s feet. Tristan would be performed; The Ring saved.

One would think that Ludwig of Bavaria’s provisions to satisfy all the composer’s needs, personal and musical, would have been quite enough for anyone. But not for Wagner. No sooner was he settled and The Ring taken up again, than he started interfering in the politics of Bavaria in a way that not even his generous benefactor could tolerate. He had sated his erotic side in Tristan, and now he had to return to his unfulfilled political ambitions. For The Ring is a tough and merciless political battle waged against a back cloth of nature in all her moods, Wagner’s fantasy world was never clearly marked off from the real one; and it is probable that for him the fantasy world was the more concrete. In The Ring he could give vent to his most maniacal political ambitions, making himself both god (Wotan) and hero (Siegfried). The trouble was that his fantasy spilled over into real life, and he intrigued shamelessly against Ludwig’s admittedly not very inspiring ministers. In the middle of the whole imbroglio, when his interference and extravagance had placed him in such jeopardy that only the king’s favor stood between him and expulsion from Bavaria, Wagner started an affair with Liszt’s daughter, who was Hans von Bülow’s wife. Somehow, he got away with everything: he disillusioned Ludwig, but he kept his pension, Bülow’s wife, and his place in German musical life, and went on (since there was no theatre in Germany capable of staging The Ring) to build his own.

When Wagner married Cosima in 1870, he was fifty-seven. So of course was Verdi, who had just received the libretto of Aida. He finished the music of this spectacular opera a year later, and before he was to write another opera fourteen years were to elapse and Wagner was to die. Thus far their careers had run true to form. Through tempest and disaster, selfish, incredibly tough, trusting to an instinct that was more than uncanny, Wagner had pursued his gigantic plans, and in 1870, with turmoil and destruction all around him, was on the brink of his last great Continued on page 170
GIUSEPPE
VERDI

...his life and times in pictures
The hamlet of Le Roncole lies deep in the flat Po valley. Giuseppe Verdi was born there on October 10, 1813, in the squat brick house which served as the village tavern and grocery shop. It can be seen at the left of the photo below. Across the square is the village church, where Giuseppe received his first music lessons. The painting at right shows the tavern as it appeared in the early nineteenth century.
At ten Verdi was sent to school in the nearby market town of Busseto. A local merchant and musical amateur, Antonio Barezzi (above), interested himself in young Verdi's education and took him into his home. The Barezzi house (top) still overlooks the main square of this little town in which Verdian associations abound at every turn.
In 1836 Verdi married Baretti’s eldest daughter, Margherita (below, right), and settled down as Busseto’s maestro di musica. But his thoughts turned to Milan and its celebrated Teatro alla Scala (above). There, in 1839, the impresario Bartolomeo Merelli (below, left) put on Verdi’s first surviving opera, Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio. By then Verdi’s two children had already died, and his wife was to follow them to the grave soon after. The young composer stayed on in Milan and became famous overnight with the Scala production of Nabucco in 1842.
The composer himself referred to the period following *Nabucco* as his "years in the galleys." In nine years he turned out a dozen operas, of varying quality. They are all pictured here in this frontispiece to a collection of Verdi arias published in the early 1850s. (Also shown are scenes from *Rigoletto* and *Trovatore*, which came immediately after the "galley years.")
The ringleted lady above is Giuseppina Strepponi, a soprano whom Verdi first met in 1841. She was then the mistress of a well-known tenor, Napoleone Moriani (left). Verdi and Strepponi met again in Paris in 1847 (the engraving of the composer at right was made that year). They were to live together—at first without benefit of matrimony—until Peppina's death fifty years later. The photo below shows their first home: the Palazzo Orlandi in Busseto.
La Fenice, the dazzlingly graceful opera house in Venice, commissioned five operas from Verdi, including *Rigoletto*, the earliest of his works that remain constantly in the repertory. Its premiere in 1851 was a riotous success. The print above shows the Fenice interior as it looked then—not very different from the way it looks now, though today upholstered seats have replaced the wooden settees. Venice does not much believe in change, as witness the handsome oil lamp over the Fenice's gallery entrance (left). The costume sketches below were drawn for *Rigoletto*'s first production.
Melchiorre Delfico was a popular Neapolitan cartoonist with whom Verdi struck up a long friendship during a four-month sojourn in Naples in 1858. Delfico's cartoons of Verdi drawn at this period portray the composer in an ambience of genial relaxation. Going clockwise from top left, we find Verdi attending patiently to the edicts of the censor, sharing a sofa with his Maltese spaniel Loulou, cowering under a deluge of requests for autographs and offers from impresarios, peering at the Bay of Naples from his hotel balcony, and slumbering in peaceful repose while Delfico plays a composition of his own.
Throughout the 1840s and '50s, when Italy was merely "a geographical expression," performances of Verdi's operas were often the occasion for patriotic demonstrations. Later, the composer's name took on an added connotation. The initials V.E.R.D.I. stood for Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia. Thus, "Viva Verdi" scrawled on a wall was understood as a rallying slogan for the Piedmontese king under whom Italy would shortly become unified. Verdi and V.E.R.D.I. met in September 1859 (left), shortly after the composer's own Duchy of Parma had voted for union with Piedmont.
Verdi composed *La Forza del destino* for the Court Opera in St. Petersburg, where he went—suitably accoutered in furs—for the first performance in 1862. The opera was given at La Scala in 1869, with the soprano Teresa Stolz (below) as Leonora. La Stolz became a great friend of Verdi's—though just how great is a matter of dispute. She sang in the first performance of the *Manzoni* Requiem under Verdi's direction in 1874 (bottom of page).
The "years in the galleys" were now far behind, and Verdi felt inclined to retire. But the force of destiny exacted from him two more masterpieces, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, to librettos by Arrigo Boito (above, with Verdi). The Act I set from the first Scala production of *Otello* (1887) is shown below.
In his apartment at the Grand Hotel, Milan, Verdi supervised the rehearsals for *Falstaff* (above). Its first performance, with Victor Maurel in the title role, took place at La Scala in 1893. In his eightieth year Verdi had created a work of sunlit gaiety and grace, totally unlike anything that had gone before. The world clamored for more, but Verdi knew better. *Falstaff* could never be surpassed.
Verdi's last years were largely occupied with the founding of the Rest Home for Musicians in Milan, which appears today as in the photo above. The inset shows Verdi and the architect, Camillo Boito, on its terrace. Peppina died in 1897, but the old man did not lack for guests at Sant' Agata. Among those pictured below are Teresa Stolz (standing) and Giulio Ricordi (second from right).
His death in Milan on January 27, 1901, was cause for national mourning. Arturo Toscanini led a chorus of 800 voices in "Va, pensiero" from Nabucco (top of page). Then seemingly the entire populace of Milan poured out into the streets and followed their beloved Verdi to his final resting place next to Peppina in the chapel of the Rest Home for Musicians.
Of Poets and Poetasters

Verdi and his librettists—from Solera to Boito.

The traditional attitude towards the librettists of Verdi's operas can best be summed up by some quotations from the composer's two excellent biographers, Francis Toye and the late Frank Walker.

"It may be debated whether the annals of opera contain a more uncouth libretto . . ." This is Toye (Verdi, Knopf, 1946, p. 208) on the subject of Temistocle Solera's I Lombardi. Walker, discussing Verdi's so called "galley years" of early success, writes (Grove's Dictionary, Fifth Edition, Vol. VIII, p. 731): "... he accepted far too many contracts for new operas and turned out much hasty work on unworthy librettos . . ." A few pages later Walker says of Il Trovatore: "The text is really indefensible, ludicrous in general conception and detail . . ." Toye, again (p. 315): "Many of the lines of Un Ballo in maschera are sheer doggerel . . .".

Toye, whose study first appeared in 1930, was (along with Franz Werfel) one of the then few crusading spirits who took Verdi's operas—aside from the generally respected Otello and Falstaff—seriously, as something worthy of critical consideration. Yet, except for those last two Boito librettos, Toye found little to praise in the texts of Verdi's operas. And Walker, whose recent The Man Verdi is a milestone in Verdian scholarship, also regards Boito as Verdi's literary savior. But, now that Verdi's early, little-known operas are gradually being reconsidered, can't the "poets" who served the composer be reexamined in the context of their time?

Even in Verdi's own day his librettos came in for sharp criticism, especially the ones by Francesco Maria Piave. When Simon Boccanegra was performed in Venice in 1857, rumors attributed authorship of the libretto to Verdi himself. The composer, quick to spring to his librettist's defense, wrote to a Venetian friend: "All we needed was the invention that the libretto was of my writing!! A libretto that bears Piave's name is condemned in advance as terrible poetry. But frankly I would be quite happy if I were capable of writing strophes like: 'Vieni a mirar la cerula . . . Delle faci festanti al barlume . . .' and many, many others like so many of his verses here and there. I confess my ignorance; I'm not capable of it . . .".

Nowadays the texts that Verdi set to music, if divorced from that music, make admittedly dreary reading. Of course, the verses were never meant to be read alone; they were pretexts for music, for scenes. And for that matter, few of Piave's modern critics take the trouble to read the Italian theatre of the nineteenth century. The hit plays of Verdi's time—in the long theatrical gap between Alfieri and Pirandello—are unreadable: bombastic, long-winded, artificial, they seem librettos with the notes missing. Piave, Cammarano, Somma, the maligned librettists, were no worse than most of their now forgotten contemporaries, and even the great Manzoni, when he turned to the theatre and wrote Aedechi, created a fairly turgid piece (though it is officially regarded in Italy as a classic).

Very early in his career Verdi was in a position to choose his librettists, just as he dictated his financial terms; and if he continued to work with...
writers like Piave and Salvatore Cammarano, he had his reasons. These men, as the Italian critic Gabriele Baldini has pointed out, were not librettists in the sense that Da Ponte or Calzabigi had been; they were more like secretaries, turning Verdi’s dramatic ideas into singable verses, using plots drawn from successful playwrights, mostly from outside Italy. But, first and foremost, these librettists were men of the theatre; they were “professionals”—despite the financial precariousness of the theatre in Verdi’s time.

In fact, the colorful Temistocle Solera, after revising the first Verdi opera to be produced, a work called Oberto (apparently written first by one Antonio Piazza, government employee and part-time journalist), and after inflaming Verdi’s patriotism with Nabucco, I Lombardi, and Attila, gave up the theatre. He had been a composer as well as a writer, but he turned to politics, served Napoleon III as a spy, then became police chief of Florence, organizer of the Khedive’s police force in Cairo, an antique dealer in Paris and finally in Milan, where he died in poverty in 1878. In the current revival of Verdi’s early operas, Solera’s librettos are being heard again. Nabucco can now almost be considered a repertory opera, and modern audiences are as inspired as the dejected Verdi was by the elegiac “Va, pensiero.” A recent Florentine revival of Attila proved that opera equally arresting and viable. The plot—like that of Nabucco and, even more so, of I Lombardi—is full of coincidences and unlikely coincidences: but again and again the verses have a convincing ring, the catchiness of a good political slogan, a rallying cry like the historic “Resti l’Italia a me!”

Solera was born in poverty, son of a political prisoner in the hated Austrian Spielberg; Piave—Verdi’s second librettist—had poverty thrust upon him. Son of a well-to-do glass manufacturer from the island of Murano, Piave suddenly found himself, when his father’s fortune vanished, with the necessity of making a living. Apparently the prospect didn’t alarm him. Piave seems to have been the most affable of men; he got a job as a proofreader, but spent many of his working hours composing verses and songs, which were sung by Venice’s gondoliers. Among Piave’s many friends was Brenna, secretary of the Fenice theatre, and when Verdi signed a contract to write an opera there, Brenna suggested Piave as librettist.

Verdi immediately made it clear who was going to lead the team. He wrote to Brenna: “In your letter I read that Piave would like to come to a decision with me so as to avoid as far as possible the necessity for changes when the work is finished. For my part I would never like to bother a poet by asking him to change a verse, and I set three of Solera’s librettos in which, if you compare the original manuscripts which I still have with the printed texts, you will find only a very few verses changed, and these by Solera’s own request. But Solera has already written fifty librettos and knows the theatre, theatrical effects, and musical forms. Piave has never written (for the theatre) and it is therefore natural that he should be lacking in these qualities.”

The opera was Ernani. Verdi was forgetting that, as a novice, he had been in no position to ask the experienced Solera for many changes (Solera, notorious for his laziness, would probably not have satisfied him). Actually, according to Verdi’s not always reliable biographer Abbiati, Solera did make changes even in the rapidly composed Nabucco.

If Solera was Verdi’s “revolutionary” librettist, Piave served the composer for a different kind of text. The young Venetian was Verdi’s “domestic” librettist. In fact, even in the stirring Ernani with its rousing choruses, we find Verdi beginning to take more of an interest in his character’s inner lives: Ernani and Leonora are fairly conventional figures, but Silva and Carlo—with their great monologues—are a step in the direction of Rigoletto and Simon Boccanegra.

Even in the “galley years,” when Verdi was
writing operas almost as fast as he could drive his pen, he spent precious time in selecting and rejecting librettos, adjusting verses, arranging a scene so that it would have musical, if not dramatic, logic. In 1844 he wrote to Piave about the rough draft of I due Foscari: "In the Tenor's cavatina there are two things wrong. The first is that, when the cavatina is over, Jacopo remains on stage and this is always bad for the effect. Secondly, there is no shift of thought after the adagio. Write some very brief dialogue between the attendant and Jacopo, then have an officer come in and say: 'Bring on the prisoner,' then a cabaletta. Make this forceful, because we're writing for Rome; and besides we must make the character of Foscari more vigorous. . . . In the third act, do as we agreed, try to insert the gondolier's song, mingling with the chorus of the populace. Couldn't it be arranged for this to happen towards evening, so we could have a sunset, which is so beautiful?"

The word effect (which sometimes has to be translated as effectiveness) occurs again and again in Verdi's letters to his librettists during these busy years. It gives us a clue to what he sought in his librettos. Other favorite words are positions (or situations) and colors. "Everything is too much the same color," he wrote of I due Foscari later.

At that time, Verdi was not much concerned with the over-all construction of the drama, with comprehensive coherence; he was after scene-for-scene effectiveness, thinking of how the cabaletta would come off, of whether the tenor would leave the stage in a storm of wild, Roman applause or equally boisterous Roman whistling of disapproval. He was writing, as he said himself afterwards, "with one eye on the public and one on art." For that matter, he kept an eye on the public even in the later years of his career, but it was a public whose tastes he himself had gradually changed.

Verdi's tastes were also to change: the immediate effect was no longer to be gained merely by introducing a messenger and striking the spark of a lively cabaletta, or by setting a scene at sunset rather than at a less romantic hour. It was character contrast that Verdi was to seek: contrast between characters and within them. The most interesting figure in I due Foscari (the opera which immediately followed Ernani) is the old Doge, a father torn between love and duty. A similar father appears in Giovanna d'Arco (by Solera), and in Alzira. Verdi's next opera, there are two torn fathers, a Spanish governor (we are in Peru at the time of the conquistadores) and a noble Inca chieftain.

Verdi's taste was the Neapolitan Salvatore Cammarano, twelve years Verdi's senior and already the highly esteemed author of librettos like Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor and Belisario and Pacini's now forgotten hit Saffo. At this first stage, Verdi's letters to Cammarano were extremely deferential—unlike his brusque handling of the docile Piave—out of respect for the older man's long theatrical experience. A fascinating figure, Cammarano came from a long line of actors, playwrights, painters: he also worked at the Teatro San Carlo as a stage manager (ancestor of today's director) and general literary handyman. When Verdi's Macbeth was being performed at the San Carlo a few years later, the composer entrusted the production to Cammarano, writing him a letter of instructions, including the famous definition of what Lady Macbeth's voice should be: "Harsh, stifled, grim . . . ."

Alzira was a failure (though after its Neapolitan premiere in the summer of 1845 it was performed in other Italian theatres), and it is the only opera of Verdi's that hasn't been revived in this century. Verdi himself called it proprio brutta, "downright ugly"; but he apparently didn't blame its failure on the libretto, since he returned to Cammarano for Luisa Miller and, eight years after Alzira, for II Trovatore.

After Alzira and Attila (Solera's last libretto for Verdi), the composer turned, in 1846, to his most ambitious project up till then: Macbeth. Piave was commissioned to fashion a libretto from an extensive prose draft made by Verdi. Piave was also conscious of the importance that Verdi attached to the new work and he obviously echoed Verdi's words in a letter to Lanari, the Florence impresario who was to put it on: "I believe that this opera, if the public likes it, will give new trends to our music and will open new avenues to composers of the present and the future . . . ." And Verdi chose this, of his now ten operas, to dedicate to his benefactor Barelli, writing: "Here is this Macbeth, which I love more than my other operas and which I therefore believe more worthy of being dedicated to you . . . ."

For once Verdi worried about the quality of the text as poetry and, with Piave's consent, he turned the libretto over to a friend, the eminent poet Andrea Maffei, twenty-five years older than Verdi, well known as translator of Byron, Milton, Goethe, and Schiller. Maffei revised the choruses of the witches and the sleepwalking scene. The libretto was printed with only Piave's name, and the very scenes written by Maffei were the ones the critics treated most brutally.

This harsh treatment didn't
discourage Verdi; he asked Maffei for a full-length libretto, I Masnadieri. This was the first time Verdi had had a really respected poet for his collaborator (excepting Felice Romani, author of the early and disastrous Un Giorno di regno; but this was no real collaboration since Verdi took the libretto ready-made and set it hastily and against his will). Maffei's product is surely one of Verdi's worst librettos, with an ending in which the hero kills the heroine on the most absurd of pretexts, merely to ring down the curtain. After I Masnadieri (a failure at its London premiere, despite the presence of Jenny Lind as prima donna), Verdi went straight back to Piave and Cammarano, the former for Il Corsaro and the latter for La Battaglia di Legnano.

Neither of these two operas represents anything new in Verdi's production, though both have excellent scenes. But the operas that immediately followed—Luisa Miller by Cammarano and Stiffelio by Piave—show Verdi again widening his range. Luisa Miller is a domestic tragedy (though there is a background of rebellion against oppression), the story of a tormented father, betrayed daughter, and noble seducer, which in some ways suggests the Rigoletto of eighteen months later. The super-villain, appropriately named Wurm, particularly aroused Verdi's interest. "There will be a fine contrast between the terror and despair of Eloisa and the infernal coldness of Wurm. In fact, it seems to me that if you give Wurm's character a certain hint of comicality, the position will become still more fearsome." Position again; but here the conflict is an inner one, a conflict of characters.

And Stiffelio is an even bolder step: it is a modern-dress story, another domestic tragedy, this time a betrayed husband (a Protestant clergyman), who at the end forgives his erring wife. As in La Battaglia di Legnano, the drama is one of conjugal love; but in this case the wife falls through a temporary lapse. She really loves her husband, and it is clear that Verdi agreed in his pardoning her. This was a risky subject for an Italian audience in 1850 (it could be risky in Italy even today), and the opera failed. Verdi later revised it and fitted it to a changed and—mutilated—libretto as Aroldo. The second version has been revived occasionally in recent years, but it would be interesting to hear the first and more dramatic version.

Verdi was now nearing forty. He was well-off, happy, famous. He had written fifteen operas. His great Italian rivals were dead or silent, and Wagner, his supreme German rival, was not to be heard in Italy for another twenty years. If Verdi had wanted to rest on his laurels, evolve a formula from his successes and go on repeating it, nothing would have been easier or more profitable. But the search for new challenges, a new kind of opera, was only begun. Stiffelio was presented to the public (in Trieste) on November 16, 1850. On March 11, 1851, in Venice, Verdi unveiled Rigoletto.

In this one work he created his three most vivid and deeply felt characters up till then: the grotesque yet human hunchback, the libertine Duke, the innocent and passionate Gilda. A little less than two years later came Il Trovatore, whose protagonist—for Verdi—was the crazed Azucena, a female counterpart of his Rigoletto. And six weeks after Il Trovatore's triumph: La Traviata, whose initial failure can be attributed to many reasons, including the boldness of the libretto—a modern-dress story again, this time dealing with prostitution.

At this point a new librettist comes into Verdi's life: Antonio Somma, a Venetian lawyer (born in 1810), a member of Verdi's little circle of friends in Venice which included the distinguished alienist Cesare Vigna and the impresario and music dealer Antonio Gallo (responsible for the successful second production of La Traviata, a few months after the fiasco of the first). Somma at this time was a well-known playwright, author of a successful play titled La Parisina.

The writer indicated his willingness to do a libretto for Verdi. The composer, on his way to Paris to write Les Vêpres siciliennes (to a text from the Scribe "libretto factory"), found time to send a long letter to Somma, the beginning of a correspondence which reveals Verdi's concept of his art: "Long experience has confirmed the ideas I have always had about effectiveness in the theatre, though at the beginning of my career I had the courage to reveal them only in part. (For example, ten years ago I would never have risked writing Rigoletto.) I find that our operas err on the side of too great monotony, and therefore I would refuse today to set stories like Nahucco, Foscari, etc. etc. They provide interesting scenes, but lack variety. It is a single string—lofty, if you like, but still always the same. I'll explain myself more clearly: Tasso's poem may be better, but I prefer Ariosto a thousand times over. For the same reason I prefer Shakespeare to all other dramatists, not excluding the Greeks. As far as effect is concerned, I believe the best story I have so far composed (without referring to the question of literary or poetic merit) is Rigoletto. There are very powerful situations, there is variety, pathos, brio. All the developments come from the carefree, libertine character of the Duke; from it come the fears of Rigoletto, Gilda's passion, etc. etc., which create many dramatic points, among them the scene of the Quartet which, in effectiveness, will always be one of the best that our theatre boasts. Many composers have set Ruy Blas, omitting the part of Don César. If I were to set that story, it would appeal to me chiefly for the contrast that this highly original character affords ..." And at the end of the letter Verdi suggested that Somma take a look at King Lear.

For the next three years Somma worked on the libretto of Lear, while Verdi bombarded him with suggestions. The libretto was completed, Verdi paid for it and kept it in his drawer for years, toying with the idea of setting it to music. As usual, the
text was as much his work as it was Somma's: every letter contains admonitions, advice, the fruit of the composer's years in the opera house. "Bear in mind only the necessary brevity," was Verdi's first reminder. "The public is easily bored!" And again in a later letter: "In the theatre long is the synonym of boring; and the boring is the worst of all genres."

At the same time Verdi was working away from the closed forms—romanza, cabaletta, stretta finale—to freer construction: "As to the recitatives, if the moment is interesting, they can even be a bit long. I have written some very long ones, for example the soliloquy in the duet of the first act of Macbeth, and the other soliloquy in the duet of the first act of Rigoletto." Macbeth and Rigoletto—still his two favorite operas.

In the projected Re Lear, again the villain's character interested Verdi more than the hero's: "Develop this aria well [Edmondo's] and give it a new shape, alternating recitative with rhymed strophes, etc. etc. Let there be a great variety of hues: irony, contempt, wrath—all well depicted, so that in the music, not being able to give a cantabile to such a character, I can find different colors. . . . For my part, I wouldn't make an Edmondo who feels a twinge of remorse. I'd make him an outright scoundrel, not a repulsive scoundrel like Francesco in I Masnadieri . . . but one who laughs and mocks at everything and commits the most atrocious crimes with the maximum indifference . . . ." In the same letter Verdi asks Somma to omit a chorus which he says would create not variety, but monotony. The variety he is seeking must be in the hues, the shadings of character, not in external changes.

For one reason or another Verdi never set Somma's Lear, but instead, in 1857, the composer employed Somma to make an adaptation, little more than a straight translation, of Scribe's Gustave III, rebaptized eventually Un Ballo in maschera. Again the collaboration between Verdi and a "respected" writer proved fatal. This libretto, concocted in haste and mauled by the censors, has become a byword for foolishness; but in Somma's defense it should be said that he was aware of the text's shortcomings and refused to have his name printed on the title page.

Except for his French librettists, the next "poet" to come into Verdi's life was Antonio Ghislanzoni, the versifier of Aida. After La Traviata, Verdi wrote less and less frequently and only when an occasion—or a libretto—inspired him. The offer from the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg was too attractive to resist, so he composed La Forza del destino (Piave's last libretto). Don Carlo was written for Paris, and Aida for Cairo. Italy was unified, a full-fledged European nation; and Verdi was increasingly conscious of being that nation's leading cultural representative abroad.

The period of revisions had begun: Forza was revised between Russia and La Scala. A new Macbeth was made for performance in Paris. Simon Boccanegra was modified to help save La Scala from closing its doors and perhaps—one suspects—to test still another aspiring librettist, Verdi's last, Arrigo Boito.

But before Boito there was Ghislanzoni, the last of the "secretary" librettists. Born in 1823, Ghislanzoni was another man of the theatre, though he had originally studied medicine. He was a baritone for a while, but lost his voice and took up writing. His melodramatic novel Gli Artisti da teatro is a mine of information about backstage life in Italian opera houses in the first part of the nineteenth century. He was also a music critic and an accomplished journalist, and an article of his describing a visit to the composer at Sant' Agata is a splendid word portrait of the aging Verdi.

Aida, dramatically, doesn't represent a radical departure from the librettos that preceded it; but it is nonetheless an unusual blend of familiar Verdian elements. Du Locle—who wrote the prose sketch—and Verdi and

Continued on page 171
when the British say
"the best pick-up arm in the world"
it warrants serious consideration

The English are noted for their conservatism
and they especially are not given to extreme claims in
advertising. Their statement that the SME is
"the best pick-up arm in the world" is simply a fact. It is made
by dedicated craftsmen working with extraordinarily close
tolerances and standards—providing features unattainable in any other
tone arm. Its "secret" (if it has one) is care
in manufacture and testing,
and utterly accurate adjustments for every critical factor in tracking.
It is not inexpensive—perfection never
is. It is, however, worth every
penny to the audiophile who wants a pick-up arm capable of realizing
the full potential of cartridge and record.

SHURE SME DESIGN FEATURES

A. Virtually frictionless knife-edge bearings. Pivot friction is less than .002
milligrams, horizontal and vertical!
B. Wood-lined stainless steel tube arm. Resonances are outside recorded range,
of small amplitude, and damped.
C. Unique weight system statically balances arm longitudinally AND laterally.
D. Rider weight adjusts tracking force from 1/4 to 5 grams, adjustable for 1/4 or
1/2 gm. increments, as accurate as a fine stylus pressure gauge.
E. Sliding base offers alignment adjustment through 1 inch. Height is adjustable
through 1/4 inch. fulfills optimum requirements of length, offset, over-
hang when adjusted with alignment protractor included.

F. "Anti-skating" bias adjuster counteracts tendency of the arm to move
toward record center and "favor" inner groove.
G. Hydraulic lever-operated set-down for "slow-motion" feather-light lowering
onto any part of the recording.
H. Nylon-jaw arm rests with stainless steel locking link.
I. International standard 4-pin socket. Cartridge shells fitted with detachable
pillars and mounting screws at standard 1/4 inch spacing.
J. Output socket and plug provides a rigid junction for the "stiff wiring" and
delicate pick-up lead, eliminating influence on free tone-arm movement.

PRICES:

Includes one shell, arm, template, alignment protractor, hardware
MODEL 3009 for 12" recordings .............................................. $89.50 net
MODEL 3012 for 16" recordings ............................................. $99.50 net
ADDITIONAL SHELL Model A30H .......................................... $5.50 each

The Shure M33-M, of course. With the SME, provides absolute minimum
tracking force . . . without distortion. Incredibly transparent sound. Peak-
free high end, clean lows, astoundingly natural and clear in the middle range
where most other cartridges suffer serious deficiencies. 22 x 10^6 cm per
dyne compliance. $36.50 net.

LITERATURE:

SHURE BROTHERS, INC., 222 HARTREY AVE., EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

*Manufactured under U. S. Patent 3,055,998; 3,077,521; 3,077,522; D193,006; D193,934; other patents pending.

CIRCLE 97 ON READER-SERVICE CARD

HIGH FIDELITY MAGAZINE
The consumer's guide
to new and important
high fidelity equipment

high fidelity

EQUIPMENT REPORTS

Fairchild Model 412-1BK
Turntable Kit

AT A GLANCE: The Model 412-1BK is a single-speed (33 1/3 rpm) turntable in kit form. Tests of a kit-built model, conducted at United States Testing Company, Inc., indicate that the 412-1BK is a high quality unit, capable of excellent performance. Dimensions, installed on the motor board supplied in the kit, are 16 3/4 inches by 14 1/2 inches. The kit price is $79.95. An optional wooden wrap-around, shock-mounted base costs $12.95. Alternately, the turntable may be installed in one's own base or in a suitable cut-out well in a cabinet. Manufacturer: Fairchild Recording Equipment Co., 10-40 45th Ave., Long Island City, N.Y.

IN DETAIL: The Fairchild 412-1BK is a sturdy, well-engineered, and reliable turntable. Its appearance is neat and unobtrusive. Black formica covers half of the exposed portion of the mounting board, while a contrasting brushed aluminum plate covers the rest of the unit. This dress plate may be removed to gain access to the speed adjustment as well as to drill the holes needed for mounting a tone arm. The mounting board itself is made of one-inch-thick pressed wood, and fastened to its underside is a steel plate that serves as a mounting chassis for the motor and other parts.

The 412-1BK uses a hysteresis-synchronous motor that is shock-mounted below the chassis plate. It rotates the platter through a double-belt drive system. That is to say, one belt runs between the motor and a shock-mounted speed-reduction pulley, and a second belt runs between this pulley and the platter itself. According to the manufacturer, this system provides double isolation between the platter and the motor, resulting in very low rumble, as well as—because of the two gradual step-down speed ratios—very low flutter and wow.

The platter itself is an aluminum casting, the outer rim of which is filled, during manufacture, with a heavy substance known as "dust" that brings the weight up to eight pounds. The finely machined shaft of the platter sits on a hardened steel spherical thrust bearing in its well. The diameter of the platter tapers from 12 1/2 inches on its underside to 11 3/4 inches across its top surface. This allows just enough of the outer edge of a 12-inch disc to project over the platter to facilitate lifting it off after play. The turntable is covered with a rubber mat, and a strobe card is supplied for checking speed accuracy. The card is removed during actual use.

The performance of the Fairchild 412-1BK, as measured in the laboratory and evaluated in listening tests through wide-range stereo systems, was among the finest and should satisfy the needs of top quality music reproduction. To begin with, speed error after assembly was extremely small (measured as 0.4% fast) and insignificant from a musical pitch standpoint. At that, it could be reduced to virtually zero error—using the strobe.

Equipment reports are based on laboratory measurements and listening tests. Data for the reports on equipment other than loudspeakers is obtained by the United States Testing Company, Inc., of Hoboken, New Jersey, a completely independent organization not affiliated with the United States Government which, since 1880, has been a leader in product evaluation. Speaker reports are based on controlled listening tests. Occasionally, a supplementary agency may be invited to contribute to the testing program. The choice of equipment to be tested rests with the editors of HIGH FIDELITY. No report, or portion thereof, may be reproduced for any purpose or in any form without written permission of the publisher. No reference to the United States Testing Company, Inc., to its seals or insignia, or to the results of its tests, including material published in HIGH FIDELITY based on such tests, may be made without written permission of United States Testing Company, Inc.

REPORT POLICY

October 1963 115

www.americanradiohistory.com
AT A GLANCE: The Model KT-900 by Lafayette is a transistorized stereo preamp-power amplifier sold only in kit form. It is characterized by United States Testing Company, Inc., as a compact unit that meets its important performance specifications and will provide the kind of adequate service for which it has been designed. Dimensions are: 13 3/8 inches by 3 5/16 inches (with legs) by 11 7/8 inches (with knobs). Cost is $134.50. Manufacturer: Lafayette Radio Electronics, 111 Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, L.I., N.Y.

IN DETAIL: The KT-900 is a solid-state control amplifier of handsome design. Its front panel, including all control knobs, is made of gold anodized aluminum, and the metal cover for the chassis has a simulated walnut wood appearance. This represents a "new look" for Lafayette. The controls begin with a group of four slide switches at the left of the panel. These are for the AC power, the rumble and scratch filters, and the loudness contour. To the right of this group, running across the panel, are knobs for dual concentric volume control, dual concentric bass tone control, dual concentric treble tone control, mode selector (stereo, left, right, stereo reverse), and program selector (tape head, phono, tuner, and auxiliary input). Input jacks for the sources noted on the selector switch are on the rear of the chassis. and provision is made for using either a magnetic phono cartridge or a ceramic type. Also found on the rear are tape output jacks for feeding to a tape recorder any of the program material going through the amplifier. A pair of speaker terminals for each channel is used for hooking up to 4-, 8-, or 16-ohm speakers. However, when using 4-ohm speakers, the owner must make a small circuit change within the chassis as instructed (this places a 3-ohm, 20-watt resistor in series with the speaker to prevent damage to the output transistors). Two switched AC convenience outlets also are found on the rear of the chassis.

Each channel of the KT-900 uses ten transistors. There is no output transformer, but an interstage transformer is used between the driver stage and the push-pull power output stage. The power supply consists of eight silicon diodes, and voltage regulation is provided by two additional transistors.

In USTC's performance tests, the kit-built KT-900 met its response, power output, and harmonic distortion specifications with ease. From a performance standpoint, the KT-900 falls in the category of "medium-high"-powered control amplifiers. It provided an output of 38.7 watts on both channels at its 1-kc clipping point. Total harmonic distortion at clipping was only 0.42% on the left channel, and 0.4% on the right channel. With both channels operating together, the power at clipping was—as is usual in control amplifiers—lower, although still adequate to drive most speakers. Thus, the left channel clipped at 28.8 watts with 0.4% THD, and the right channel clipped at 32.8 watts with the same low amount of distortion. The amplifier's actual rated harmonic distortion is 0.5%. At this figure, the amplifier provided better than 40 watts at 1 kc on the left channel.

The power bandwidth, referred to rated distortion, was measured between 20 cps and 5,500 cps. Below 20 cps, the 0.5% distortion level was estimated on an oscilloscope and found to extend down to 7 cps, indicating very good bass response. (This is also shown on the 50-cps square wave photo, which has—for an amplifier in this price class—only a moderate amount of "tilt" or low-frequency phase distortion.)

Above 5,500 cps, the distortion level increased, so that for the same amount of rated distortion (0.5%), the total available power would be a few decibels less, or conversely, for the same power, distortion would be more. Thus, at 35 watts output, the harmonic distortion on the left channel rose to 2% at 20 kc. At half that power, 17.5 watts, the distortion was 1.3% at 20 kc. In practical terms, this means that the higher overtones—especially when the amplifier is being driven "hard," as for instance when playing very loudly or when driving low-efficiency speakers—would not be reproduced as "purely" as all the other tones in the musical spectrum. Whether this would be readily discernible in listening is hard to predict. Distortion already present in a program source or in the speaker's high-frequency response might be aggravated somewhat as a "hardness" in the sound; on the other hand, some of it might be masked.

Frequency response for a normal average one-watt output level was found to vary somewhat with different settings of the volume control, but was essentially flat across the 20-cps to 20-kc range.

The Lafayette KT-900's intermodulation (IM) dis-
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54
db on the tape head
input, all adequate.

The square-wave response of the amplifier (a measure
of its transient response) was fair and generally typical
of this class of equipment. The 10-kc square-wave re-
sponse had slow rise time, some overshoot, but no
ringing. When checked for stability with capacitive loading,
the amplifier had no tendency toward oscillation, and
did remain stable.

The damping factor of the KT-900 was found to
be less than 1 for either 8-ohm or 4-ohm loads. Despite
this low measurement and the relatively high IM
measured, the KT-900—used with high quality program
sources and wide-range speakers which themselves have
good internal damping—did furnish acceptably clean
sound. It can be characterized as a good “budget type”
amplifier for use with fairly efficient speakers.

How It Went Together

though not as lavishly packaged as some kits, the KT-
900 is carefully boxed and supplies everything—
cluding a metal case—needed to complete this stereo ampli-
cifer. The pictorials supplied with the kit are large and
clear, giving a step-by-step picture of the over-all wiring.
The instruction manual itself is carefully laid out and
has clear and concise directions for installing the
transistors. Ample room is provided on the heavy-
gauge chassis for all wiring procedures.

The right and left pre-amp and driver sections are
mounted on separate printed circuit boards. The tran-
sistors are soldered directly to the board and do not
use sockets. When soldering the transistors, some form
of “heat sink,” such as alligator clips or long-nose
pliers, should be used to prevent damage to them. The
power and output transistors are mounted to the under-
side of the chassis which itself serves as a permanent
heat sink.

The function and stereo mode switches are laid out
in such a way as to simplify the procedure of wiring
the complicated circuits. The kit should go together
successfully at the hands of anyone who is willing to
work slowly and carefully. Our experienced kit builder
completed the unit in about sixteen hours.
AT A GLANCE: The Models 10 and 14 by KLH are full-range speaker systems. Each employs its own method of providing high fidelity response within compact dimensions. The Model 10 is 23 5/32 inches high, 11 25/32 inches wide, and 8 3/4 inches deep. Cost, unfinished, is $86; in mahogany, $89; in satin or oiled walnut, $94. The Model 14 is 18 inches high, 14 inches wide, and 3 3/4 inches deep. Cost, in satin or oiled walnut, is $49.50. Manufacturer: KLH Research and Development Corp., 30 Cross St., Cambridge 39, Mass.

IN DETAIL: A number of recent products from KLH demonstrate, in sum, that compactness need not be synonymous with poor acoustic performance. While costlier and larger systems—such as those made by KLH itself—offer more heft in the deep bass, and possibly more of that elusive quality that has come to be known as “air” in the extreme highs, the present models are no less clean-sounding within their admittedly more modest over-all ranges. At that, the range of either the Model 10 or the Model 14 is wider than we may have dared expect from such relatively small units, and this feature is combined with fine musical balance, smoothness, and freedom from audible distortion. These qualities, noted in a previous report on the KLH-8 FM/Amplifier/Speaker System (High Fidelity, August 1961) were summed up as “rather like an excellent reproduction of a good painting—smaller and less thrilling than the original canvas, but enjoyable nonetheless in its reduced proportions.”

The Model 10, to begin with, is a full-range, two-way speaker system. A 10-inch, high-compliance woofer is housed together with a small cone tweeter and a frequency-dividing network (nominal crossover is at 1,500 cps) in a cabinet which, except for a small port opening, is completely sealed. Both speakers face forward from behind a neutral-tint grille cloth. A particularly handsome feature of this cabinet is its white front frame that contrasts with the dark patina of the wood. Impedance of the Model 10 is 8 ohms, and connections are made to it by knurled-nut screw terminals that are marked for polarity.

Response of the Model 10 was found to be among the smoothest yet encountered, with no significant peaks or dips across its range. At the bass end, there was a slight rise just below 100 cps, then a gradual rolloff to below 50 cps. The bass was still clean at 45 cps, and just seemed to drop out at 40 cps. There were virtually no audible signs of distortion or frequency doubling even when the speaker was driven “very hard”—which would confirm the manufacturer’s recommendation for using it with any power amplifier, including those that are rated as high as 60 watts output. Yet, the Model 10 is fairly efficient, and it will produce ample sound when driven with low-powered amplifiers. The midrange was outstandingly smooth. There was a slight rise at about 2 kc and another at about 8 to 9 kc. The extreme high end extended to beyond audiibility, with an apparent slope downward from about 14 kc. The Model 10 was moderately, but not overly, directive at its upper end, and had a smooth white noise pattern, again indicating its very low distortion. Reproducing music, the Model 10 sounded less “boxy” than some systems costing more, and did have an astonishing amount of impact in the bass for a system of its size. Its reproduction in general sounded exemplary, with remarkable transient response that not only helped define musical tones, but also—in our view—tended to mollify a tendency to emphasize record surface noise, such as “ticks,” because of the rise near 9 kc. In any case, the most decisive impression of listening to the Model 10 is one of clean, eminently musical sound—a sound which would be very easy to live with.

The smaller Model 14 uses two 3-inch speakers, both covering the full range, and housed within a ducted enclosure. Also in the enclosure is a special network, used—not for frequency dividing—but for “frequency contouring.” This technique, briefly, regulates the amount of signal voltage entering the speaker’s voice coil according to a predetermined frequency selection. In general, more signal is used for the bass tones (the rate of effective boost is reportedly 4 db per octave). It is, in sum, a kind of “post-equalization” that shapes the signal leaving the amplifier so that the diminutive speakers employed can “make the most of it.” The speakers themselves are specially designed to complement this electronic technique (which would not normally be used with “regular” speakers). They are small for good high-frequency reproduction and dispersion, but—at the same time—are capable of unusually wide excursions for good bass reproduction. Precise control of cone movement is achieved by combining the small diaphragm with an unusually powerful magnet. Ordinarily, such a magnet would increase the damping of the speaker’s movements and thereby tend to restrict its bass output. The “contouring” introduced by the network compensates for this effect and permits the speaker to respond more deeply than it otherwise would. The network and the speaker, thus, are symbiotically related or integrated.

The Model 14 has two input connections. One is a pair of regular 8-ohm speaker terminals, similar to those found on other speakers. These terminals, which feed into the contouring network, are for connection to any high fidelity amplifier in the 12- to 25-watt power class. Additionally, there is a phono jack for connecting to an amplifier that has the contouring built into its own circuit, such as the one found in the KLH-11 phonograph. In this instance, the frequency compensation occurs before the signal enters the speaker system, and so the phono jack bypasses this network in the Model 14 and leads directly to the two speakers. Unless one is adding the Model 14 to an existing KLH-11 phonograph, he would normally use the regular 8-ohm terminals.

While not as full-throated as the Model 10, the response of the Model 14 was, again, exceptionally clean, smooth, and well-balanced. At the bass end, there was a gradual rolloff from just below 100 cps to about 70 cps. Doubling began just below 70 cps. The midrange and highs had no significant peaks or dips and
extended to beyond audibility, with a slope apparent at just below 15 kc. Directivity was moderate but by no means excessive or unpleasant, and most of the clean highs could be perceived well off axis of the system. The Model 14's reproduction of white noise was among the smoothest yet encountered in a speaker of its size, with virtually no trace of harshness.

As with the Model 10, the Model 14—reproducing high quality program sources—provided an honest, musical sound. Despite its relatively modest bass end, it did furnish a sense of the bigness of orchestral sound and, again, because of its fine transient response, enabled listeners to perceive full instrumental timbres, even when played in massed ensemble works. Like the Model 10, the Model 14 was a revealer of surface ticks on records, but again, its excellent transient characteristics did not prolong those noises. In general, the sound from the Model 10 had no trace of "boxiness" and seemed, in comparison with the Model 14, limited mainly by a sense of ultimate bass response; in other words, the impact and heft contributed by the deepest bass tones are suggested rather than actually projected. The Model 10 reaches somewhat deeper into the lowest part of the musical spectrum and can be driven to greater volume by high-powered amplifiers. Either system is well suited for a variety of installation needs in different size rooms, although the Model 10 is—as expected—more at home in a larger room.

Benjamin/ELAC Model 322-D
Stereo Cartridge

AT A GLANCE: The 322-D is the newest model of the ELAC stereo cartridge introduced some time ago. Tests conducted at United States Testing Company, Inc., indicate that the 322's performance has been improved over earlier versions, with noticeably smoother response and better channel separation. Price is $49.50. The cartridge is manufactured by Electrosound (ELAC) in West Germany, by the same company which produces the Miracord automatic turntables. Both products are distributed in the U.S.A. by Benjamin Electronic Sound Corp., 80 Swalm St., Westbury, L.I., N.Y.

IN DETAIL: The ELAC 322—a moving magnet type of cartridge—has a rated compliance of 14 x 10^{-6} cm/dyne, which represents a considerable improvement over that of the older Model 310, which was rated at 5.1 x 10^{-6} cm/dyne. This increased compliance, combined with the 0.52-mil diamond stylus with which the pickup is fitted (and which can be replaced without tools by the owner), is intended to permit better tracing of stereo discs and, at the same time, result in decreased record wear. It should be noted that this stylus is too narrow for best playback of monophonic records, and the owner of a 322 cartridge is advised to get a Model DM-222 stylus ($12.50) for mono use. It can be inserted into the cartridge very easily. Recommended tracking force of the 322 is 1.5 to 3 grams, which would suggest its primary intended use in professional-type tone arms or in the arms of the new, improved changers. The cartridge is supplied with instructions and mounting hardware, including a special bracket which is fastened into the tone arm's shell. The cartridge then clips onto the bracket, and can be removed very easily for inspection or replacement. It will fit any standard tone arm and may be wired to mate with either a three- or four-wire pickup lead system, whichever is found in the tone arm.

U.S.T.C.'s tests were run with a 2.25-gram tracking force, and with the cartridge terminated in the standard 47K-ohm load on each channel. Tracking ability was very good at the 2.25-gram force and, in fact, remained fairly down to a force as low as 0.8-gram. Needle talk and hum sensitivity were both very low.

The response on each channel was measured from 50 cps to 20 kc. Except for the peak at 13 kc, the overall response was quite smooth and much more uniform than that measured in older ELAC pickups. Distortion was found to be low across most of the pickup's range, and the effect—if any—of the 13-kc peak (which showed up on a 1-kc square wave as "ringing") could not be discerned in listening tests using ordinary stereo discs. The output signal level measured (left channel, at 1 kc with a 5 cm/sec peak recorded velocity) was 3.9 millivolts which is adequate to drive any preamp or combi-
HE PUT THE BLOOM ON THE TIGER...

In the hands of Eugene Ormandy, says Virgil Thomson, The Philadelphia Orchestra’s sound has taken on a “wondrous bloom.” Thomson compares The Philadelphia’s precision, grace and agility to a tiger’s. The analogy is apt.

For, as conductor of this brilliant assemblage, Eugene Ormandy has shown himself to be not only a formidable musician, but something of a tiger-tamer.

Since 1936, he has wheedled, whipped, petted and pushed his 105 virtuosos, and today they perform with absolute singleness of mind, spirit and style. They respond with lightning coordination. They give shape to the subtlest nuance of meaning. Moreover, they produce a sound that is unique...opulent, lustrous, dazzling.

These gifts illuminate new and varied recordings by The Philadelphia. The rousing tempi of A Festival of Marches, by composers ranging from Beethoven to Sousa, Verdi to Prokofiev. Or an inspired performance of Brahms’ masterpiece, A German Requiem, sung in English by Phyllis Curtin, Jerome Hines and The Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Whoever the composer, whatever the work, Ormandy and The Philadelphia are never less than perfect.

EUGENE ORMANDY AND THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA ON COLUMBIA MASTERWORKS
No less than six of the most glorious singers of our day are to be heard on a fabulous new Angel disk: Victoria de los Angeles, Maria Callas, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Regine Crespin, Birgit Nilsson and Joan Sutherland. Some of the most beloved, spine-tingling operatic arias of all time are here for your constant pleasure. But this is just an introduction to the Angel sorority of the great sopranos of our time. There are scores of other wondrous Angel albums in which great sopranos are heard at their most thrilling best. Your favorite dealer has them on prominent display this month.

In addition to this new release, Angel album (S) 36135, you may want to hear Schwarzkopf sing in Der Rosenkavalier (S) 3563 D/L, or with Sutherland in Don Giovanni (S) 3605 D/L. And, in Angel album 3508 B/L, Callas sings in Puccini’s Tosca. Victoria de los Angeles is Madame Butterfly in Angel’s (S) 3604 C/L, and she sings Carmen in (S) 3613 C/L. Birgit Nilsson sings Beethoven, Weber and Mozart in Angel album (S) 35719. And Regine Crespin is The Voice of Wagner on (S) 35832.
PARMA, the charming capital of Verdi's native duchy, merits the attention of any traveler wandering off the beaten path in Italy—not only for its food (the justly celebrated Parmesan ham and cheese), its architecture, its unsurpassed collection of paintings by Correggio (that most Mozartian of Renaissance masters), and its ambience of slightly decayed elegance, but also for its abundant musical associations. Parma has been spawning music and musicians for at least four hundred years. Arturo Toscanini was born there and attended its famed conservatory (so did Ildebrando Pizzetti and Renata Tebaldi, among many others), and the audience that fills its beautiful opera house, the Teatro Regio, is reputed to be the most exigent and knowledgeable in all Italy. Soon Parma will have even stronger claims to musical attention—for the town is destined to become for Verdi what Salzburg is for Mozart and Bayreuth for Wagner: a festival town on the order of Salzburg and Bayreuth. As an earnest of future intentions, the Institute is sponsoring a performance on September 26 of Verdi's rarely heard Gerusalemme, conducted by Gianandrea Gavazzeni and directed by Jean Vilar. This will be given in the Teatro Regio, old as opera houses go (it was opened in 1829) but a mere youngster compared to Parma's Teatro Farnese, which—dating from the early seventeenth century—remains the earliest extant theatre designed for mobile scenery. It is here that Mario Medici hopes eventually to stage the festival performances.

The Teatro Farnese, a vast auditorium accommodating at least four thousand spectators, was inaugurated in 1628 with an extravagant spectacle—part opera, part ballet—entitled Mercurio e Marte, for which Monteverdi (summoned to Parma for the occasion) contributed the music. It was used fitfully thereafter until 1732, but the theatre proved too monumental for ordinary entertainments, and its baroque lines went counter to the taste of the time.

The Institute's first major publication appeared in 1960—a three-volume Bulletin devoted principally to Un Ballo in maschera and that period of Verdi's life (roughly from 1857 to 1860) relative to the opera's gestation and production. This was a dazzlingly copious demonstration of what could be accomplished in the way of Verdian exegesis and interpretation: more than 1,800 pages crammed with an enticing variety of articles (each published in Italian, English, and German). Mario Medici, a onetime music critic in Bologna and cofounder of the brilliant (and, alas, short-lived) monthly magazine Melodramma, gave persuasive evidence in the 1960 Bulletin of his critical acumen and editorial skill.

The conception and publication of these three volumes—indeed, the launching of the Institute itself—was largely an act of faith on Maestro Medici's part. In the intervening years that act of faith has begun to engender some heartening consequences. This year the Institute has been granted a "juridical personality"—which means that it is now entitled to a State grant (of roughly $50,000 a year) for the administration of its programs. With this liberal subvention the Institute can now resume publication of its critical edition of Verdi's complete works."

Three volumes dedicated to the study of La Forza del destino will appear this fall (the advance table of contents looks fascinating), and three more on Rigoletto will come out next year. Other special publications—for instance, a chronological index of the complete Verdi correspondence—are also in progress. Very shortly the Institute's headquarters will be transferred from present temporary offices in the Conservatory to one of the largest palazzos in Parma, and there it will be possible to organize the library, the microfilm archive, and the record and tape collection. The Institute intends to amass not only as complete a collection as possible of published Verdi recordings but also of unpublished material—private tapes of broadcast performances, rehearsals by Toscanini and other celebrated Verdi interpreters, etc.

In time, Maestro Medici would like to see Parma become a Verdi festival town on the order of Salzburg and Bayreuth. As an earnest of future intentions, the Institute is sponsoring a performance on September 26 of Verdi's rarely heard Gerusalemme, conducted by Gianandrea Gavazzeni and directed by Jean Vilar. This will be given in the Teatro Regio, old as opera houses go (it was opened in 1829) but a mere youngster compared to Parma's Teatro Farnese, which—dating from the early seventeenth century—remains the earliest extant theatre designed for mobile scenery. It is here that Mario Medici hopes eventually to stage the festival performances.

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No, you're not seeing things.
You're looking at the first rectangular woofer in history.
Listen!
The sound you hear comes provocatively close to the real thing.
The recent revival of interest in the work of Toscanini is a heartening thing to witness, and one can take particular pleasure in observing that it seems in large part due to the fact that the younger generation of music lovers—who have known his artistry solely from recordings currently listed in the Schwann catalogue—are now discovering, by way of the "tape underground" and sundry FM broadcasts, a greatness far more diverse and communicative than they had ever suspected.

As a result of the recirculation of the Maestro’s performances, many of the fallacious notions surrounding him are rapidly disappearing. Others are at least being revised—including, happily, the myth of the relentless machine, the ruthlessly hard-driving automaton. In fact, in his younger days Toscanini was a true romantic, an interpreter who often freely rode the crest of a surging line and was not loath to letting a melody sing with luxuriant indulgence. His deleted 1929 and 1936 recordings with the New York Philharmonic give ample evidence of that, evidence supplemented by other (unreleased) performances from that era. It is true that in later years the conductor was apt to subordinate freedom to discipline and that his style became more economical—perhaps, in a sense, less creative—but to deny the existence of emotion in his music is simply not to hear Toscanini’s art.

For years the public has been hearing about the series of performances Toscanini recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra, but has not been allowed to listen to them. As might be expected, the truth about these discs has been considerably blurred. For one thing (and I speak as one who has heard nearly the entire series—which includes Debussy’s La Mer and Iberia, Tchaikovsky’s Pathétique, Respighi’s Feste Romante, Strauss’s Death and Transfiguration, Berlioz’s Queen Mab, and Mendelssohn’s Midsummer Night’s Dream music, in addition to the Schubert under review), not all of the performances are as consummate as legend would suggest. On the other hand, the over-all sound quality is really far better than tales of mishaps in the electroplating process would lead one to fear. Indeed, for 1941-’42 these reproductions are, without exception, quite remarkably fine. In my opinion the surface noise on even the worst of them is hardly severe enough to preclude their release.

The Schubert Symphony, however, seems to me the best thing in the Philadelphia series, and its release is nothing less than a major event in phonographic history. This vast piece of music always played a central role in the Maestro’s career (in fact, it appeared on his very first orchestral concert, in Turin in 1896). Until now, record collectors have had two Toscanini versions of the work available to them. Both are with the NBC Symphony, one made in February 1947 and one in February 1953, immediately after his final two concert performances of the score. The 1953 version is a fine performance, well recorded, and ranks as an indispensable documentation of his work. The 1947 edition, tensely directed and tightly recorded, can be eliminated from this discussion. More instructive, I believe, is a scrutiny of the 1941 Philadelphia reading now at hand and the 1953 NBC disc, together with an air-check of a 1936 New York Philharmonic concert which I am privileged to have available for reference. These three performances not only give one the opportunity of comparing how three highly individual and equally distinguished ensembles responded to Toscanini’s direction, but they are sufficiently separated in time to provide reasonably reliable evidence with which to document the conductor’s changing attitude towards the music.

The 1936 performance is one in which there is great elasticity of tempo. Details of phrasing are often accompanied by slight changes of speed, slowing, as a rule, on pianos, accelerating on fortissi-
mo. The first movement introduction, for example, gathers immense impetus towards its conclusion and broadens greatly at meas. 77. The speed of the lyrical second subject, characteristically, is slightly slower than that of the stormy first, and there is a violent accelerando at meas. 568 in order to provide headlong momentum for the Più moto coda beginning at meas. 570. All of these details are consistent with what we know from Toscanini's other recorded performances of this era. In the 1936 version, these features are wholly absent: the tempo is slower and more static, the transitions accomplished with far less elaboration. One can argue as to whether the earlier or later reading is more effective, but certainly the earlier one contains more surprises.

The Philadelphia performance on the whole adheres more closely to the 1936 rendition. The tempo adjustments for the first movement introduction, second subject, and coda are present here too. Nevertheless, there is, already in 1941, less tendency to change speeds for the purpose of delineating orchestral tone color. One striking feature, strangely, is confined to the Philadelphia version only. This is the treatment of the end of the Finale. The scanning of phrases in the Philadelphia performance gathers a breath-taking force which is arrested momentarily by a huge holding back on the groups of unison sforzando Cs (meas. 1058 et seq.) only to be unleashed again on the answering fanfares. The entire fourth movement, in fact, differs from the 1936 and 1953 performances which are exceedingly, and rather surprisingly, similar in their faster, bouncing locomotion.

In terms of sonority, the NBC Orchestra produces sounds of the utmost precision and refinement, although the various instrumental choirs seldom blend with the easy melodiousness of the Philharmonic's or Philadelphia's. Everything remains razor-sharp, and just a mile impersonal. (The high clarity of the reproduction tends to throw the brilliant characteristics of the orchestra into even sharper relief.) The Philadelphia ensemble is smoother, more subtle, and less rugged than the Philharmonic's, but the wide color of its tonal palette and the intertwining of its various instrumental sections is much more akin to that orchestra's than to the mirrorklike gloss of the NBC's forces. A prime illustration of the typical quality of each aggregation is provided by the transitional passage, with the French horn against the strings, starting at meas. 145 in the slow movement. In the NBC version, hornist Arthur Berv plays with a "white," almost muted restraint, and the prevailing mood is one of detachment, even aloofness. The most superficial of comparisons will reveal the greater warmth and golden tonal glow of Bruno Jaenicke's playing in the 1936 Philharmonic performance. Mason Jones, the Philadelphia soloist, is no less warm than Mr. Jaenicke, but far more campus in his treatment of the passage, and in the Philadelphia performance the strings make more of the throbbing counterdialogue to the horn's insistent statement. The Philadelphia execution gives the effect of a silvery moon shining over a serene lake. It is a beautiful effect, and one which Furtwängler also evoked. But while the German conductor consistently sacrificed cohesion for beauty of this sort, in the Toscanini-Philadelphia recording such incidental niceties are incorporated into a total design of unfailing plasticity and infallible "rightness." Toscanini's 1936 reading is sometimes a shade too loose, that of 1953 too studied; the 1941 performance strikes the perfect mean. I think, indeed, that it is the finest statement of this music ever to reach records.

Much interest, of course, revolves around the reprocessed sound. As I mentioned above, the Philadelphia series as a whole is much better than we had reason to anticipate. The present disc bears comparison nobly with more modern recordings of the Symphony. There is an occasional trace of "grit" or background noise, but for the most part the sonics are vivid and well balanced. Indeed, I can well understand why many people will actually prefer it to the more self-consciously brassy impact of the 1953 reproduction: the music is more atmospheric, more Schubertian.

I cannot praise this masterpiece of interpretation too highly. If this release, elegantly packaged in the Soria series, has the reception it so obviously deserves, perhaps in time we will also get the complete Berlioz Romeo and Juliet, the sublime Verdi Requiem and Beethoven Missa Solemnis from 1940 (with soloists Milanov, Castagna, Bjoerling, Moscona, and Kipnis), the eloquent New York Philharmonic Beethoven Fifth (1933, but very recently reproduced), the Sibelius Second and Fourth Symphonies, and a representative Brahms Third.

In the meantime (before greed overtakes me completely!), a grateful thanks to RCA Victor and Walter Toscanini for a job superlatively well done.

SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 9, in C ("The Great")

Philadelphia Orchestra, Arturo Toscanini, cond.
- RCA Victor LD 2663. LP. $5.98.

by Eric Salzman

A New Oedipus Rex Brings More of Stravinsky's Stravinsky

An unmistakable accent...

It is really astonishing to realize how much of Stravinsky's music comes out of the theatre or is closely related to theatrical-dramatic experience. There are, of course, the ballets—a dozen or so from Firebird to Agon. There are two full-fledged operas, The Nightingale and The Rake's Progress, and two chamber operas, Mavra and Renard. Closely related to the last-named are the special dramatic works that mingle song, speech, mime, and dance—L'Histoire du Soldat, Les Noces, Perséphone, The Flood. To this typically Stravinskian kind of theatre Oedipus Rex, described as an "operatorario," is closely related, although its static, monumental character also links it up with another group of works of a semidramatic character, the big religious vocal pieces—Symphony of Psalms, the Mass, Canticum Sacrum, Threni, and, in a sense, the new Abraham and Isaac.

Oedipus was written in 1926 and 1927 to a text of Jean Cocteau "after Sophocles." The idea is that of a mythic-rhinal drama with the dramatic and theatrical content utterly conventionalized
and reduced to a bare narrative structure. Everything is translated into Latin except the words of the narrator, a kind of pitchman’s spiel recounting the wondrous and tragic events in the vernacular. The simplest possible dictum is everywhere employed, and this laconic declamation is organized into blocked-out set speeches and choruses. The narrator stands outside of the scene and is dressed in evening clothes. The characters of the drama, although they should be costumed and masked, have neither individuality nor power to act. They are not even symbolic in the conventional sense but are, rather, merely abstracted and particular manifestations of a human condition. There is no motion and no action because whatever transpires is preordained; all that is necessary is to reveal it.

Stravinsky responds perfectly to the implications of all this. If there is no action on the stage, then the music takes up the functions of rhetorical gesture. Almost every gesture—like the myth itself—is a familiar one; we recognize the figures of musical speech without difficulty. This is assertive and prideful music (why not? Stravinsky knows what hubris means) and it constantly suggests search and exploration without ever losing its sense of certainty. Certainly these are characteristics of musical thought consonant with the Oedipus legend.

Because the musical ideas themselves derive from preexisting gestures, Stravinsky need not become involved at all in the problem of getting music to “express” something specific. The very conventionality of the figures (Creon’s trombone triad tune, the Verdiana in Jocasta’s aria and the following duet with Oedipus, the grand opera Gloria music and so forth) suggests a quality of detachment and of generalized statement; but these materials and inventions also gain a new kind of expressivity through their context. Context (what Stravinsky himself calls “manner”) is everything, and it is this context, this musical environment, that gives the familiar gestures their new and powerful meaning. When this is understood, one suddenly realizes that the often noted grandeur and marble monumentality are really the least of it; they also are conventionalized gestures—or rather the sum of known and borrowed gestures. What is important and new and striking and powerful is the controlled technique of reinterpreting conventional gestures in new and invented ways, so that even the most trivial material becomes part of a true, “sublime,” and terrifying inevitability.

A performance of Oedipus should reinforce this conception; in a sense, the players and singers must also put on musical masks. While the principals here, George Shirley and Shirley Verrett, both have voices that are almost too warm, rich, and personal for the abstractions they must represent, certainly their artistic realizations are first-rate, and the chorus and orchestra are skilled and responsive. Most important, however, is the fact that this is the composer’s own realization of the work.

The older Stravinsky recording of Oedipus, long since vanished, offered Cocteau himself reading the original French narration, but it is otherwise superseded by this new version. The major competition to the present disc is the recent Angel performance from England with Colin Davis conducting a capable group of performing forces. In general, the orchestral and choral work there is smoother and more polished than on the recording at hand, and the Angel sound is richer and warmer. I myself feel that Columbia’s drier, closer sound is perhaps more appropriate to the music; and while many listeners will be impressed by Ralph Richardson’s narrating for Angel, John Westbrook’s stiff, pompous reading seems to me just exactly to the point. And, of course, Stravinsky’s own reading of his music has a special intensity and accent which is unmistakable; one would opt for it even without knowing the conductor’s name.

STRAVINSKY: Oedipus Rex

John Westbrook, narrator; Shirley Verrett (ms), Jocasta; George Shirley (t), Oedipus; Loren Driscoll (t), Shepherd; Donald Gramm (b), Creon; John Reardon (b), Messenger; Charles Watson (b), Tiarios; Chorus and Orchestra of the Opera Society of Washington, Igor Stravinsky, cond.

COLUMBIA ML 5872. LP. $4.98.
COLUMBIA MS 6472. SD. $5.98.

"The Badmen"—Fable Bows to Fact

by O. B. Brumell

The myth of the American West—the brawling nineteenth-century frontier—seems to have caught the imagination of the entire world. In Paris, every Sunday in good weather, a group of sober Frenchmen don cowboy garb, mount the Gallic equivalent of brandy and empty solemnly through the Bois de Boulogne. In Budapest, chic young Communists favor tight, low-slung blue jeans. Any cobbler in Hong Kong can knock out a pair of Texas boots. And week after week, the facts are tall and true across television screens. What matter that the nocturnal activities of Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp in Dodge City won them the title of “the fighting pimps,” that Wild Bill Hickok had a penchant for shooting unarmed men in the back, that Calamity Jane was a sordid whore? The fables have routed the facts.

Yet truth occasionally fights a rear-guard action, and here in Columbia Records Legacy Collection is mounted a brilliant—indeed an awesome—counter-attack on the gunmen and their silly legends. In a superb marriage of song and story, pictures and text, this two-record album presents a haunting glimpse of the American past. This is history unfolded in the most graphic form.

On one disc, a battery of top-drawer folk singers, backed by two guitarists, imparts sparkling life to the ballads spawned by stories of Billy the Kid, Sam Bass, Cole Younger, et al. The songs are vital and often moving. They are also a sobering lesson in the evolution of folklore, for few of them relate in any way to reality. The murderous, heartless Confederate guerrilla Quantrill, for example, is enshrined as a dashing Robin Hood—even though his song memorializes his slaughter of almost two hundred hapless citizens of Lawrence, Kansas. The story is exquisitely sung in Spanish and English by Jacques Menahem and Carolyn Hester, does something of the true character of the hero emerge. After justifiably gunning down a brace of Texas sheriffs in 1901, Gregorio Cortez Lira

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managed to elude a massive manhunt for ten days and almost six hundred miles. The border corrido, faintly moaning, recalls the dignity and ingenuity of one Mexican who, if he didn't win, at least made a stand. Also bearing some relation to the facts is Woody Guthrie's slyly cynical Belle Starr, in which the amorous proclivities of that gun-slinging harridan are catalogued in true, if incomplete, detail. Incidentally, Belle is the reputed author of My Love Is A Rider, perhaps the most dearly lyrical ballad in the present collection.

The second record, a documentary of enormous significance, contains four interviews. Sophie Poe, whose late husband Sheriff John Poe was with Pat Garrett when he killed Billy the Kid in 1881, provides every detail of the grisly episode—even to describing the candles that sorrowing Mexicans placed around the outlaw's laid-out body. Billy, it seems—and Mrs. Poe inadvertently says the only good word I have ever heard uttered on behalf of that vicious adenoidal youth—was in the habit of sharing with Mexicans the loot he reaped from "white people."

Author Homer Croy, who grew up in the shadow of the Janes farm in Maryville, tells us how he knew the family well, not only reminisces about America's most famous outlaw, Jesse James, but offers an impassioned rationale for Jesse's sins. (They were, by the way, legion.) Zoe Tlghman, widow of Dodge City Mayor Bill Tlghman, gives some fascinating, first-hand insights into the life of an honest, fearless lawman in the West's wildest town.

The pièce de résistance, however, is a long narration by George Bolds—taped in 1953 when he was a very lucid, witty eighty-nine—of his youth in Dodge City with Masterson, Earp, and Tlghman. Bolds eventually fired a sixgun in anger more than once and also caught a generous dose of lead, but his recollections of his first "green youth" days preserve the wonder of a perceptive boy face to face with his heroes. His anecdotes are amusing, incisive, and pointed. Two of the best describe how clever outlaws twice conned the young Bolds out of his gun. Every lusty word re-creates that lost era.

A handsome, outszie book accompanies the album. Authoritative, zestful essays, pictures of the badmen, their press clippings, and eyewitness accounts of their deeds and the old desperadoes in true perspective. On every count, this is an instructive, entertaining set. A brilliant exploitation of the enormous documentary potential of the phonograph, it can be called, and I do not use the term lightly, an unqualified triumph of the recording art.

THE BADMEN


- COLUMBIA L2L 101I. Two LP. $10.00.
- COLUMBIA L2S 1202. Two SD. $11.00.

BACH: Cantata No. 78, Jesu, der du meine Seele; Magnificat in D, S. 243

Ursula Buckel, soprano, John van Kesteren, tenor, Khieth Engen, bass, Soloists Ensemble of the Bach Festival Ansbach, (in the Cantatu); Maria Städer, soprano, Ernst Höffiger, tenor, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone, Munich Bach Orchestra (in the Magnificat); Hertha Töpper, contralto, Munich Bach Choir, Karl Richter, cond. (in both).

- ARCHIVE ARC 3197. LP. $5.98.
- ARCHIVE ARC 73197. SD. $6.98.

A magnificent coupling. The Cantata has a highly chromatic and expressive opening chorus and a delightful duet among its number. The two ladies do the duet nicely—Miss Töpper, indeed, is steadier here than I have ever heard her. Van Kesteren slips into falsetto for some of the high notes in his recitative but avoids this in his aria; and Engen gets considerable feeling into his accompanied recitative and aria. In the quality of the sound as well as in the general quality of the performance, this version of the Cantata is, I think, superior to the only other available edition, on Vanguard.

The great Magnificat is given a performance that is very fine in some respects. Miss Töpper is at the top of her form here too, singing the long phrases of "Esurientes" without a break. Miss Städer and Fischer-Dieskau turn in the first-class work they have led us to expect of them, and Richter has added one or two telling touches, like the basso in the continuo in the "Esurientes." But in other respects the performance is less impressive. The chorus aspires its vowels in lively passages, a German trait that Quantz complained about more than two centuries ago, and so does the otherwise excellent Höffiger in "Deposita." This aria is neither as slashing nor as dramatic as in some other recordings. Finally, the first trumpet, well played, is permitted at times to drown out most of the other instruments. The Bernstein recording on Columbia is in general a more satisfactory performance.

BACH: Sonatas for Flute and Harpsichord, S. 1020, 1030-32; for Flute and Continuo; S. 1033-35; for Unaccompanied Flute, S. 1013

Jean-Pierre Rampal, flute; Robert Veyron-Lacroix, harpsichord; Jean Huschot, cello.

- EPIC SC 6045. Two LP. $9.98.
- EPIC BSC 145. Two SD. $11.98.

Some years ago London Records brought out a set of these works recorded by the same artists for Ducretet-Thomson. It was an excellent set, marred only by a bit of imbalance here and there. The present recording is free from any such defect. Rampal plays with much Pyrrhic heroism, but he seems never to have to try to breathe, and he negotiates the trickiest passages with no perceptible effort. Veyron-Lacroix is a worthy partner. If he is responsible for the continuo realizations in S. 1033 through 1035, he should also be credited with considerable imagination and good taste. Only in the Presto and Allegro of the C major Sonata, S. 1033, did the harpsichord give me the impression of being a little too busy. Together the two artists make a fine team, thoroughly at home in the Bach style. Except for a sudden slowing up and softening for no perceptible reason twice in the Andante of the sonata in B flat, and a big retard at the end of the Sonatina of S. 1031, the performances seem to me entirely convincing. From the standpoint of performance this one seems to me inferior only to the Wunder-Malcolm recording.

Beethoven: Quartet for Piano and Strings, No. 4, in E flat, Op. 76


Beethoven: Symphony No. 5, in C minor, Op. 67


- COLUMBIA ML 5868. LP. $4.98.
- COLUMBIA MS 6468. SD. $5.98.

On November 14, 1954, Leonard Bernstein first gave us his telecast on Beethoven's alternate sketches for the first movement of his Symphony No. 5. It remains one of his best programs. Something edited to accord with the lack of the visual element, the Bernstein talk became a partner for the Bruckner-Walter-New York Philharmonic recording of the score on Columbia CL 918. Now it appears as a seven-inch LP accompanying a Bernstein reading of the score of the rare complete performances [in which all repeats are observed].

The result is a very praiseworthy package. Not even Walter observed all those repeats when he made the stereo version he regarded as the definitive documentation of his performance of the work. And quite apart from that double busing, there has been a surprising lack of really satisfactory editions of this score from the start of the stereo era. In my opinion at least, the Beethoven Fifth wants some level of phrase, a touch of rhetoric, and a sense of mastery. Bernstein takes this approach, and I find the result rather dazzlingly convincing. Unlike many German conductors who strive for these effects. Bernstein never boggs down. The line is always firm, the meter clear, and the thrust of...
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the phrase evident. (There are some fresh scissions of meter too, especially in the opening bars of the Scherzo; they invite study.) I would like to see the slow movement a little slower, but not at the cost of any soggy passages, and Bernstein's course is the wiser one. The finale (that difficult and somewhat-looked-at but is really telling) carries a particularly strong sense of resolution.

The recording makes use of fairly long reverberation time, but it is handled with taste, and does not give the ensemble to any great degree. Mono and stereo versions are equally good in their respective media. In short, this is as attractive a Beethoven Fifth as you can buy today.

R.C.M.

**BRAHMS: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, in D, Op. 77**  
Zino Francescatti, violin; New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, cond.  
- **COLUMBIA ML 5871. LP. $4.98.**  
- **COLUMBIA MS 6471. SD. $5.98.**

This performance of the Brahms Violin Concerto has temperament, virtuosity, and bite. All of it is not the kind I would care to own. Francescatti, alas, seems to have become enamored of his fiddling; and while that is understandable—his execution is truly elegant—there are times when Brahms asks that the soloist play roughly, indeed, unviolinishly. This, Francescatti (along with Heifetz, Milstein, Kogan, Szeryng, Stern, and any number of virtuosos) is often unwilling to do. Take, for example, those awkwardly divided phrases which begin at mes’s 343 in the first movement development: played as Brahms instructed, these sequences create a mounting sense of excitement leading up to the recapitulation section. To be sure, it is a strain on the performer to sustain these phrases which scan intervals larger than an octave. Furthermore, the difficulty is increased because the phrases run counter to the bar line. Faithful execution of what Brahms wrote here would probably put them in strident tones, but the content of the music would soar.

Szegedi is the only artist to have recorded the Concerto who seems adventurous enough to insistently self-effacing to take the risk. Naturally, his performance sounds rough: he is bowing and fingering against the violins grain. What the unwary listener does not realize is that softer-sounding soloists are taking the easy way out (by shifting the division of these phrases so that they fall effortlessly).

There are, of course, many places in the music where the performer can sound "beautiful" and still be correct. Francescatti's version is undeniably a good one and can be confidently recommended to lovers of lucious fiddling (as can the editions by Szeryng, Milstein, and Heifetz, not to mention the deleted discs by Kogan/Kondrashin and Grumiaux). If, however, you want the largest measure of Brahmsian fire, Szegedi's version is the clear choice, distantly followed by the roughhewn but strong-minded Ostrakh/Klemperer collaboration.

Bernstein leads with a good deal of vitality and a firm sense of rhythm. The Philharmonic's strings, however, sound sloppy and opaque. Columbia's reproduction is bright and well balanced. H.G.

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**BRAHMS: Liebeslieder Waltzer, Op. 52**  
†Schumann: Spanische Liebes-Lieder, Op. 138

Veronica Tyler, soprano; Regina Sfatay, mezzo; Charles Bressler, tenor; John Holiday, baritone; (in the Brahms); Lois Marshall, soprano; Regina Sfatay, mezzo; Leopold Simoneau, tenor; William Farfel, baritone (in the Schumann); Arthur Golub and Robert Fizdale, pianos.  
- **COLUMBIA ML 5861. LP. $4.98.**  
- **COLUMBIA MS 6461. SD. $5.98.**

With one excellent version of the Brahms (with vocalists Benita Valente, Marlena Kleinmnn, Wayne Conner. Martial Singer, and pianists Rudolf Serkin and Leon Fleisher) already at its credit, Columbia has gone and issued another which is even better. Indeed, scarcely anything in the present performance—ideally lively, expressively passionate and beautifully organized vocally—could be improved upon.

The close-to-recorded sound is a decided asset too; the four vocalists emerge with lucid clarity. (the stereo places two of the singers in one channel, the other two on the opposite side, thereby creating some choice antiphonal effects) and the soundness which slightly blemished the earlier Columbia disc (made under more improvised conditions at Serkin's music settlement in Marlboro, Vermont) is quite lacking. I would place the present edition above a very good one by a group of British singers and Vronsky and Babin on the Capitol label. The present team seems just a shade more forthright and emotionally involved.

The Schumann cycle, which receives its initial recorded performance on the overside of this disc, is a lovely work, comparable to the Brahms in every way. Although both composers use individual singers for some of the songs, I feel one could say that Schumann's narrative is the more intimate and personal, depending, as it does, on individual voices primarily. As in the Brahms, the performance is all that one could want, and the recorded sound here too is superbly realistic. H.G.

**BRAHMS: Quintet for Piano and Strings, in F minor, Op. 34**  
Leon Fleisher, piano; Juilliard String Quartet.  
- **EPIC LC 3865. LP. $4.98.**  
- **EPIC BC 1265. SD. $5.98.**

This is definitely "jet age" music making. Fleisher and the Juilliard ensemble are of that new breed of players who feel that expansiveness and sentiment should be minimized, and their reading here is about as direct and tightly knit as possible. All of the complex rhythmic patterns emerge with awesone technical precision and razor-sharp clarity; indeed, even the slow movement and the poco sostenuto introduction to the finale are kept moving along with characteristic liveness.

If you require emotional warmth in your Brahms, you will undoubtedly find the present performance rather severe of not dry at all. Taken on its own terms, however, it is superbly judged, and magnificently integrated as ensemble playing.

There are advantages as well as liabilities with an approach such as this. For one thing, the formal structure of the music is apt to emerge with greater clarity. It is less complicated and therefore more leisurely rendition. Also, a kinetic reading tends to eliminate the occasional flabbiness of Brahms' writing. Both things happen in the present version: rubato is used sparingly—and usually only at important structural joints in the music—while the ensemble tone, albeit a trifle slick and lacking in nuances, is presented to classical proportions. Solo bits, though marvelously well played, are always subordinate to the overall look. There is absolutely no lingering over beautiful melodies here. Significant motifs are always brought to the foreground so that the structural importance can be readily discerned.

Everything considered, this seems to me the most satisfactory LP recording of the Quintet. Richter and the Borodin Quartet (Artia-MK) project a higher emotional temperature, but at the expense of cumulative impact. The aging Capo-Budapest (Columbia) is a fine reading, without any particular interpretative Achilles' heel, but it lacks the verve and dynamism of the Fleisher-Juilliard combination. Eva Barathov (DGG) fails to match the warmth and flow of the Janacek Quartet's playing, and any rate this disc is temporarily out of the catalogue. Denius-Vienna Konzerthaus (Westminster—out-of-print but announced for reissue as the goes to a previously played version but stolid and unadventurous. To the other merits of the new Epic disc can be added brilliantly lifelike reproduction. H.G.

**CHANLER: The Pot of Fat**  
Dixie Stewart, soprano; Arthur Burrows, baritone; Bruce Abel, baritone; CRI Chamber Orchestra, Jorge Mester, cond.  
- **COMPOSERS RECORDINGS CRI 162. LP. $5.95.**

Cat marries mouse. Mouse finds pot of fat and stashes it away against hard times. Cat keeps going to mysterious champagne parties for new-born Max and Persian relatives. Comes winter. Mouse finds pot of fat kaput. Cat has final meal: squeal, squeak, squeal. Which is the outline of Theodore Chanler's chamber opera, to a text by his sister, Hester Pickman, after a Grimm fairy tale. It may appear silly, but it isn't. The score is one of the most delightfully written of all American operas, with a genuine vocal line, some exceedingly ingenious writing for the characters, and—most unusual of all for an American work in this genre—a professional's grace in the vocal give-and-take between the characters. All the characters are real, too. I suppose it would be zoologically incorrect to say that Cat is a natural-born SOB, but he is as close to

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**Fleisher: Brahms for the jet age.**

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CIRCLE 12 ON READER-SERVICE CARD

October 1963

133
it as a cat can come. Mouse is a truly good wife to him—and also a bit of a fool, in nary a face in gaps and makes trios where only ducts could otherwise exist.

No insconsiderable part of the charm of this prediction lies in its elegant performance. There may be a bit of wobble in Dixie Stewart's voice, but she is such a sweet, nice, stupid, forgiving mouse that doesn't knock Arthur Burrows is the last yowl in vocal felines, and Bruce Abel—who is billed as a baritone but sounds like a tenor most of the time—is that oddly gifted, who cannot sing an unmusical phrase. Mester and the orchestra are full partners in the recording, and the result is excellent.

DEBUSSY: La Mer
†Ravel: Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2; Pavane pour une infante défunte
Cleveland Orchestra, George Szell, cond.
• Epic LC 3863. LP. $4.98.
• Epic BC 1263. SD. $5.98.

Szell's La Mer is soundly conceived, tastily directed, and superbly played. The scoring is piquant and sharp, and he obviously concurs with the Toscanini principle that whatever is in the score must be heard. No hazy impressionistic or romantic approach is used. Similarly gifted material in a masterful and, occasionally, a razor-sharp way. (The violins, in particular, sound like they were bowing with military precision—to judge from the sharply defined and rather unfwalking sound they produce.) In the main, though, this is not a slavish or unpoetic reading. Within the tightly organized, forward-pressing framework, there is considerable interplay of light and dark sonority and there is some striking phrasing. In fact, to my mind this is the finest standard of the music to be had in stereo, and, indeed, I find that I prefer it to the 1950 monophonic record by Toscanini. The Cleveland ensemble continues to do wonderful things in the two Ravel works overside, but here Szell is too black in treatment of the music. The "Daybreak" section of Daphnis et Chloé arrives with jet streamers. This is a Shostakovich passage. Here, to judge from the sharply defined and rather unfwalking sound they produce. In the main, though, this is not a slavish or unpoetic reading. Within the tightly organized, forward-pressing framework, there is considerable interplay of light and dark sonority and there is some striking phrasing. In fact, to my mind this is the finest standard of the music to be had in stereo, and, indeed, I find that I prefer it to the 1950 monophonic record by Toscanini.

The Haydn Sonata is played lucidly, with ideal balance between form and content. Richter's bowing with the essentially galant framework of the piece, and his crisp but always singing fingerwork is a constant delight. The sound is also soberly and faultlessly, yet by exquisitely transparent and realistic. Only the Prokofiev loses quality, but the deterioration is hardly serious. The few audience noises heard during the music are actually more obtrusive than the shuffling and throat-clearing between selections. I find a trace more vividity in the Prokofiev, but the difference between the two formats is not significant. H.G.


GIBBON: Excerpts from the Short Service—See Monteverdi: Missa a 4 voci da cappella


HAUDN, MICHAEL: Divertimento in G—See Mozart: Divertimento No. 15, in B flat, K. 287.

MONTEVERDI: Missa a 4 voci da cappella
†Gibbons: Excerpts from the Short Service

The Old North Singers, John Fesperman, cond.
• Cambridge CRM 415. LP. $4.98.
• Cambridge CRS 1415. SD. $5.98.

Although the Monteverdi Mass is first published in 1610, seven years after the master's death, it is in the late sixteenth-century style of flowing polyphony with only occasional chordal passages. The line of curve-expressiveness, and they are smoothly joined together. They are also love music that avoids the drama and passion of Monteverdi's operas and madrigals but seems admirably suited to its purpose. Equally functional, just as conservative, and almost as beautiful are the four movements—Te Deum, Benedictus, Magnificat, and Nunc dimittis—from the first of the two Services by Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625). This is considerably more chordal than the Monteverdi, but there is enough of the bel canto to make this a good thing lively. The chorus sings with flexibility and good tone. Care has been taken to achieve proper balances—the tenors, for example, are sometimes very prominent—but more could have been done, to bring up the altos and to keep the sopranos from ruling the roost. Clearer projection of the affinals than we have helped, too, particularly in the Gibbons. No texts are supplied. The sound, except in the matter of balance, is good in both versions. N.B.

MOZART: Concertos for Piano and Orchestra: No. 22, in E flat, K. 482; No. 6, in B flat, K. 238

Geza Anda, piano; Camerata Academicia of the Salzburg Mozarteum, Geza Anda, cond.
• Deutche Grammophon LPM 18824. LP. $5.98.
• Deutche Grammophon SLP 138824. SD. $6.98.

The special qualities required to do justice to the Mozart piano concertos are here in abundance. Insight into the musical structure, passion well controlled but not hidden, the right apposition of tenderness and strength, are present, as are singing tone, a faultless technique, and lovely sound. The profound tragedy of the great slow movement of K. 482 is conveyed with its full poignancy, and the first and last movements lead up to and away from this peak with proper breadth. Anda is as proficient a conductor here as he is a pianist. There are a few flyspecks: moments when the pianos could be softer, when the soloist covers an important motif in the orchestra, but these are rare. I know of no better full round version of this masterpiece on records. Anda has no competition at all with respect to K. 238. It is good to have that attractive little work restored to the catalogue in so excellent a performance and recording. N.B.

MOZART: Divertimento No. 15, in B flat, K. 287
†Haydn, Michael: Divertimento in G

Members of the Vienna Octet.
• London CM 9352. LP. $4.98.
• London CS 6352. SD. $5.98.

Although the Mozart is scored for strings and two horns, it features the first violin

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are in the composer's richest, most flowing, flexible style; nothing startling, but everything warm and attractively in place. The busy last movement strikes me as a good deal weaker in conception and realization. Doktor is a superb soloist and the orchestra excels in ensemble.

The Symphony by Hall Overton is an interesting work by a talented composer. It uses a range of striking material built up in a kind of arch form which takes its shape from rhythmic, chordal, and accessional impulses rather than from melodic, thematic ideas as such. It contains many imaginative touches along with a few old and familiar problems of coherency. The orchestra has a few troubles here—admittedly this is much more difficult music to play than the Piston. At any rate the over-all result is communicative, and the recorded sound is, if not exceptional, good enough.

PROKOFIEV: Suggestion diahloique, Op. 4, No. 4—See Debussy: Preludes, Book I.

PUGGINI: Tosca

Leontyne Price (s.), Florida Tosca; Herbert Weiss (b. soprano), Shepherd Boy; Giuseppe di Stefano (t.), Mario Cavaradossi; Piero de Palma (t.), Spoletta; Giuseppe Taddei (b.); Baron Scarpia; Ferrucio Corena (b.s.), Sacristan; Leonardo Monreale (bs.), Sciarrone; Alfredo Mariotti (bs.), Jailer, Vienna State Opera Chorus, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan, cond.

* RCA Victor LD 7022, Two LP, $9.96.
* RCA Victor LDS 7022, Two SD, $11.96.

This is one of the better Tosca in the catalogues, and surely preferable to the heavy-handed London performance, which is the only other stereo version.

It will come as no surprise to learn that von Karajan and his orchestra produce some splendid sound and turn up some interesting detail. There is useful woodwind power in the statement of the opening chords, and the whole sequence at the beginning of Act III—the breaking of dawn and the orchestra playing of "Pavarolla"—is so gorgeous that I have gone back to it several times already. Yet I wonder if Fosco should sound quite this neatly and precisely articulated, and I wonder if the temps should be as deliberate as they are—there are many points where it seems to me that the singers are held to a pace which regards its urgency and point. The Tosca/Scarpia dialogue in Act I is an excellent place to check on this—the whole scene strikes me as too slow. On the whole, the De Sabata reading on the Angel set still seems to me almost ideal—strongly structured and controlled but violently inflected and rapidly moving.

Two of the three principals stand up very well to the competition. Price is in good form, producing much round, full-bodied tone and a sense of the believable characterization. She is especially compelling in some of the lighter moments, as with her splendidly free and easy handling of the "mi cresso satinata..." scene. Callas grander of temperament (though not as lovely of voice as Tebaldi heard recently). But of course one cannot have all the virtues in one singer, and there are places where Price is the best of the lot.

Taddei must be thought of as the finest of the recorded Scarpia. He is becoming increasingly unsteady on top, but that matters only once or twice in this role, which does not lie high. Taddei's baritone has the power and the dark color needed, and an exciting open roll and fairness in the upper-middle range. In welcome contrast to many Scarpia, he is able to sing suavely and beautifully, though his voice can turn to a cutting snarl if his personality requires it. I do wish he would tone down the nastiness in Act I; one of the points about this character, I believe, is that he is entirely winning in his power to terrify. A more controlled interpretation of the first act would lend extra impact to Taddei's altogether admirable performance of the second, where Scarpia flies into uncontrollable rages at not being able to bend people to his will. This reservation aside, Taddei's is a very imposing performance.

Alas, there is the tenor to consider. The basically beautiful quality of Di Stefano's voice can answer a few questions about where she is going, says "Enough of this love-making!" Despite the ensemble's small size, the polyphony is not as clear as it should be. Latin texts and English translations are provided. N.B.

PISTON: Concerto for Viola and Orchestra

†Overton: Symphony No. 2, in One Movement

Paul Doktor, viola; Louisville Orchestra, Robert Whitney, cond.

* LOUISVILLE LOU 633, LP, $7.95.

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natural on “Armonie di conti diffond-eme” in Act II takes my nomination for the most disastrous single tone recorded by a major singer.

For the first-rate Spoletta, and Carlo Cava a better than usual Angelotti. Corena's Sacristan has succumbed so completely to traditional buffo jeryy as to be no longer enjoyable, even though the basic condition.

In sum, a Tosca to be seriously considered if one's chief interest does not lie in which case Givi, Bjoerling, the younger Di Stefano of the Angel set, and even Campora must be given preference.

This is a Soria Series production with a big hand-bound booklet containing libretto, notes, photos, set and costume reproductions, and so forth. The sound is a little overbright and brassy; though the recording was a Gallia Paray (in stereo) edition from Mercury, it is not up to the level established by the better London recordings. There are some fine effects with the bells in Act I (Tosca's tormented Satan), and no shots (it you like real cannon shots).

RAVEL: Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2; Pauvse pour une infaite déjante — See Debussy: La Mer.

SAINT-SAENS: Symphony No. 3, in C minor, Op. 78
E. Power Biggs, organ; Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, cond.

COLUMBIA ML 5869. LP. $4.98.

COLUMBIA MS 6469. SD. $5.98.

Ormandy and Biggs have waited too long to issue this strong and placement-in-1958 mono version, for some years the most popular choice, of the Organ Symphony. Now that we have a diversified organ sound from Gallia Paray's Dupré edition from Mercury, the grandiloquently expansive one by Munch and Zankowich for RCA Victor, the poetic "Toccata" and "Air sur le Mai" by Messiaen (for London), the Ormandy/Biggs treatment tends to seem self-consciously deliberate, suave, and contrived. The Philarmonia Orchestra's tonally pinched, course; the recording ultrabright, with less extreme spread and reverberation than RCA Victor's but apparently more of the clarity I have long admired in my view. Perhaps the handling of tonal prominence to the organ but also contributing an unnatural edginess to the Philharmonic strings.

The French atmosphere, high-register, passages. There are many impressive moments here, but except to Ormandy/Biggs devotees this version is likely to seem more rhetorical, less idiomatic, and less convincing than its rivals. R.D.D.

Mieczyslaw Horszowski, piano; Julius Levine, bass; members of the Budapest String Quartet.

COLUMBIA ML 5873. LP. $4.98.

COLUMBIA MS 6473. SD. $5.98.

As a bargain package this release can hardly be bettered. The playing time runs to an hour, and both works are beautifully set forth with the aural splendor of our number-one chamber music group. The Beethoven exists in an alternate form for piano and wind instruments, and I always have thought that the thematic material fitted winds better than strings; but when it is heard played as well as it here, there is no real grounds for complaint.

The Trout, of course, is Schubert's most popular chamber music. Generally it's sentimentalized. This instance it's performed with feeling—there's a nice warm, romantic aura about it all—but artistic discipline keeps the structure intact and the edginess under control. I like the results, and I am sure other listeners will too. R.C.M.

SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 9, in C ("The Great")
Philadelphia Orchestra, Arturo Toscanini, cond.

For a feature review of this recording, see page 125.

SCHUMANN: Dichterliebe, Op. 48
Franz Schubert: Die schöne Müllerin

Charles Panzéra, baritone; Alfred Cortot, piano (in the Schumann); Magda Street, Panzéra-Bailot, piano (in the Fauré).

PATHE FALP 50008. LP. $5.98.

These re-releases of two famous recordings by the eminent French baritone date from the 1930s and sound good for their age. The Dichterliebe was in the LP catalogue a time, backed by Aksel Schjat's version of the same cycle; I believe this is the first microphone of the Fauré performance.

Panzéra had a very high reputation as a Lieder singer, and his singing of the Schumann cycle has long admired. But it is the Fauré that makes the record desirable; from the opening of the first song, Une Sainte en son autel, he sings with a legato naturalness that, to my ears, eludes him in the German songs. Panzéra's voice, as heard on recordings, is warm, sturdy, very well controlled, but less lacking in punch—when sustained strength is called for, it occasionally sounds like the opening of the Fauré cycle is straightforward. There is ample attention to nuance, but less fussiness, less use of mezzo voce than in Souray's. The Souray's is by no means as scenic as Epic. It seems to me that Panzéra pulls the whole opus together better than Souray, and I should think his interpretation acceptable choice. The Souray disc, though, offers a number of other fine Fauré pieces, and for this reason those who have a satisfying Dichterliebe might well pick Souray's rendition of the French songs.

As I have already implied, I don't much care for the Panzéra/Cortot Dichterliebe. I have continued exposure to it might change my view. Certainly, there are fine things about it. I can't remember hearing any other performance of this song so clearly marked in In Rhein, im heiligen Strone, and the last two songs (Aus alten Mächten and Die alte, hösen Lieder) are both extremely good. And Cortot has wonderful moments, particularly where crispness and fast movement are called for, as in Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen. But Panzéra's treatment of the more lyrical songs strikes me as choppy, as if he were taking too much care to " speak" each word on the note, and not enough in translated into phrases and the phrases into songs. He takes breaths in awfully strange places (just before "trachten" in Ich will meine Selle versuchen, for instance, distinctly dissecting what is obviously a single phrase), and even cheats on note values. Cortot frequently stretches the rhythmic frame to the breaking point, too. Most of these details are of small matter in themselves, but they are symptomatic of an approach I might add that the basic development was enough vocally and not tough-minded enough musically. Try Valletti or Häßlinger among tenors, Fischer-Dieskau or Souzy among baritones. Pathé provides notes, but no texts. R.C.O.


STRAVINSKY: Oedipus Rex

Soloists; Chorus and Orchestra of the Opera Society of Washington, Igor Stravinsky, cond.

For a feature review of this recording, see page 126.


COLUMBIA ML 5877. LP. $4.98.

COLUMBIA MS 6477. SD. $5.98.

..., and when he's good, he's very, very good!—which statement is wholly applicable to the Bernstein we hear in this release. His fiercely enthusiastic yet always faultily refined performance of the Capriccio italien already had the widely admired—in its later 1961 release (MS 6258), where it was coupled with Francesca da Rimini, the new Marche slave and 1812 Overture has the exaltingly noble quality of the best of the other high-powered versions available today. Audio connoisseurs will find considerable fascination in comparing the differences in recording made at the Hotel St. George in Brooklyn and the other two works. The New York Philharmonic Hall. The warmer reverberance of the former locale seems to do better by the Philharmonic strings (they occasionally sound to me a bit tonally pinched in the March and Overture), but in other respects the sound is thrillingly vivid throughout. And I might add that the tremendous impact of the "cannon" in the Overture is a valuable reminder that the highly publicized utilization of real artillery in other recordings is no more convincing than its "effects" supplied for Columbia by the band's Musical Instrument Service. My only dissatisfaction here is with what seems to my view a new background noise (the disc surfaces themselves are excellent) in the quieter musical passages—and Tchaikovsky has seen to it that there aren't very many such moments. R.D.D.

TCHAIKOVSKY: Concerto for Piano and Strings, No. 1, in B-flat minor, Op. 23

Vladimir Ashkenazy, piano; London Symphony Orchestra, Lorin Maazel, cond.

LONDON CM 9360. LP. $4.98.

LONDON CS 6360. SD. $5.98.

The partnership here seems more like a
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corporate merger than an artistic collaboration. Both artists are musicians of taste, but the juxtaposition of the whimsical Askhenazy and the objective Maazel produces a strangely flavorless interpretation.

Munch's interpretation of the perennial Tchaikovsky favorite is lusty and spirited, the opening movement is brilliant, while the Bostonians produce some red-blooded sonorities on this disc, subjectivity and rhythmic finesse are often in short supply. This is especially noticeable in the opening movement, where a crisp attack and release is not only desirable but mandatory. To be sure, the present recording lacks some of the panoramas of tempo which blemished Dorati's recent account for Mercury, but missing too, most regrettable, and classed up on that performance. Also on the debit side is RCA's Dynagroove engineering here, which flattens the dynamic range of the performance and throws the instrumental balance into unrealistic perspective. (Why, for example, must that gong be right on top of us in the fourth movement?)

Until EMI-Angel releases the magnificent Giulini-Philharmonia "Pathétique" made in England in 1961 or RCA lets us hear its electrifying 1954 Toscanini dress rehearsal tape of this work, the choice must be among Reiner, the 1947 Toscanini, and Monteux (all RCA Victor releases) for the taut, whiplash approach or Talich (Parliament—just deleted) for something richer and more passionate. Dorati's edition is also worth considering despite the obvious capricious details in that performance.

VERDI: Choruses and Orchestral Excerpts


Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Arturo Basile, cond.

* RCA ITALIANA ML 1665. LP. $5.98.
* RCA ITALIANA SL 1665. SD. $5.98.

As the album title ("Viva V.E.R.D.I.") would indicate, this record puts together excerpts from operas which were popular in Italy at least partly because of the patriotic fervor. Their most famous numbers aroused in the patriots of the Risorgimento. "Va, pensiero" is the most widely known example, having been a theme song of the nationalistic movement, in addition to being a chorus of strikingly beautiful and simple inspiration.

But the other selections here were, in their day, almost equally revered for their inflammatory, or at least supportive, sentiments, and so the motif is a valid one; if further justification is needed, there is the fact that a number of these selections are not often heard—I know of no other commercial recording of the Giovanna d'Arco Overture, and I believe that the Battaglia di Legnano piece is available only on the complete Cetra recording of the opera. The Giovanna d'Arco Sinfonia is an uncommonly interesting one. Like most of Verdi's overtures, it makes its effect through repetition and juxtaposition of elements, rather than through a blending or "development" of them. All the usual Verdian effects are here—the martial trumpet melody, for instance—but the remarkable feature of the piece is, as an expert on the woodwinds, first each in a solo turn, and then in various duets and ensemble combinations, an interestingly worked and quite atypical passage.

La Battaglia's overture follows a similar pattern and even has another passage for the woodwinds, but it is more conventional and workmanlike in overall effect. To those unacquainted with it, I must commend the overture to I vespri siciliani. This is a "startling Verdian" and with the arrival of the violin melody suspended over strings tremolando, the listener will recognize the touch of the man who was soon to produce Rigoletto. And the overture's main theme, an expansive tune taken from the tenor/baritone duet, is from the composer's top drawer. The choruses are, of course, among the most effective ever written by Verdi.

Unfortunately, neither performance nor recording is good enough to make the collection a stopgap. Basile is a solid enough conductor, and in the Italian repertory sometimes more than that, but the orchestra is ordinary, with some indifferent "effects," evoking with patches of shoddiness, and the chorus is downright poor, with that artistically and technically while some Italian directors are inexplicably dedicated, and a glee-clubbish habit of thudding down on each accent. These affectations do not quite conceal the fact that there is a good deal of insecurity about the staff above for everyone, and a lot of frayed tone at key points. The sound is all right, but the "veep-tone" to which some critics are so constrained and shallow when the full orchestra comes into play.

Recommended to those interested in filling the gaps in their Verdi collections —it may be a while before we see these numbers again.

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October 1963
Serafin: an intuitive way with Verdi.

offers little that is unusual or exciting, and occasionally goes a bit far in peppering up certain sections (the Act I chorus "Si ridesti in ciel l'aurora," for instance, is awfully precipitous in relation to the surrounding temps, and sounds souped-up and tense). The three principals taken together form a very strong group, despite any critical reservations about individual performances. For sheer vocal richness, it is possibly the finest Traviata cast yet recorded, though the Moffo/Tucker/Merrill combination has plenty of luster, and on a somewhat smaller scale the Carteri/Valletti/Warren trio is very fine. The comprimari are also excellent, and one is grateful that, with Gastone assigned additional solo lines in the Act III chorus, there is on hand a musicianly tenor with a genuinely attractive lyric voice—the admirable Piero de Palma.

The sound is very fine, and the aural "staging" sensible, even if London continues to indulge in Rainbow Room sound effects for all social occasions.

C.L.O.

VERDI: Il Trovatore

Antonietta Stella (s), Leonora; Armanda Bonato (s), Inez; Fiorenza Cossotto (ms), Azucena; Carlo Bergonzi (t), Manrico; Franco Ricciardi (t), Ruiz; Ettore Bastianini (b), Count di Luna; Ivo Vinco (bs), Ferrando. Chorus and Orchestra of Teatro alla Scala (Milan), Tullio Serafin, cond.

As with the new London Traviata recording, comment on DGG's new Trovatore is included in the Verdi discography appearing elsewhere in this issue, to which I refer readers for discussion of the principals and conductor as compared with those of other recorded versions. On the whole, this is a strong set, decidedly one of the better products of the DGG/La Scala collaboration.

It is also a very heartening performance on the part of Serafin, whose reading sounds anything but routine or "old." The tempos are surprisingly quick, the accents strong—listen to the surge and thrust with which the strings launch "Mal reggendo." This performance is not quite so careful of detail, or so glossy technically, as Von Karajan's. Yet there are things about Serafin's way of phrasing and of tying one section into another that somehow sound more natural, more instinctive than Von Karajan's—and the execution is far more scrupulous than is the case with Cellini, or Errede, or Busile, or even Previtali. Orchestra and chorus both live up to their reputations.

Stella is in much better form in this Trovatore than on the Somm Don Carlo. She never quite sounds like a distinguished singer, but at her best she is an enjoyable one who can be counted on for much good, round tone and at least idiomatic styling. Those qualities are in evidence here, and the undeniable weakness in her lower-middle range is the only obtrusive vocal fault. Cosotto is most musical, and her voice moves freely; in view of her great success at La Scala as Azucena (and as Eboli), my feeling is that she sounds too young and lightweight may be unfair to her as an opera house performer—but the feeling persists.

Bergonzi seems wanting only if compared with Bjoerling. He does a smooth, poised job, not terribly colorful or dramatic. Bastianini is anything but suave, but far better than his exhibition of "brutto canto" on the recent Traviata would indicate. It's a long way from the Battistinis and Stracciaris, and De Lucas to this sort of roughhousing, but there's a lot of rich sound and plenty of vocal excitement in the dramatic passages. Vinco is excellent on all counts.

The sound is good in a DGG way—very clear, with the soloists singing right in your ear. This can be quite unpleasant if the singer is like Bastianini, who needs a bit of distance to soften the cutting edge, and it brings us too close to passages such as the Act II finale, where things just don't seem to blend into a single movement.

My own preference is the Cellini set (RCA Victor, monophonic only), with its opulent vocal display, as the choice all-round Trovatore, and I would pick the Karajan (Angel) as possessing certain unusual qualities despite some pretty wild vocalism from the male side of the cast. After this, the field is a jumble, with the new DGG set offering as well-balanced a performance as any. In view of the excellence of the leadership and the general spirit of the performance, it's a good selection.

C.L.O.

RECITALS AND MISCELLANY

ABBEE SINGERS: "Five Centuries of Song"

Abbey Singers.

* DECCA DL 10073. LP. $4.98.
* • DECCA DL 710073. SD. $5.98.

There is certainly no dearth of madrigal groups, but we can never have too many of high quality. The Abbey Singers belong among the best of them. I have heard Moreen's "The Tempest" and the repertory is not restricted: in addition to madrigals and sixteenth-century chantus they record here eighteenth- and twentieth-century American pieces, among other things. These five young singers are well trained (by Noah Greenberg, who also teaches and prepares their programs); the individual voices are all of good quality; and they blend together beautifully. The result is a collection of stylish performances, brimming with vitality, of unacknowledged and delightful music. I particularly enjoyed Weelkes's "Hark all ye lovers" with its curious progressions; the dark coloring of the Salve Regina by Riva-flecha (d. 1528) and the very beautiful Mignonette of Guillaume Costeley (about 1531-1605); the amusing choruses by Lassus and Passereau (early sixteenth century); I Am done by William Billings, here in a lusty but finely chiseled performance; the rhythmic interest of a Christmas piece by the young American Ernst Toch's "tour de force, his Geographical Fugue, a four-part piece with a text consisting of place names—a fugue in every respect except that no specific pitches are used; and the charming children's song I bought me a cat as arranged by Aaron Copland and Irving Fine. The dictation is quite clear throughout, except in Madame has lost her cat, which has been attributed to Mozart (K. Anth. 188) and is here sung in an English translation. In this way, hardly seems the perfect translation for "d'Alinou"—the peasant woman or farmer's wife). The sound is first-class, but no texts are supplied. N.B.

"THE BADMEN"

Singers; guitarists; speakers.

For a feature review of this recording, see page 127.

JULIAN BREAM CONSORT: "An Evening of Elizabethan Music"


Julian Bream Consort.

* • RCA Victor LDS 1565. LP. $5.98.
• • RCA Victor LDS 2656. SD. $6.98.

All of the selections recorded here come from Morley's anthology "First Book of Consort Lessons," which does not identify the composers of the pieces included. That information (arrived at by speculation, intensive research, and astute musicological detective work) is provided for this Series Sorga production by Sidney Beck. Head of the Discography and Manuscripts Collection of the New York Public Library, Mr. Beck, an authority on Elizabethan music, has also furnished program notes and the arrangements used in the present performances.

This is a superb program, and one that strikes a perfect balance between historical authenticity and latter-day considerations of musicality. Although the members of the Julian Bream Consort (who include, in addition to Mr. Bream, Desmond Dupre, cutaway lute, Joy Hall, bass viol, David Sandeman, flute, Robert Spencer, pandora and lute, and Oliva Pashley, who gives the innucent awareness of style and ornamentation, they completely avoid the archaic stiffness which sometimes hampers exponents
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of this music. And their decision to use a modern flute and violin in place of the predecessor recorder and treble violin is one that I, as a lover of wholeheartedly applaud. The players are all excellent, with Olive Zorian and Joy Hall, in particular, demonstrating a fine tonal and phraseological eloquence. Mr. Spencer, in addition to his instrumental contributions, sings O Mistresse Mine and It Fell on the Young Dally with admirable poise, in a clear baritone voice.

The recorded sound in both versions (the monophonic disc is a little more intimate) is absolutely flawless, and RCA's Soria packaging (with a box album far more convenient than the "slip-in" folders of last year) adds further adornment to one of the most refined and picturesque discs ever to come my way. H.G.

ERICK FRIEDMAN: "Virtuoso Favorites"


Erick Friedman, violin; Brooks Smith, piano.
• RCA VICTOR LM 2671. LP. $4.98. 
• RCA VICTOR LSC 2671. SD. $5.98.

As one might expect from a Heifetz pupil, Erick Friedman is an exponent of the motoric school of violin playing. His ap- proach to the instrument features a lean rather than lush tone, and a marked emphasis on the pyrotechnical aspect of execution. Even granted that none of the works on this record (save, perhaps, the Mozart Rondo) is really more than a display piece, the young violinist's accounts here appear to be primarily concerned with the abstract craftsmanship of violinists a few years ahead of him. As one would expect, the pieces like the Wieniawski which demand the tightly coiled impetus and staccato quality that he can provide in abundance. He does not, on the other hand, reveal the simple melodic line unfold with spontaneity. I found his statement of the Tchaikovsky Serenade mélancolique, for example, to be a rather tortured, contrived affair.

Some stretches of harsh or thin tone and his slightly forced articulation (not to mention occasional wayward intona- tion) lead me to suspect that Friedman is not yet really an incandescent tech- nician. He seems to work too hard at playing "effortlessly," such as the Hora stac- cato, for instance, the charm of the piece is largely put to rout by the strenuous effort apparently involved in merely playing it. Erick Friedman certainly gives evidence of intelligence and temperament, and it will be extremely interesting to hear him when he liberates himself from the influence of his illustrious teacher.

Brooks Smith performs his duties with reticent efficiency, and the recorded sound—edgy and studio-bound though it undeniably is—is highly realistic. H.G.

NICOLAI GEDDA: "Great Tenor Arias from French Opera"

Adam: Le Postillon de Lonjumeau: Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire. Massenet:


Nicolai Gedda, tenor; Orchestre de la Radio- diffusion Française, Georges Prêtre, cond.
• ANGEL 36106. LP. $4.98. 
• ANGEL S 36106. SD. $5.98.

Gedda is possibly the most efficient tenor singing today—certainly I can think of none who gets more out of his equipment than he. The tone is always clean, clear, and resonant, the enunciation extraordinarily good, the pitch right on center. His high range is wonderfully free and focused, and anyone who can maneuver well and with strength in the B natural to D region has to produce some really singing sound.

For this well-chosen program, Gedda has the additional advantage of being one of the few tenors of today with a good grasp of French language and style. While one looks in vain for any trace of personal magnetism or charm in his singing; it all sounds intelligently, bravely, and skillfully executed, but not emotionally compelling. There is really almost no feeling of tenderness in "Adieu, Mignon, courage," very little of the romantic spirit that should invest the Werther arias.

The Postillon excerpt is intended as a tour de force and comes off, since Gedda sings his voice into the stratosphere with remarkable accuracy and brilliance. There is, however, nothing inimitable about his narration of the three verses. The Cellini excerpts are moderately interesting. Unless there is much more to the dramatic situation of "Seul pour lutter" than I can gather, it seems a bombastic piece of writing—preternaturally grand expression of what seems a very simple, nostalgic longing for the life of a plain shepherd.

Perhaps I'm ungrateful. Here, after all, is a selection of French arias, most of them unacknowledged, sung with consistent line technique, and with excellent average style, and at a time when service- able French tenors are nearly as scarce as the Heldentenor variety. For many collectors, that alone undoubtedly be enough. The sound is good, and Angel has provided notes, texts, and translations. C.L.O.

GREGORIAN CHANT

Chorus of Monks from the Abbey of En-Calcat.
• MUSIC GUILD M 25. LP. $5.50.
• MUSIC GUILD S 25. SD. $6.50.

This is a collection of eighteen chants, mostly from the Proper of the Mass (the Ordinary is represented only by Sanctus 1X). They are for various seasons of the year and range from syllabic hymns to the elaborate responsory Collegiarii, for Palm Sunday, after Passion Sunday, and such pieces like the Graduals Qui sedes and Huc dies and the Offertory Jubilate Deo univera terra. The choir of this Benedictine monastery in the south of France sings with considerable rhythmic flexibility. There is a good deal of reverberation but not enough to be annoying. Latin texts and English translations are provided. N.B.
VLADIMIR HOROWITZ: "The Horowitz Collection"


This handsome offering from Victor's Soria Series—included in the package are reproductions of some beautiful Degas, Roualt, Manet, and Picasso paintings from Horowitz's personal art collection—is actually a discographic patchwork. All of the performances are either transfers of 78-rpm recordings or reissues of miscellaneous sides of discontinued LPs. For such a rich-looking album, the percentage of bona fide musical masterpieces is, unfortunately, low: it is the pianist's art for the most part, rather than the composer's art, which stands out.

But let there be no mistake: the playing, as such, is uniformly breathtaking. Horowitz's performance of the Prokofiev Sonata remains the most individualistic that I have ever heard. In contrast to the crisp staccato and perfectly balanced transparency of the standard approach (best exemplified by Richter's dancing rendition) Horowitz is much weightier, more brooding and granitic. As he plays the piece, it sounds more neurotic perhaps, but certainly more serious.

Barber's Sonata was new in 1950 when Horowitz premiered it and made the present recording. Now, it turns up on just about every debut recital. In my opinion the piece is basically synthetic, but Horowitz's masterful account of it is fraught with true pianistic voltage. The Scherzo, a genuinely creative little work, appeared on Horowitz's last public recital, and that performance is the one preserved on this disc. When it comes to febrile, indeed, spasmodic changes of emotion such as are encountered here, Horowitz is absolutely in a class by himself: the manner in which he negotiations the repeated notes in the central section is slightly hair-raising.

The Mozart Sonata, however, poses a problem to this artist (as, indeed, it does to so many). Horowitz's solution is to view the work in purely abstract, pianistic terms—a test for evenly placed fingers, properly positioned wrists, and cunningly balanced arm muscles. Everything is articulated with beautiful clarity and singing tone, but the music is not nearly so innocent and passionless as this pianist would have us believe. There are similar features in the other "classical" pieces in the album, but the Czerny is more frankly technical and therefore less inhibited-sounding in performance.

I wish that some of the inhibition had been maintained in the Schumann Triiunerei. Here Horowitz lets his showmanship get the best of him in a rendering which is "romantic" in a fashion more in keeping with Hollywood than with Düsseldorf. The longer Variations

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October 1963
The Collector’s Verdi

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... invan morte des’io.” Verdi’s music for this character is strong and gloomy, and the only one of his most probing, finished pieces of writing—the great Act III recitative and aria, “O tu che in seno a voi angeli.”

None can equal Alvaro Alvaro does much to plumb this figure, but two at least offer a great deal of satisfying vocalism—Galliano Masini (Cetra) and Pasero’s (RCA Victor) portrayal best. His tenor has a good ring, without sacrificing the ability to sing softly or bring a variety of color into play. Consequently, he is able to observe Verdi’s directions more closely than most tenors; note his almost exact reproduction of Verdi’s dynamic markings in “At this voice a blare example of his sensitive phrasing in the final trio. He also brings plenty of temperament to the more strenuous pages, and works an extremely clear selection in giving some real pulse to his music, even in recitative.

Tucci sings an excellent command of line and much exciting tone, and does some of his best work in the big Act III scene so often omitted, so that its inclusion constitutes real gain. There is a certain stiffness in his vocalism, and the softer dynamics are absent, but he sings with sufficient musicality to conceal this most of the time. What really disfigures his portrayal is a rather juvenile projection of what he conceives to be the emotional content of several of his scenes. This takes the form of exaggerated inflections and repeated slurs—Alvaro loses any sympathy if he seems faltering in self-pity. Tucci is at his best in the first scene, which is relatively straightforward exposition; in many climactic passages (the close of “O bel Core d’un interel vinculo”) he drenches the music with a sort of artificial emotionalism.

The remaining tenors evince graver weaknesses. Pasero (Cetra) makes quite an effort at singing legato, but often fails (as in “Solemate in quest’anora,” where he scoops and leaps in a rumorous manner) when he succeeds it sounds as if it is costing him pain. He’s quite vital in some of the declamatory outbursts, but in general is too monotonously loud and metallic to do the music justice. Di Stefano (RCA Victor) marks the rhythms well, and gets more out of the words than most tenors, but his voice is not high above the staff, sounds tight and tired, and goes flat on many high tones, and some not so high, Campora (Urania), with a tenor that is all too obviously a young lyric tenor with register-separation problems trying to sound like a tenore robusto.

Don Carlo is not much of a character study, being presented so consistently as a single-minded thirster-after-revenge, but the role contains tremendous opportun­it­y for display of Italian dramatic baritone voice. Carlo Tagliabue recorded the role twice, and the second time (for Angel) was far past his prime, only partly covering up his stylistic demands for what was lost in unfocused, muffled tone. His first effort (for Cetra) is top-flight—his steady, warm tone has bite and brightness, his grasp of the style is thorough, his musical accuracy unexcelled. His voice is first-rate (it follows the sotto voce instruction on the line “Una chiave!” in “Solemate in quest’anora,” for example), which so many baritones render as if for some sort of public announcement.

Bastianini (London) does a good, stock job with his rich, firm voice, which was well shown in the rousing measures when this recording was made (about five years ago) than it is now. He tends, though, to let his voice do all the work for him, and is not graceful in his handling of some of the higher-lying passages (his lumpen treatment of the cantabile lines “Disperso vada il ma pessier” in the first of his principal arias, pp. 207-08, is an example). Leonard Warren (RCA Victor) is in some ways the most exciting of all the Carlo; he achieves the free, smooth handling of the upper voice, capped by a ringing high A (most remarkably used at the conclusion of his first song, “Son Pecato mai m’ha condotto,” which holds) for the quarter-note value indicated for the C sharp in the score, then drops it—a fine climax for the song, without sound rushing. Generally he seems aware of the value of piano singing, again most cleverly used in “Son Perdet, falsi”, which attains the required eleganza, captured by no other baritone. On the other hand, Warren quavers a great deal of his music; there is a noticeable shake as early on as p. 90, on the seemingly unproblematic line “Salute, Fighera, non si perda,” and you will see phrases calculated to make any real bass shudder. He approaches the role with much unfolding and lyrical covering, and makes quite an effort of it.

Among the many comprimari represented on these sets, I should like to call attention to the following outstanding performers: Augusta Giusy and Gabriella Carturan, the Currias of the RCA Victor and London sets respectively; Ernesto Dominici, the Marquis of the Cetra set; and Giuseppe Nessi and Piero de Palma, the Trabuccos for Cetra and London, respectively. The Accademia chorus sounds particularly good on the London set (Angel’s Scala chorus does excellent work, but is not so vibrantly recorded), and Urania’s chorus, which I suspect was relatively small, is commendable for getting plenty of life into its pages.

It’s interesting, by the way, to hear the Requiem a-borning in the Convent Scene, particularly in the outburst “Il cielo fulminì incernescos” (p. 161) and in the subsequent hushed muttering on “L’immorale cena” (p. 163)—a contrast which has Dies Irae written all over it.

AIDA (1871)

One can approach a discussion of Aida from so many directions that a decision as to what use to make of very limited space is a hard one. There is a remark of Toye’s that will serve, I think, as springboard for our one little excursion: “Granted ... the full importance of the human factors in the drama, it remains first and foremost an expression of the atmosphere, generally, always, objective rather than subjective.”

These last terms are dangerous ones to use, but their meaning in relation to this work is clear enough in the context and situation of what we may as well call the subjective and objective elements—now

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juxtaposed, now fused—that I find so interesting. There is no doubt that, from a structural point of view, Aïda is formalistic—on paper, almost rigidly so. If one chose, one could find striking parallels with Le Nozze di Figaro or Don Giovanni, in that every note assigned is aimed at the filling of what looks like a prefabricated musical mold. It is also true that the music is more descriptive of situation than of specific character; Aïda, for example, is given two extended solo scenes, neither of which explores any personal peculiarities. They deal—most dynamically and thrillingly, of course—with the awful predicaments in which she finds herself; her reactions are strong, and set in brilliant contrast, but of her they tell us only that she is a proud, sensitive princess. The—specify no more.

The same is true of the other characters—they are definite and clear as theatrical figures, and we can apply certain general adjectives to each (e.g. Amonasro, "savage and proud," or Radames, "moralistic" and maybe "muddleheaded"), but this is all.

Yet that is the point. We have four people who are normal in psychology (none can be described as warped), reasonably intelligent, reasonably high-minded, each of whom does the best he can to carry out what he conceives as his life role or duty, despite the imposition of tremendous emotional pressure. We might even say the same for Ramfis. He, like the king, is primarily a public figure, and his motives aren't explored; still, he is, after all, doing nothing beyond conscientious performance of his duties, even if he is the one major character for whom no audience sympathy is invited.

It is the consistency and strength with which the reaction of these characters to the dramatic situations are painted that is so remarkable. The concerted piece in Scene I—a small-scaled model for the Act II finale—is a simple illustration. It starts with the King's big, four-square tune "Sul del Nilo al sacro lido," followed by a brief melodic variation for Ramfis, then a choral restatement of the tune with parts for the King and Ramfis. Then come eight extraordinary bars for Aïda and Radames. Radames, thinking for the moment of nothing but the military glory he hopes to win, sings the "Sul del Nilo," a minor third up from the A major tonic on which it is introduced. Against this, Aïda sings a variation ("Per chi piango? per chi prego?") concerning her torn feelings with regard to her lover's new post as destroyer of her father's army. Then Amneris breaks in on the dominant to vend Ramfis the standard; then the chorus returns with the tune. Aïda singing over it, which carries into the brief coda ("Guerra" etc.).

With the eight bars for Aïda and Radames, Verdi accomplishes all sorts of things: a harmonic variation, what sounds like a rhythmic variation (the whole scene is in common time—as is, incidentally, everything in Acts I and II except "Celeste Aïda"—but the alternated accents of the two voices make the difference), and an expression of the two characters’ predicaments. (The halting off-beat effect also expresses the cross purposes at which the lovers are, for the moment, operating.) And it fits snugly into the scene's grand-opera structure—choral statement, followed by expression of each character's reaction in turn, then choral recapitulation with the soloists added. This is the scheme employed, in more complex form, in the so-called
Triumphal Scene, where Verdi somehow contrives to keep even the inner parts among the soloists expressive of the characters' emotional conditions, and forces them to serve their roles as building blocks at the same time. This illustration hardly serves as an analysis of Verdi's methodology, let alone as an explanation of the opera's almost unprecedented hold on its hearers. One can view the work as a study in contrasts, or as the culmination of nineteenth-century operatic tradition, or as one of the three works of Verdi's "last period," by which he wrote some sort of last word on all operatic traditions—the grand, the tragic, the comic. It is the most perfect grand opera ever written; as such, it will succeed, in a general way, with even a poor performance, yet is one of the most difficult of all operas to stage (or record) at anything close to its potential.

The recorded efforts have been in the hands of some of our century's finest operatic conductors. (I should note that an old Columbia recording was available briefly on Entré EL. I have not been able to find a copy. Under Molajoli, it had a promising-looking cast including Arrangi-Lombardi, Armando Bogioni, Pasero, and Baccaloni. Since there is so much to discuss with regard to the recordings of Toscanini (RC VICTOR II), Von Karajan (London II), Solti (RC Victor IV), and Serafin (Angel), I am going to be a bit cavalier with the work of Gui (Cetra I), Questa (Cetra II), Erede (London I), Perlea (RC Victor III), and the Serafin of RCA Victor I. Only two of these performances strike me as actually poor—Erede's (this usual faults and Serafin's a disinclination at least partly traceable to an aysmal job of editing, I assume from 78 masters). Gui and Questa are both estimable musicians (Gui's effort, incidentally, is now about a dozen years old) with perfectly solid, traditional ideas about the score; in both cases, however, there are enough slips of choral and orchestral execution, enough uningratiating tone, to leave the performances short of the highest musical level. Perlea's reading is brisk and well executed (some work on rec-

ords from the Rome Opera orchestra and chorus), and well above routine. I like it but can't say it provides much food for thought.

The Toscanini/Karajan comparison is, as one would expect, fascinating. Both men had the collaboration of superb orchestras and choruses, both have des-

erved reputations as sticklers for technical perfection. They are by no means poles apart in their conductorial viewpoints—indeed, some class Karajan in the "Toscanini school"—yet they have come up with radically different executions of the music. Perhaps, this is stretching the point too far to say that Tosca-
nini and Karajan represent, respectively, the subjective and objective approaches to the score. However, there is no doubt that the emphasis of the Toscanini rendering is on the tensions and agonies of the personal drama, while Karajan tends to present the structurally related series of portentous state occasions—the steady swinging open of a series of massive doors.

Unhappily, Toscanini defeated himself before ever raising his baton by assem-

bling a group of singers who are not only of mediocre quality or worse (with the exception of Tucker), but who are peculiarly ill adapted to bringing any spec-

ial imagination or interpretative insight to bear. Their performances range from the cataclysmic to the workmanlike, never through the enlightening or the magnetic. Naturally, there is much in Toscanini's own performance that is admirable and even thrilling, though one almost has to decide to listen to Toscanini rather than to Auda to find the total effect compelling. Most of the unique moments in Toscanini's reading are instances of his way of suddenly lighting up the dramatic situation for us. The sudden tremolando on p. 14, line 2 of the Schirmer vocal score (as Amneris sings "Non, hai tu in Menfi decisioni—speranza?"") comes to mind, as the insinuation must to Radames. The heavy, accented chords that break into the opening section of "Ritorna vincitor" (second last bar on p. 52) have a terrific weight—they seem to lash Aida from one awful thought to another by Amonasro's entrance is electrifying (somehow the Aspasia photo of Radam-

es' entrance in the last bar of p. 151 is sharper, more startling here than in any other account); so there is a realization of his betrayal ("Tul Amonasro tu! il Ret"—top of p. 251), where the strings flash like lightning and the sudden dyna-

mism contrasts are uncanny. There are many other such moments, and there is an excitement in the dash and accuracy with which even a section like the Dance of the Moorish Slaves (pp. 118 151) is adap-

ted. Some of it is certainly quick, and conceivably a little too tightly wound; it seems to me, for example, that the opening of Act II (the scene where Amneris' female attendants prepare her for the feast), whose chief quality surely ought to be an expansive voluptuousness, could well relax a bit perhaps, every bar of the reading is full of vigor and purposefulness, even if the singers are frequently incapable of seeing the concept through.

Brilliant execution also marks the Karajan performance. Here we have an orchestra of very different attributes (the Vienna Philharmonic) and a Viennese chorus. The brass sounds mellow, rounder, less thrusting, than that of the NBC; the woodwinds have a sensual softness—listen to the flute weave through the Sacred Dance of the Priestesses in the Temple Scene (p. 65). We also have a very different method of recording—carefully staged 1959 stero-

eophony as against monophonic off-the-

line recording dated 1949. The differ-

ces in recording methods cannot fail to become part and parcel of the differ-

ces in the conductors' and orchestras' work, no matter how carefully one tries to separate them; it is, for instance, due to conscious design on Karajan's part that we hear the harp articulated under the women's chorus at the begin-

ning of Act II (I found myself actively listening to this part for the first time),
or is this the result of the engineer's idea of balance? Beyond that, is it desirable? (An honest question—I can't quite decide for myself.) The chorus (the Vienna Singverein) is bothersome, its quality notwithstanding. It is not so much a matter of rather undiplomatic Italian (very close, e.g., on "cieli," a failure ever really to roll the rs, etc.) as it is of a tone color that just doesn't seem right—bright, clear, rather hard, with particularly light-sounding basses. The grand choruses do not have the solidity and depth that are wanted, the sacred ones lack softness and mystery—all this despite choral musicianship of the highest order. (Toscanini's chorus is not Italian, either; but to my ears, at least, offers a much more satisfying sound.)

This is, as I've indicated, a stately reading, never slack, but slower than most. It works well in the big ensembles, and in the final scene, and there is enough snap in the orchestral playing to maintain tension during Amneris's grand scene. Sometimes, though, the bottom sags; again, one does not quite know where to fix the blame. The first-scene trio flaps badly; instead of pulling us into the dramatic situation, it simply stands as a gap between "Celeste Aida" and the King's entrance. Curiously, this failure seems to stem from an eagerness to stage the scene intelligibly and dramatically. Many of the lines in this scene are asides—each character is expressing his thoughts and feelings to himself. The London recording tries to convey this in aural terms—the lines are sung inwardly. The logic of this approach is fine, but the results aren't. When we add this over-careful approach to the asides to the relatively deliberate tempos, and then to London's habit of stationing the soloists at a distance, we realize why the scene produces so little effect, has so little presence.

These are the things one must accept with this very consistent carrying out of Karajan's concept. Perhaps one or two of the observations relative to Toscanini's Traviata are not irrelevant; that is, granted that Karajan's general approach is perfectly valid, it is still not well suited to the singers, or the singers to it. Tebaldi, for example, is precisely not the soprano to carry this out—one would want a specialist in tonal shading, in textual nuance, in rhythmic precision, to keep a sense of movement in the lines. All the same, a reading to respect, and to listen to for the sheer beauty of the playing.

I was most impressed by Solti's performance when I first heard it, and still find it dynamic. The more closely I listen to it and compare it with the other significant readings on records, however, the less satisfying it seems—it is a trifle edgy and wearisome, not easy to live with. The Rome orchestra is, of course, a healthy cut below either the NBC or the Vienna Philharmonic. Still, does the brass have to sound quite this harsh throughout the performance, and must the crescendos in the Prelude sound quite so blatant? It is good to hear the nuances rendered with such care and point, and to hear so distinctly the choral flaps—commentary on pp. 167-69, where the soloists are recapitulating "Ma tu, Re." On the other hand, the precipitate fashion in which some of the climaxes are built seems to me a rather artificial way of producing excitement—two small examples are the last three staves of the violin leaping into the opening chorus of the Triumphal Scene, and the final bars of
this same chorus ("Gloria al Re, Innit festos") on pp. 114-15). In both cases, the instruction is "cresc. e stringendo poco a poco," which I think Solti has exaggerated. Again, though, theREMOVE conductor with quite definite and recogniz-able ideas about the score, consistently-RECORDERed and well executed, and it might be surmized that he has secured fine work from his strong cast.

In Serafin's performance for Angel, the corners are not so sharp. The temps sound moderate, the playing is smooth and polished. There is occasional limp-ness in the choral attack—the entrance of the first tenors on p. 71 ("Numine, Santa Vittoria") is weak. The Scala tenors in general do not make an espe-cially good showing, and the choral return to "Gloria al Re, Egito" on p. 180 is somewhat slow and feeble. That most of my uneasy feelings about the performance center around the Tri-unphal Scene—Amonasoro's "Mu to, Re does not flow quite naturally into the succeeding ensemble, for instance (p. 154), and the playing and choral singing in this section appears to be tightly pulled together as elsewhere. (The ballet is an exception—it is beautifully played.) But of how many readings can it be said that the ballet does not seem to intrude into the music and the listener? That, I think, is the virtue of Serafin's performance.

There are no extreme cuts on any of these recordings, though both Cetra I and II omit some of the ballet music, and various practices are followed for the little double-tine sections at the end of the Radames/Amneris duet (p. 275, line 2). Cetra II makes the unforgive-able omission of all the vocal lines between Amneris and Radames' "Sacerdote, io resto a te!" at the end of the Nile Scene, thereby dropping some of the most effective declamatory lines ever written by the composer. Filipepechi does not sing "Dessai" at Aida's first entrance, probably simply because he missed his cue; in the Judgment Scene, Norman Scott, the Ramilis of the Toscanini recording, sings the third accusation in place of the second, then repeats it—also a simple mistake, I suppose.

Although a number of the world's best sopranos have recorded the title role, it reads to come too well on complete recordings; in several instances, the singers have been below their best, and the role allows no leeway for vocal problems of any sort. The one big ex-ception is Price (RCA Victor IV), whose account of the part is so satisfactory—vocally, musically, and interpretatively —as to make one wonder if the only vocal weakness lies in the low register, which is lacking in richness and often sounds dry—it is the danger signal in her singing at present. This is the model Aida voice—fragile and soft, yet stark and strong when it needs to be. The freedom of the upper voice allows her a choice of approaches, and enables her to follow the careful instructions—listen to the stunning ascent to B flat on "Fuggire!" at the end of the Nile Scene duet. Price is completely—here I do not mean merely that she recognizes note values and renders them. She is one of those rare singers who sends her efforts straight to the target; when she must sing "padre, pieta!" F sharp, B natural—this is precisely what she does, either on pitch or off. It is really most unusual; there are a number of sopranos of whom you cannot say that they are off pitch or out of time, or that the vocal quality is poor—yet somehow they are not really quite 100 per cent. With Price, there seems to be no gap between the concept and the execution of a sound—she seems that her voice can on, with no limits. Only, of course, we cannot separate the musical from the vocal. Callas has this same ability, except that her vocal problems are constantly interposing themselves at exposed points.

Nor can we separate the musical and vocal problems of the interpreter of a singer. In Price's case, these are re-markably adapted to the role of Aida, and her recorded Aida is much superior to her Columbia recording. When she sings "Fuggire!" to Radames (p. 239), there is the inflection that is truly that of a woman planting a suggestion; she is equally spec-ific and personal when she almost con-temptrously asks Radames how he plans to outmaneuver Amneris, the King, the people, and the priests (p. 235). She also has the gift of simplicity, as in her beautifully defined carrying of the mel-o-dy in the "Mu to, Re" ensemble. Just what it is about all this that makes it add up to a great performance is difficult to define, but it is apparent in the most direct, uncomplicated line in the score—"Ciel! mia madre!" (p. 216).

Three other sopranos, Milanov, and Tペンデル—bring unusual qualities to this part, though I think none of them reaches Price's level. Callas' strengths and weaknesses (Angel) are more evident right from the start. Her entrance line ("Ohme! di guerra fremere,") is an extreme example of the hooded, somewhat-gummy vocal quality typical of her middle range. But hooded tone or no, it is a most unusual soprano who can take the top line in the ensuing trio with such marked rhythmic bite, such firm line, who recognizes that a quick, clean rendering of the descending quarter-note figure (top line, p. 28) is the key to the number's conclusion. Her "Ritorna vincitor!" is amply dramatic; one could wish for a prettier, rounder tone for "Numi, pieta," but the feeling is always there, and lines such as "Sventurata, che dissi!" are most moving. (Her tone color when she asks Amonasoro who might be able to discover the path the Egyptians have taken—"Chi mai?" bottom of p. 222— is ingenious in its projection of the idea that Aida really has no notion who it could be.) In general, she is in her happy enough voice to meet the role's demands, if some harsh, wobbly high notes can be excused.

Among Milanov's complete recordings, Aida (RCA Victor III) is one of her better-sung roles. But the set was made, I should say, just a couple of years late to catch her at her best—or perhaps it is simply not in top form at the recording sessions. The "O patria mia!" is the highlight of her performance here, and it is almost worth the album's price to hear the wonderful little swell up to the final pianissimo A; the whole aria, in fact, is an expertly controlled piece of singing. There is, though, a good deal of mouthy tone, particularly in the lower range, and a lot that is rather spread and uncontrolled. Milanov follows the same line that Callas etches so firmly in her version, and is slightly squeezed here. Milanov also tends to hang back on the tempo, especially in the interview with Amonasoro. Fortunately, Perlea keeps things moving. It is a pity any means bad vocalism, but it is not Milanov at her best.

Milanov has recorded the role twice, on London I (now Richmond) and London II. Her first effort found her in consid-
Aida recorded; interpretatively, for instance, and an exquisite floating of fully glia and surrounding difficult beginning with "Amore, tired. work pitch matic sections, such as Erede. The second version is least some min? lion on ASCO A115. effect" Aida might this role. Among the recorded excerpts from the sections beginning with "Amore, amore" in the scene with Amneris (p. 93) would be difficult for anyone to animate at the pace Kanzer has chosen, which hardly seems an allegro animato even in relation to the surrounding sections.

The other Aidas on record with at least some moments of interest are Cuniglia and Mancini. Cuniglia had slipped by the date of the RCA Victor recording (1946, LCT 6400; later reissued at LVT 4600) but available in Italy on Voci del Padrone QALP 10010/13, and it is hard to warm up to a performance in which nearly every note from A upward is well below pitch, the piano tone usually precarious, and the declamatory passages rendered in a jerky, pecking fashion. On occasion, though, the tone of the singer's younger voice cuts through, and her sense of dramatic projection illumines passages where the vocal demands are not too great—the "Qui Rodamme verha" recitative before "O patria mia" (pp. 209-10) is an example. Mancini (Cetra 1) is very uneven vocally, with a poorly controlled top. But she does everything with great conviction, and turns up some interesting inflections as in her "Chiaro luminoso" (p. 96, where she manages to suggest that Aida already senses she is being betrayed). Mancini's is not what one could call an Aida of first caliber but it is one that can be respected and enjoyed.

Among the recorded excerpts from this role, I should like to call attention to the interpretations of Reithberg and Ponselle, either of whose instruments might justifiably be regarded as the "perfect" Aida voice. Reithberg's was gleaming, even, splendidly focused; it had the flexibility and purity to deal with Handel and Bach, the size and thrust for Wagner. Her "Ritorna vincitor" has been issued on ASCO A1101, a good cross section of her early recordings. Its middle section is rushed, and the "I sacri nomi" passage is omitted, but if you wish to hear a perfect legato singing, I refer you to the section beginning "E l'amor mio... Dique sceler art peza". It couldn't be better. Two versions of her "O patria mia" have been transferred to LP. The earlier one, on the same ASCO disc, is acoustical, and begins with the aria itself; the second, electrical, on RCA Victor LCT 10198 (deleted), includes the recitative but only one verse of the aria. Both are very fine. They offer an interesting contrast in the approach to the high C: the earlier version, she takes a bit off the top of the phrase, producing a very well

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controlled sound at a moderate dynamic; on the electrical version, she opens it out for a forte climax, and following one. Her voicing of the recitative, incidentally, is exemplary. Her splendid Nile Scene 78s (with De Luca and Lauri-Volpi) have not, as far as I know, been pressed on LP.

Ponselle actually did not sing Aida often at the Metropolitan, which seems strange, since she knew the whole range of her voice suited her so well to the part. She did, however, record the Nile Scene duet and the final scene with Martinelli. The Nile duet has been available on both RCA Camden CBL 100 (the two-disc Ponselle album) and RCA Victor LCT 1035, deleted (the "Aida of Yesterday" collection). Recorded in 1924, it finds Martinelli in fresh, rising voice, and Ponselle in similar prime condition. Her "La viva le forse," round and even, is especially fine. In the final duet (available for a time on RCA Victor LCT 1004 and still to be had as an import from England, RCA Camden CDN 5105) both artists sing with an incomparable legato flow and amazing ease in molding of the line. Though Martinelli's tone is, as usual, somewhat steely, he has amazing control over it—listen to the clarity of the enunciation on the repeated A flats of "degli anni tuoi nel fiore" (p. 299). These recordings are classics.

The role of Amneris, Verdi's greatest for the mezzo-soprano voice and nearly an equal to the title role in terms of its challenges, has, surprisingly, been coped with most successfully on most of the complete recordings. I will pass quickly over the abortive effort of Eva Gustafson in the Toscanini performance, and over that of Miriam Pirazzini (Cetra II), which is adequate and musically, but not quite top-drawer. The best Amneris of them all is also the most recent—Rita Gorr's (RCA Victor IV). She is, in fact, the only recorded Amneris who can maintain a perfectly even scale from one end of the role's compass to the other, with no artificial-sounding adjustments of position or breathers. The imperious, rich sound of the voice, with its gleaming dramatic soprano top, is wedded to the sort of temperament that can convey the role's nobility—she can, for instance, project the Judgment Scene as a tragic grand scene in the classical tradition rather than as twenty minutes of scenery chewing. The sheer solidity of the voice, combined with her magisterial concept of the music, makes all the difference in a moment like "Torna, vilt schiavato!" (p. 101) or that of the simple command "Guardale! Radames qui venga" (p. 261). On the other hand, she can project the broken, feminine quality of "E, in potenza di casato io stesso lo getta" (p. 279). There is never a moment when she seems extended; she does not have to rant, she can merely underline the flood. Three prominent mezzos have each recorded Amneris twice: Stignani (RCA Victor I and London I), Simionato (Cetra I and London II), and Barbieri (RCA Victor III and Angel). Since I am a great admirer of Stignani's, I am a bit surprised to find myself relatively unimpressed by both of her attempts. Curiously, the voice, which was a great one, does not seem of sufficient caliber, especially in the middle range; these recordings are accompanied by her presw 78s. I do not mean that she actually sings badly—few veterans of her

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years could summon so much fresh, round tone for the Judgment Scene. But the role needs more bite, more body, and fewer tricks—I, for one, grow very tired of listening to the vowel "a" blandly substituted for "e" on all but a few selected pitches and of hearing the words mumbled as if they contained no consonants. All this comes under the heading of "technique," I suppose, and if it enabled her to extend her career, well and good. But it smacks of what the Army would term "field expedient". By and large, she sounds a shade fresher, less gimmicky, and more even on the earlier Victor recording than on the London—but only a shade.

Simionato is always intelligent, musical, and vocally impressive, except for some wobbliness in the lower-middle area of her range. Her high voice is expertly focused, and serves her well at places like "e apprenderai se lattar tu part e con me" at the end of the Amneris/Aida scene (p. 109). On both recordings, she is immensely effective in the duet with Radames—she has a fine sense for capturing the pulse of a phrase and keeping it going. There is remarkably little vocal difference in the two recordings (which are separated by eight or nine years), musically and interpretatively. She sounds a bit more refined in the London edition, though she is not always served well by the recording (we cannot even hear the important line "In pater nostro!" at Amonasro's entrance, p. 151).

Barbieri does not always sound terribly regal, with her booming raw chest tones, but her voice has power and punch, and the right sort of lush quality. She uses the chest tone for good effect at points where voice or weight are called for (e.g., "Trenti al cor ti lessi"), and on the Victor recording (which is the better of her two efforts) she brings to the "Ah, vieni" lines at the opening of Act II the kind of voluptuous expansion that has always seemed right to me, but which is so seldom attempted—with the billowy choral lines in the background, the passage creates a languorous Samson et Dalila feeling. In general, a strong, dynamic unctuous performance that carries considerable conviction.

The only section of the role to have received much attention as an excerpt is the Act IV duet with Radames. Three of the transferred recordings are interesting in that they afford an idea of what the role used to sound like when it was sung by true contraltos. These are the Emilie Gossuin/Caruso (RCA Victor LCT 1035, deleted), Ennemy Leisner/Roswaenge (Classic Editions CE 8), and Margarete Ober/Melchior (ASCW A121) versions. A version with Sabine Kalter and Richard Tauber, in German, has also been available on Eterna's Tauber recital (Eterna 742); I have not heard it for several years, and do not feel qualified to comment on it. Contraltos are few and far between these days, and such as they are, they do not sing Aida. From my observation, many modern listeners do not care for the sound of these older recordings; a contrast to even a good one, begins to falter at the high A flat, and of course acoustical recordings did not do well by the high female range. However, I think there is something to be said for the dark, full sound of a well-trained contralto, who does not have to push to make an effect in the lower register. Homer's virtues are well known to collectors; this is not one of her best record-
The recording of the recitative ("Se quel guerrier si fusi") is quite out of time, the "Se" being held much too long, and the A flat on "vinto" is held for roughly three times its value—unnecessary departures—and to the rather determined way of going into the Gs on "Tu sei regina," which momentarily disturbs the lyric grace of his approach. Bergonzi's treatment (London II) is also smooth and sensitive. The sheer quality of his voice is not as fine as Bjoerling's, but it's certainly pleasant, and I am more bothered by occasional stylistic lapses: e.g., after making a lovely effect with the difficult attack on "E a te mia dolce Aida" in the recitative, he loses the gained ground by smearing the downward line into a series of slurred notes—he does it again with "un regal setto sul crin posato,", on p. 11, line 2. Interestingly, the same note is involved each time—F sharp in the recitative, G flat in the aria, just on the upper edge of the tenor "break." This kind of thing is not criminal, but disappointing from a singer of Bergonzi's ability and taste.

Vickers (RCA Victor IV) captures the feeling of the aria well, though the voice is a trifle mushy and not very Italianate. Perhaps he tries a bit too hard for a careful, sensitive treatment; he is reluctant to follow the crescendo marking at "sei lo splendor." Like most tenors, he is not overly comfortable on the Fs at the top of the phrase. His final B flat is interesting—very heavy tone at moderate volume.

Tucker (RCA Victor II and Angel) is firm, reliable, secure, and rather lacking in charm or any sense of romantic lyricism—his resonant, well-schooled voice moves in a four-square, no-nonsense fashion from note to note. His voice is a bit brighter and freer on the Victor recording; in both cases, the upper register has its usual invigorating ring. Del Monaco (London I, now Richard Rodgers) is a fine, firm voice, and beautiful handling of the permissive of Radames' music—his resonant, well-schooled voice moves in a four-square.

These comments will, I think, serve to characterize fairly the complete presentations of these tenors. Bjoerling's is incomparably smooth and sympathetic, with no obtrusive interjections are held for roughly three minutes. His voice is very secure, and the recording is impressive. His final B flat is interesting—a very heavy tone at moderate volume.

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ideally endowed for the heroic passages, marshals his resources cleverly and places well. Tucker is solid and often exciting on top. He is somewhat better on the Toscanini edition; the final scene, especially, is superior to the later recording, which is less lyrically vocalized and more generously emotionlized in an exaggerated fashion.

In addition to the tenor excerpts already noted above, there are scores of versions of "Celeste Aida." Those of Caruso and Martinelli possess those single characteristics—(I refer now to the later, orchestrally accompanied Caruso version, with the jort B flat (RCA Victor SP 3375); the bonus disc cited in the Traviata excerpts) and Bjornson's 1936 performance (Catalo G 7248) is even more flowing and more brilliant than that on the complete set (but what a remarkable similarity over a twenty-year span!).

I should like to call attention also to the interesting McCormack performance (E1erm 1944) with its bell-like sonority and absolute clarity of tone—the voice of the young McCormack does not sound as light as one might suppose. Leo Slezak's (version) (Catalo C 733), MacNeil, is somewhat heavy-sounding for my taste, and afflicted on sustained tones with a slight slow beat, but his rendition of the return to the melody, taken in a meatting melodia-voce, is superb.

The rather short but extremely important role of Amonasro is not vocally overwhelming even by a generous-voiced baritone, but the dramatic aspects of the part are quite important: that even a very well-sung interpretation can fall considerably short of the desired effect. That of Carrell MacNeil (London II), for example, though quite sumptuously vocalized, has no dramatic vitality at all. (Again, Karajan's deliberate approach does the singer no good. But listen to "E trono e patria, e amore, tutto avrai," bottom of p. 217, where a singer is bound to indicate his interpretative tendencies—MacNeil is completely neutral, inflectionless.) The only really gripping Amonasro is Amasa Cobb, whose voice is insistent. Since the role does not lie high in relation to the other Verdi baritone parts, it creates only one or two unforgettable moments for the singer and he makes us forget them with his impassioned, almost terrifying voicing of the great Nile scene duet. Since Caish is also excellent in this passage, the father/daughter scene takes on the air of reality and builds to wonderful climax at "De Foro, inn a terra la spada!" and "O patria, quanta mi costa!"

Gino Bechi (RCA Victor I) is not long on musical or interpretative niceties, but when this set was recorded he still played one of the great Italian baritone voices, with a rock-steady, wide-open high range as its special glory. He sometimes sounds mean when he should not ("Rivedrai il lontanese imbalzamale," for instance), but he thunders through the big moments most impressively. He is also excellent in the role of Guelghi (Cetra II), who labors hard with his big voice but produces a weighted sort of tone.

Leonard Warren (RCA Victor III) gets off on the wrong foot by misreading his first line, "Non mi tradir," which he distorts musically so as to put the emphasis on "int." He also sounds a little flat and shaky in some of the declamatory moments—"D'Aida il padre e degli Etiopii il Re" (p. 250) is so exaggeratedly enunciated as to sound like a
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High Fidelity Magazine
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Mr. Krainis, besides being a first-rate recorder player, is a canny program maker. He has got together here a col-
lection of pieces extremely varied in form, style, and in instrumentation. Since some of them are also of high
quality, the disc will give, I think, a good deal of pleasure. The three longest works are from the baroque period:
a Concerto in C for “flauto” by Vi-
valdi (P. 79), a Sonata a 4 by Telemann, and a Sonata pro Tabula by Heinrich Biber. Of these, the Telemann, with
two happy fast movements and an engag-
ing slow one, and the Biber, for the
interesting combination of five recorders
and five strings, are especially attrac-
tive. The oldest pieces on the disc are
discs of villancicos dating from the end
of the fifteenth century, the youngest
ones a Song for Unaccompanied Record-
er by Edward Miller and Eons Ago by
Robert Dorough, both written recently.
The Miller is pleasantly meandering work; the Dorough starts out promisingly as a kind of “third
stream” piece but then turns into a rather
ordinary blues, cliché-ridden except for
the delicate instrumentation. Other com-
posers represented are John Bull, Fresc-
búldi, Johann Rosenmüller, and Orlando
Gibbons. Mr. Krainis is a spunky fellow,
as an assortment of players (the bassoonist
in the Rosenmüller does a particularly
fine job), and the sound is excellent.

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RECORDS IN REVIEW

Continued from page 145

on a Theme by Clara Wieck, however, is
beautifully—and simply—stated. I have
nothing but praise, too, for the crystalline
delivery of the Mendelssohn Songs Without Words, the florid Chopin work, and the
innocuous little Moszkowski Etude.

Horowitz is, perhaps, the last of the
great pianist-transcribers. True to the
tradition of Beethoven and Liszt, his adap-
tation of the Saint-Saëns Daus分布
music has freely altered various pas-
sages so that they may make the max-
imum impact in pianistic terms. His
phrasing here is extremely flamboyant,
and anyone looking for musical fulfill-
ment had better be forewarned, and only
the Barber selection is really badly repro-
duced.

H.G.

N.B.

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BEETHOVEN: Christus am Ölberge, Op. 85
Maria Stader, soprano; Jan Peerce, tenor; Otto Wiener, bass; Vienna Academy Chorus and State Opera Orchestra, Hermann Scherchen, cond.
- Westminster WTC 160. 60 min. $7.95.

Apart from some fascinating foreshadowings of Fidelio here, and a very few moments of dramatic tension, this score—with which the composer himself was never satisfied—remains a museum curio. Scherchen and his extremely able soloists do their best to bring it to life; their performance may be a bit too emotional at times, but it hardly could be bettered. The recording is excellent for its stereo spacings and lucidity, though not outstanding otherwise; and the tape processing, except for the faintest possible suggestion of spillover at the very beginning, is irrefutable. But unless you are an omnivorous Beethovenian, all the executant and technical merits here are scant compensation for the pervading dulness of the music itself.

BEETHOVEN: Sonatas for Piano:
Wilhelm Backhaus, piano.
- London LCK 80121 (twopack). 73 min. $11.95.

The scanty list of Beethoven sonatas on tape is now expanded by two fresh additions. The present twin-pack provides impressive testimony to the miraculously unimpaired pianistic skills of the nearly eighty-year-old soloist. And if Backhaus’s robust, coolly objective readings may seem to devote Schnabel’s, somewhat lacking in romantic eloquence, they are always dramatically noble in the traditional grand manner. Best of all, the expertly controlled tonal qualities of these performances are captured with superb sonic authenticity in recordings which are notable in stereo for the genuine solidities and ring of a full (yet never overlife-sized) concert grand piano. The tape processing is marred by a couple of perceptible spillover whispers between selections on each side, but it is otherwise praiseworthy for minimal surface noise and absence of prechokes.

COPLAND: Appalachian Spring; Dance from "Music for the Theatre"; Danzón Cubano; El Salón México
- Columbia MQ 559. 46 min. $7.95.

Even tape collectors already familiar with Bernstein’s affinity for Copland’s music may be surprised by the warmth and restraint, in addition to the expected zest, this brings to the present diversified program. It is vividly recorded and admirably processed, and it boasts the attractions not only of the long awaited first taping of the popular El Salón México but those of two relatively unfamiliar dances, also hitherto uncharted. The jaunty first dance may seem a dated no more, but the longer, very pianistically rhythmed Danzón Cubano is a special bonus for tape collectors. (It apparently was not included in the disc version, released just a year ago, of the other works in the present program.) The great Appalachian Spring ballet has been taped before (by Susskind for Everest/Alphatape, July 1959), but although that version remains a fine one and is by no means technically outdated, Bernstein’s is both more idiomatic and less self-consciously expressive.

HINDEMITH: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra
Bruch: Scottish Fantasia, Op. 46
David Oistrakh, violin; London Symphony Orchestra, Paul Hindemith, cond. (in the Hindemith); Jascha Horenstein, cond. (in the Bruch).
- London LCL 80119. 60 min. $7.95.

In the past, Hindemith’s music has more often commanded my respect than genuine liking, but now that the composer has become less austere as a conductor of his own works he convinces me for the first time that his violin concerto of 1939-40 is not the intellectual exercise I once thought it to be—not, at least, when it is performed with such grace, tenderness, and dramatic tension.

There is, of course, more overt romanticism in the familiar Bruch divertissement, though far less originality. Oistrakh makes the most of the expressive elements, and so do the engineers, who have recorded both works with the most translucent of stereos and an ideal equilibrium between orchestra and soloist. The only adverse criticism possible here is that the otherwise well-processed tape admits a couple of spillover intrusions in the Hindemith side of my review copy.

As for comparisons between Oistrakh’s Bruch and that by Heifetz for RCA Victor last January: how could anybody possibly label one of these supreme virtuosos “better” than the other? I still prefer the Heifetz version because of its greater animation and less nearly overripe expressiveness, but the Oistrakh performance is matchless of its more romantic kind. In any case, no connoisseur of violin concertos can afford to miss the present tape, if only for its inclusion of Hindemith’s contribution to the genre.

- London LCL 80117. 45 min. $7.95.

Apart from The Planets, The Perfect Fool ballet music, and the folk-song suites, the music of Gustav Holst has never caught on in this country. But its admirers may find this representative reel a powerful magnet for attracting new converts. To any listener acute enough to recognize the originality un-

Continued on next page
continued from preceding page

The Tape Deck

Here are some beautiful idioms that no longer seem modern as they did in the post-World War II era, The Hymn of Jesus can be a profoundly moving experience. The less ambiguous Elyon Heath, too, is an evocative tone poem which captures the brooding atmosphere of Thomas Hardy's countryside. Each offers some unidentifiability in the choral enunciation (particularly unfortunate because the hymn text drawn from the Apocryphal Acts of St. John is not included here), but the performances could scarcely be bettered. Neither could the spastically stereogenic recording or flawless tape processing. The program, with fine notes by Holst's daughter, fills several important gaps in the tape catalogue. It may well provide venturesome American listeners with an entirely new appreciation of a composer who has been justly honored, so far, only in his own country.


Symphony Orchestra, Bruno Walter, cond.
• • COLUMBIA MQ 543. 45 min. $7.95.

Everything blends miraculously to make this a reach a matchless memorial to the personality as well as to the artistry of the late Bruno Walter. Except for his ingratiation (the finest full-strings-choir version), all the works here were recorded at his last studio session in Hollywood, in March 1961. But more significantly, this last appearance before the microphones found Dr. Walter's players at the very peak of their powers—enthusiastic and communicative, and (as always under Walter's direction) warmly expressive. Moreover, the recording engineers served him better than ever before in providing spatially authentic recording of the marvelously colored performances. Apart from a few slight precothes, the tape processing is first-rate. Walter was unexcelled in persuading audiences to share his love for these small Mozarteum gems. Besides the familiar Serenade, there are four bilthe overtures, plus the poignant Masonic Funeral Music. This alone, perhaps even more than most of the bigger works in Walter's recorded legacy, serves as a living remembrance of one of the most endearing musical mentors of our time.

PERGOLESI: Concertini for Strings: No. 2, in G; No. 3, in A; No. 4, in F minor. Concerto for Flute and Strings, in F

André Jaunet, flute (in the Concerto); Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Edmond De Soultz, cond.
• • VANGUARD VTC 1665. 47 min. $7.95.

This is Volume I of a two-disc series devoted to the six concertini most conveniently attributed to Pergolesi and to two flute concertos by the same composer. Of the present installment, only the Concertino No. 2 has been taped before (in the current "Nottourno" reel by I Solisti di Zagreb, also for Vanguard). If De Soultz's approach to it and to the other works here is more romantically expressive, and at times more nearly tense, than Janigro's, his performance is engagingly sentimental throughout and often blithely exhilarating in beautifully pure, sweet, and "live" recording. Even the lightweight flute concerto has zestfulness in its livelier moments and haunting loveliness in its Adagio—qualities captured to perfection in Janigro's cool-toned playing of the solo part. The musical magic here may be a bit too delicate and thin-spun for some tastes, but every connoisseur of baroque music will treasure it.


Artur Rubinstein, piano.
• • RCA Victor FTC 2150. 58 min. $8.95.

Since neither of these works has been available on tape before, and since the performance and the recording have been rapturously praised by disc reviewers, it might be enough here merely to note that the tape version is entirely indistinguishable from the disc counterpart, even down to a couple of very slight A precothes. (Curiously, a Side B disc precho has been eliminated on the second.) The other hand there may be a fractional bit more background noise in the quietest passages than there was in a first disc playing.) But I can't help voicing a mildly subjective minority demur regarding performance and quality of sound: the tremendously virtuosic and exultant Carnaval heard here reveals a little of his more characteristic dreaminess and sheer fanciness; while the closely miked, extremely powerful recording is indeed mightily impressive, either it or Rubinstein's own vehemence is responsible for a certain hardiness in piano tone—which rings much more than it sings. Even so, I myself find it hard to resist Rubinstein's éclat in Traumstränen, In der Nacht, and the showier moments of Carnaval.

SCHUMANN: Symphonic No. 4, in D minor, Op. 120

Beethoven: Symphonic No. 8, in F, Op. 93

Cleveland Orchestra, George Szell, cond.
• • EPIC EC 831. 52 min. $7.95.

Even before my plea for Szell's Schumann Fourth appeared in print (August 1963), this reel arrived to meet the long felt need for a first tape edition. The performance is one fully worthy of the finest contemporary exponent of Schumann's orchestral works (and, of course, the music itself makes the liveliest immediate appeal of any of the four symphonies). The recording is satisfactorily robust, if sometimes italicizing a slight fragility of string tone; and the tape processing is competent, if not quite as get-surfaced and precho-free as that of the Second Symphony. The Beethoven Eighth, however, while perhaps superior technically, is treated so boldly and resounding-ly that it is likely to please those who like all their Beethoven "big" rather than those who seek a lighter, more humorous touch in this delectable "little" symphony. In any case, its choice as a Schumann coupling is not particularly appropriate.
SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 5, in D, Op. 47

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Istvan Kertesz, cond.

• • LONDON CIC 80113. 42 min. $7.95.

Kertesz's reading makes much of the brooding elegiac qualities of the first movement, but his elegant, refined, and complete freedom from the slight spill-over that may have been earlier. Bernstein/Col-umbia and Stokowski/Even live taping, one must weigh Bernstein's far greater dramatic forcefulness and overwhelming impact. Listeners with a tendency toward introversion to the least in the incandescent and galvanic will find Bernstein's recording more immediately acceptable than the others, but if they choose it they will inevitably miss many of the work's most distinctive profundities and thrills.

WAGNER: "The Glorious Sound of Wagner"

Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, cond.

• • COLUMBIA MQ 552. 49 min. $7.95.

If ever a come-on program title were fully justified, it is here. The Philadelphia string and brass choirs are captured in incandescent and panoply breadth. Unfortunately, Wagner connoisseurs will be unlikely to share the enthusiasm of the sound-fanciers-at least in the Tannhäuser Overture and Venusberg Music (without voices) and the Sinfonie "Forest Murmurs." For the former they will cling steadfastly to the 1961 Stokowski/RCA Victor taping; for the latter, the July 1963 recording for Angel. Everyone, however, should welcome the present first tape edition of the Act III Prelude to Die Meistersinger and prefer Ormandy's Act II course. The Meistersinger Dance of the Apprentices and Entry of the Mastersingers to those by Leinsdorf in a Capitol 4-track reissue of a 1958 3-track release. But whatever your tastes may be, the luscious aura of the recorded performances here can't be minimized.

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM: "Lollipops," Vol. II

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Thomas Beecham, cond.

• • ANGLI ZS 35865. 40 min. $7.98.

This miscellany of Beecham's favorite encore pieces (only the second representation of the conductor on tape) is an ideal addition, musically and programatically, to every reel library. Here are four tate firsts: the Piazzolla-Mes-
anzas, the brooding Sonneml de Juliette from Gounod's Roméo et Juliette, the superbly lilting Menuet des Follets from Berlioz's Damnation de Faust, and the quintessential orchestral playing from Debussy's L'Enfant prodigue. And while the Waltz from Tschaikovsky's Eugen

Onegin, the Marche triste from Ber-

lioz's Trovem, and the Saint-Saëns Samson et Dalila have been taped before, no other conductor has ever endeavored to interpret them with such distinction. The recordings must date back a few years, but one never would guess that from the transparency and concert-hall authenticity of this well-processed, If not completely preëcho-free, reel. A delectable remembrance of Beecham's unique insights and some forty minutes of incomparably satisfying musical entertain-

ANTONIO JANIGRO: "Notturno"

Solisti di Zagreb, Antonio Janigro, cond.

• • VANGUARD VTC 1663. 57 min. $7.95.

Janigro's chamber orchestra gives us some of its finest performances here, all recorded in the loveliest imaginable stereo. Every timbre is delicately but precisely differentiated, and the string sonorities float buoyantly heavenward. A delight to one's ears (unflawed by any suggestion of either preëcho or spill-over in the quiet-surfaced tape processing). Most of the contents are exceptionally appealing: first 4-track tape editions of the liltmg Suite No. 3 in Respighi's An-

cient Airs and Dances series, and the Concerto in G commonly attributed to Perozoti; the most attractive (and least stipulated) recorded performance of Vaughan Williams' "Forest Murmurs," and the preëcho-free recording of Respighi's Panoramica with Julius Baker as superb flute soloist and a fresh recapping of the more familiar Kleeine Nachtmusik of Mozart, a score elastic and zestful in this properly small-sized ensemble version than even the best performance of Walser's for Columbia) by a full symphonic string choir. Even the two final selections, which I consider superficia

lly were less well played, but Janigro is too fastidious to give the necessary melismas to Sibelius' Valse triste or the yearning romanticism essential to Bar-

ber's Adagio for Strings. And in both cases these works demand a larger complement of strings.

"Cleopatra." Original Sound Track Re-
cording. Alex North, cond. 20th Cen-
tury-Fox (via Bel Canto) SXT 5008, 40 min. $7.95.

"The Longest Day." Original Sound Track Condensation. Lowell Thomas, narr. 20th Century-Fox (via Bel Canto) SXT 5007, 31 min. $7.95. Alex North's score may have been overshadowed by other aspects of the fabulous Taylor/Burton spectacular, but it is surely one of the best, most imaginative, ever provided for a film epic. North has solved most effectively the problem of suggesting the music of antiquity without resorting to superficial exoticisms or forbidding dissonances. Like many large-scale film scores, even on this one, North has used a bit choppy when heard in isolation: undoubtedly it will interest most of those who have seen the film. But anyone will be delighted here by the exceptionally fine orchestral scoring and playing, the grippingly warm and vivid stereo recording, and the first-rate tape proces-

sion. Damnting of Faust, and the quint-

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THE TAPE DECK

Continued from preceding page

quasi-documentary film itself, represented in a series of Allied and German armed forces visits to closed-in Lowell Thomas’ voice-of-doing-narration. It’s all done dramatically enough and recorded vividly, though with excessively close mixing uninfallibly. Much of the action itself is simply talked about, in anticipation or retrospect, rather than directly depicted. Undoubtedly a fine document for those who have seen the film, but it’s unlikely to satisfy others.

"Film Spectacular." London Festival Chorus and Orchestra. Stanley Black, cond. London LPL 74025, 43 min., $7.95.

As a tape proponent I find it rather disconcerting to have to admit that the present reel, impressive as it is in many ways, fails by a slight margin to match the outstanding technical qualities of the disc version I praised so warmly in the September issue. It has been processed at a markedly lower modulation level, and when playback is equalized for proper A B comparisons some tape-motion noise is evident, whereas the disc (on a first playing at least) is astonishingly silent. The scores themselves are reasonably identical, but there is just enough more bite and impact in the disc’s climaxes to establish its slight superiority in both frequency and dynamic ranges. And there’s an unmistakable trace of reverse-channel spill-over at the very beginning of the tape. But such flaws can’t detract seriously from the musical attractions and Black’s superb performances—at their best in Walton’s "Henry V" excerpts, "West Side Story," "Moross: The Big Country," and Anka’s "The Longest Day" scores; notable also in the more conventional themes from "Exodus," "Breakfast at Tiffany’s," "Samson and Delilah," and "Around the World in 80 Days."


This is a sampler anthology of recordings made in 1962, for the most part, representing the main currents of jazz as the leading stars in Columbia’s permanent or temporary stable. It ranges widely from the avant-garde styles of Thelonious Monk and Jimmy Giuffre, through Eddie Condon and the Dukes of Dixieland, all the way to the attractive but certainly not jazz-styled singing of Carmen McRae. Apart from Miles Davis’ bouncy rhizodical "Devil May Care" and perhaps one of Duke Ellington’s less original essays in exoticism, "Turkish Coffee," the honors go, curiously enough, to the oldest recording, that of Quincy Jones and the All-Stars playing "Grasshopper," dating back to 1955 and here "rechanneled in stereo" from the original monophony. An excitingly virtuosic performance, its sounds just as robust technically as the others. The tape processing, especially on the first side, is plagued with preeches.

"In Action." The Chad Mitchell Trio. Kapp KTL 41055, 36 min., $7.95.

The trio’s apt sense of topical humor provides a worthy successor to their famous John Birch Society satire ("At the Bitter End" program of last January) in an even more amusing ballad, "The Idee of Texas," celebrating the exploits of Billy Sol Estes. The group’s professional deftness is evident again in such vivacious airs as "The Ballad of the Greenland Whalers," "Run, Run," and such lyrical ones as "Green Grow the Lilacs," "Blowing in the Wind," and "Adios Mi Corazon." And if the quasi-spiritual "One More Time" is not quite convincing, and the multi-installment, "Story of Alice" is soporifically silly, one can’t expect even these talented young arrangers to overlook absolutely good taste. As in their previous reel, the recording and processing are first-rate, the mike placements never uncomfortably close.

"Inspiration and Meditation." 101 Strings and Organ. Bel Canto ST 188, 38 min., $6.95.

I haven’t heard the oversize string orchestra for some time, and I am impressed all over again by its sumptuous sound. It is augmented here by unadvertised wind and percussion choirs, plus pipe organ, all captured in broadsheet, rich stereosonic and a warm big-hall acoustical ambience. Musically there is less distinction to the anonymous conductor’s performances of elaborately scored transcriptions of familiar hymns and religious heart-throbbers (not excluding the Hallelujah Chorus, Beautiful Isle of Somewhere, and Malotte’s Lord’s Prayer.) But in a fine literal setting of Onward Christian Soldier the sonic potentials are exploited with genuine interpretative drama.

"It Happened at the World’s Fair." Original Sound Track. Elvis Presley; the Mello Men and Orchestra. RCA Victor FFP 1199, 21 min., $7.95.

If you’re not incorrigibly prejudiced, you’ll find that Elvis is learning how to sing and how to relax. His present Cotton Candy Land. How Would You Like To Be Me? and Relator are engagingly jaunty. Otherwise, however, as in the hit One Broken Heart for Sale, there is a harder plugger. The recording itself tends to be harshly overpowering, and there is a good deal of background hum or noise on the “A” side of this uncommonly short reel.

"Jazz Samba Encore." Stan Getz. Saxophone; Luiz Bonfa, guitar; Maria Toledo, vocals; Edorne. Verve VSTC 293, 40 min., $7.95.

Unlike most sequels, this one is almost as good as the famous "Jazz Samba." The only respect in which it falls a trifle short is in the percussion playing which, while first-rate by all normal standards, just can’t match the incomparable delicacy and subtlety of the earlier release. Otherwise, Getz is more eloquent and assured than ever; Luiz Bonfa’s guitar solos are perhaps more coolly expressive than Charlie Byrd’s and even more imaginative; and there are brand-new attractions in the enchanting singing of Maria Toledo and a piano solo by composer Antonio Carlos Jobim in his own Insucute. The selections mostly by Bonfa or Jobim are superbly filling, with top honors perhaps going to Bonfa’s Tribute to Getz, Ebony Samba, and Samba de duas notas. And many of the other chart hopes have a real bedrock of their own. Add flawless recording and tape processing, and again we have a reel of exceptional merit.


Most attempts at jazz impressionism have struck me as far too precious, but the present series of McFarland originals
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boasts atmospheric attractiveness, occasion- 
al quite haunting lyricism (espe- 
cially in "Peach Tree"), and often genuine 

drama. Even the longest pieces on 
the second side ("Misplaced Cow Poke 
and Almost Alone") reveal considerable 
inventiveness, if perhaps not enough to 
sustain lively interest throughout. Very 
clean stereoism and flawless tape proc- 
dessing do full justice to both the music 
and the beautifully controlled and colored 
performing heritage. Leonard Fein and 
Evan's 
rhapsodic pianism. McFarland's poetic 
vibes, Jim Hall's guitar, Phil Woods' 
flute, and a somewhat overexpressive 
string quartet.

"Raise a Ruckus and Have a Hoof- 

tane." Alan Lomax and the Duree 
Family, Kapp KTL 410A, 29 min., 
$7.95.

The sweetness and lucidity of this re-
cording is in the unadorned, unaffected 

differences Lomax and the Durees bring to 
their uncommercialized folk materials. 
I relished particularly that's All Right 
Rollin' Bill. (A Pretty Girl Is Like a Little 
Bird, Lazy John, and Raise a Ruckus. But I find 
it hard to believe that the same rec-
cording director, Braun, is the effec-
tively stereogenic spacings of the banjo 
guitar accompaniments could also have 
been responsible for the irritating and 
frequent final fade-outs.

Samplers: "The Best of Liberty" and 
Liberty (via the Philips) PHXSTX and 
Philips (via Bel Canto) PHSTX, 32 
min., $3.95 each.

Two new pops sampler reles. Liberty's 
quite attractive selections, although 
perhaps only Slatkin's Lawrence of 
Arabia Theme, Zentner's Delftballad. 
Garrett's La Bamba, and the Dave Pell 
Octet's Days of Wine and Roses are 
particularly distinctive. There is 
more variety in Phillips', but also more record-
ing gummicky, and less musically in-
teresting materials. The best are Michel 
Legrand's Milord, Gerry Mulligan's Open 
Country, Dizzy Gillespie's A Shuny 
in Old Nebraska, Frinell's Florida's 
Noche de Estrellas. This reel, however, 
is the better processed in its freedom 
from the preechios, or possibly spill-
overs, that plague the "A" side of the 
liberty sampler.

"This Is My Country." Mormon Tabern- 
acle Choir: Alexander Schreiner, orga-
nor: Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene 
Ormandy, cond. Columbia MQ 533, 
$7.98. An ideal in the "spiritual" field.

Rehearing this often thrilling program of 
world-wide patriotic songs, which I re-
viewed in its disc edition last June, I am 
more impressed than ever by Schrei-
ner's martial and ingenious setting of 
Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean and 
the fervent Israel Haiyuk. The other 
pieces (representing England, France, 
Finland, and Canada, as well as the 
United States) are more conventional in 
both musical interest and execution but 
— especially in the oldies, finely 

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the Bourbon rulers who, in the eighteenth century, succeeded the Farnesi as Parma's overlords. The abandoned theatre slowly deteriorated and in 1944 was almost destroyed during an Allied bombing attack. But the structure survived, and its interior is now in process of being restored. This spring Maestro Medici showed us the work in progress. We found that just to breathe the air and hear the reverberations in a hall more than three centuries old was a thing of joy. Surely, no more fitting environment for festival performances could have been imagined than a theatre with such ancient operatic roots.

Readers who would like to be kept apprised of the Institute's activities and to receive its publications should address inquiries to the Istituto di Studi Verduziani, Via del Conservatorio 27, Parma, Italy.

THIS COLUMN is the final piece of "copy" herein written for the Verdi Anniversary Issue, and it is fitting that we conclude with a word of thanks to the many people who aided us in its preparation. Here at home we received valuable advice and letters of introduction from Walter Tormo, Mario Soria, and Mrs. Manolita Doelger of the Italian State Tourist Office. From Rome we had the close collaboration of William Weaver, who not only contributed one article and translated another but also tracked down innumerable rare pictures, checked a profusion of factual queries, and accompanied us through much of Verdi's Italy. In Parma, as noted above, we had the good fortune to have as guide and companion Mario Medici, abetted by Signora Franca Medioli, an accomplished and delightful linguistic intermediary. In Venice the artistic director of La Fenice, Mo. Mario Labroca, gave us free access to the theatre's archives, and in Milan we had the help of Doct. Clelia Alberecci (of the Bartarelli Archives), Signorina Elena Vitale (of Casa Ricordi), Signorina Floriana de Martino (of Edizione Garzanti), and Dott. Stefano Vittadini and Signorina Cofino (of the Museo della Scala). Our thanks to them all and to the many others who have helped—far beyond the call of duty—to honor Verdi in this special issue.

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October 1963
CLASS OF 1813

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triumph; Verdi had toiled in the most practical fashion possible, keeping his eye on what he called "the infallible parameter"—the box office—and had scored a solid success. But fourteen years of Verdi's operatic abstinence were broken only by the great Manzoni Requiem and talk of retirement.

The Requiem, written in memory of the author of I Promessi Sposi, had begun life, at least in part, as a memorial to Rossini; but its scope was so obviously more universal that one wonders whether Verdi had not also in mind the dead and the achievements of a century of revolutions. Those who think Verdi's orchestration grossly inferior to Wagner's should study the Requiem. The orchestra has a field day in this work, and from the delicacy of the opening to the tremendous impact of the Dies Irae—a climax that for shattering power was never equalled by Wagner—yet is handled with intense imagination and dazzling mastery. It was Verdi's finest work to date, and showed a further cautious advance; the old professional was still learning.

While Verdi lived through these years of desultory work, comforted by his achievements, Wagner toiled at the practical details of his ideal theatre in Bayreuth. He watched it being built with money that existed only in his imagination: his fund-raising schemes limped, in spite of every device. Then at the last moment the almost estranged Ludwig sent him 100,000 thalers, and the great work was saved. With Bayreuth, The Ring, and Tristan safe, Wagner conceived the idea of a sacred festival drama to be given only at Bayreuth (it was, in fact, not staged elsewhere until Cosima Wagner sanctioned its performance at the Metropolitan in 1903). Parsifal was completed in Palermo in 1882, after Wagner had returned for a brief while to Bayreuth for its production, and then departed in September for Venice.

Parsifal is a strangely resigned and world-weary work, so dynamic a man as Wagner, and Venice is by no means always the city of sunlight and sparkling water depicted by Canaletto; in winter it is often dark and dank. Wagner was depressed, and his malaise affected his old friend Liszt greatly. Liszt wrote some extraordinary piano pieces to express the sense of foreboding and gloom he felt: Sinister!, Gray Clouds, The Funeral Gon dolia—the titles are expressive enough. Over the shadowed waters of the city of waters the gondola glided, themselves like shadows, while Wagner, alone in a great deal, fought both his depression and a serious heart complaint—and waited for returning strength so that he could start writing symphonies! Before that winter had ended, on February 13, 1883, he was dead. "When I read the news yesterday, I was, I must tell you, overcome with grief. Let there be no mistake; a great personality has disappeared. No man has left a more deep mark upon the history of art!" So Verdi greeted the announcement.

About this time, Verdi decided to revive Simon Boccanegra, and engaged a new librettist, himself, a powerful composer, for the job. Working with Boito and savoring contact with that fine mind, Verdi began to hanker after opera again; the two began in great secret on an opera on the subject of Othello. It was finished in 1886, and given for the first time the following year at La Scala. This time Verdi's success was not solid; it was sensational. The venerable composer had surpassed everything he had ever done before. He was seventy-four; and destiny had still not yet done enough. With Boito he prepared yet another Shakespearean drama and the world heard it five years later.

Falstaff! Parsifal. These were the last works of the two great rivals, who had worked apart with so little acknowledgment of each other. Parsifal is a work of religious resignation. Strange, one might think, from such as Wagner! Yet there is a sinister hint of something of the kind in Tristan, in which the lovers express the torment of death. It is almost as if that furious egoist had been only a tool, giving voice to the as yet almost unconscious explosive rising of German national aspirations. The whole of The Ring seems to proclaim this. When that mighty impersonal force had done with the mighty impersonal force that was Richard Wagner, it cast the mortal man aside. How different with Verdi! He had portrayed always not impersonal forces, but humanization of the world that, however remote, is always recognizable as our own. It was natural that at the close of his life he should turn to the great poet who is ever concerned, in compassion, with people. Verdi's own mighty humanity found a fellow spirit, and the collaboration of Shakespeare and Verdi marks the highest point of Italian opera. Verdi's farewell was more even than the all-embracing pity of Othello; it was a shrug of the shoulders, a great sigh of resignation. Falstaff proclaims to our tortured world that it is still good to live.

The two final operas need no comparison with Wagner. They are truly Shakespearean in their clear Mediterranean light. Indeed, they have something of a Vergilian quality, a sense of immemorial and sunlit wisdom. Verdi did not long survive their completion. His beloved second wife, Pepinna, passed away, "he for a little tried to live without her, liked it not, and died." The school of 1813 was a tough one. Wagner and Verdi were among the toughest. How different the men! How great the achievement!
Ghislanzoni managed to fuse the heroic, pageantlike style of Nabucco and Aïda with the intimate "disordered passions" (to quote Verdi on the subject of Ballo) of the domestic operas like Luisa Miller and Stiffelio. Choruses and triumphs, ritual and splendor on the one hand; and on the other, a suffering father, a daughter torn between love and duty, a woman made wicked by overweening jealousy.

More than any of his earlier operas, except perhaps for Rigoletto and La Traviata, Aïda has an over-all dramatic coherence. In nearly all of Verdi's librettos, even the earliest, there is a scene-to-scene logic, the characters act understandably towards one another, though we may not understand their behavior as a whole. The Count di Luna, for example, behaves logically when we see him on stage, challenging his rival, trying to kidnap his beloved. But we will never understand why (when off stage) he didn't burn Azucena on that pyre we saw flaming up. What happened between the scenes bothered Verdi little in those years. But with Aïda all motivations are clear and consistent. Verdi's dramatic art had reached a climax. Aïda could logically have been the composer's last opera. And, in fact, it was followed by a long silence, broken chiefly by the Messa da Requiem.

Then in June 1879 Verdi went to Milan, and while he was there. Giulio Ricordi brought Boito to dinner and slyly introduced Shakespeare's Othello into the conversation. Again—as so many years ago with Nabucco—it was a libretto that brought Verdi back to the opera house.

Boito was then approaching forty. His Mefistofele, after a clamorous fiasco at La Scala in 1868, had been revived with success in 1875, and he was now financially independent with an artistic reputation unusually great for the author of a single opera. He had written librettos for other composers and published criticism and verses. After a youthful period of his own Bohemianism, he was setting into respectability, a charming dinner partner, excellent friend, gifted author of vers de société. Since 1862 he had been contemplating another opera, Nerone; he was to work at it, off and on, till his death in 1918. Already in 1879, the youthful, rebellious vigor that had fired Boito's poetry and music seemed to be flagging; and if the libretto of Othello was a powerful stimulus to Verdi, the thought of working with Verdi was an equally necessary catalyst for Boito.

Verdi was, at this time, fond of calling attention to his age; he may have emphasized the number of his years also because he now felt the world of music was leaving him behind. Boito himself had been, for a while, in the vanguard of the pro-German forces. Wagner (translated by Boito) was now performed in Italy, and a whole school of younger composers was calling for a renovation of Italian opera. Verdi felt this challenge,

but obviously he couldn't meet it with a librettist of the Piave-Camarano school. Times had changed, he had changed. Italian culture was becoming sophisticated; Boito—like Maffei a generation earlier—was a respected part of this culture, he was young, an aesthete but a man of the theatre. Against the new, outspoken opposition Verdi needed an ally, not a secretary. Boito was the ideal choice.

Verdi's admirers can never be too grateful to Boito for his contribution in bringing Verdi back to the theatre. But gratitude has led many critics and musicologists to misinterpret that contribution. As a poet, to unbiased, twentieth-century ears, Boito is often no better than Piave or Solera. On a small scale, Boito could write deft verses; but he also had typically Victorian taste for rhetoric, for quaint archaisms, for tricky metrics. The critics who now who praise the poetry of Othello conveniently forget that Boito also wrote La Gioconda. And if one read the revised Simon Boccanegra, it is hard to tell where Piave leaves off and Boito begins. Othello undeniably has moments of effective poetry, but these are the moments closest to Shakespeare. When Boito invents—as in the choruses of sailors, children, etc., in Act II or in the "Credo" with its cheap diabolism—he falls back on his Victorian tricks. Falstaff, less demanding dramatically, allowed Boito to use his skill to better advantage; the verses of Nannetta and Fenton, for example, resemble the billets-doux in verse that the poet sent to his Milan hostesses or to his mistress Eleonora Duse. Falstaff may or may not be Verdi's greatest achievement; it is certainly Boito's.

Sommers' plays have now vanished into that limbo which houses Dion Boucicault and Helmine von Chezy. Maffei's volumes of verse, Solera's cantatas are there too. Though a mammoth volume of Boito's Collected Work exists, it is read only by students, and students of Verdi at that. Nabucco is still alive; so are Ballo, Forza, Otello. Verdi remains the chief architect of his works. Others helped him, but the real librettist of Verdi's operas is Verdi.
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