

EDINBURGH : THE SEVENTH FAT YEAR

Doubts whether Edinburgh would be able to maintain the standard it first set itself, always expressed with a certain air of relish before the Festival opens, have for the seventh time been resolved. If this summer's festival was not better than any of its predecessors, it was unquestionably on the same high general level, with wide ranging programmes and a number of brilliant individual performances. An argument is sometimes advanced that the festival is so wide ranging as to be amorphous, but it is doubtful whether there is really much weight attaching to it and the organisers would probably be ill advised to lavish their ingenuity on thinking up "themes" for future years. In so far as the Edinburgh Festival needs a point of focus, this is surely provided by the *genius loci*. As long as it is not turned into a holiday camp for hackneyed masterpieces all should be well.

Enough has appeared in the Press to absolve us from the need to report at length now on this year's activities. A few points, however, are worth repeating and remembering. The success of Isaac Stern is one of them. Here is an artist of the top rank and his performance of Mozart's G major Violin Concerto at a morning concert with the London Mozart Players was an overwhelming revelation of beauty. The Rome Symphony Orchestra (Italian Radio) were welcome visitors. They played with distinction under Fernando Previtali and Vittorio Gui. Herbert von Karajan, not particularly well known in Great Britain, enjoyed a success with the Philharmonia Orchestra. Their performance of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra was particularly brilliant. The most important new symphonic work to be given was Michael Tippett's *Fantasia for String Orchestra on a Theme of Corelli*. This had been commissioned by the Edinburgh Festival Society and it was played by the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra with Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting.

Glyndebourne contributed three very good opera productions: *La Cenerentola*, *The Rake's Progress* and *Idomeneo*. Particular interest attached to the Stravinsky work because this was the first British performance. Fears (in some quarters they were hopes) that it would not be acceptable proved unfounded and all five performances were sold out. This was a tribute not only to the composer and the librettists but also to Carl Ebert's capable production (a great improvement on the rushed Venice one of two years ago) and Alfred Wallenstein's strict and musicianly handling of the score. It was not in all respects ideally cast, but Richard Lewis, taking over the role of Tom Rakewell at short notice, gave one of the best performances of his career. Osbert Lancaster's stage designs, assuming a rather post-Hogarthian slant in order not to challenge comparison with Rex Whistler's designs for the ballet in the Sadler's Wells repertory, were lively and becoming, but it is a pity that they should have necessitated putting the auction scene before and not after the second interval. The balance of the three acts is thereby a good deal disturbed.

In reviewing *The Rake's Progress* the music critic of *The Times* indulged in a piece of double-talk which should prove instructive to those who are inclined

to take the judgments pronounced by newspapers over seriously. In the daily edition this Janus-like fellow wrote as follows:

"If, when the balance sheet is drawn up, there is a deficit, the reason will be that Strawinsky long ago gave up composition and took to musical carpentry. He has made a serious æsthetic defence of this abdication of the imagination by claiming that the notes do not matter, only what you do with them. But the claim cannot be admitted: it is not enough to write sham Bach with a few wrong notes added for flavouring, not enough to overwork syncopation borrowed originally from ragtime; pastiche is pastiche however tricked out."

And in the Educational Supplement as follows:

"When the opera was broadcast at the beginning of the year the cry of *pastiche* was raised. At first hearing this is perhaps excusable, but it is sad that the charge should have been raised once more, for it is based on a total misunderstanding of the nature of Strawinsky's genius. Since he cut himself off from Russia he has become a prototype of the rootless modern man that revivalists with roots to peddle are so fond of talking about, and has wandered from one style to another. But in *The Rake's Progress*, as elsewhere in his music, what is essential is not his use of the conventions of eighteenth-century opera peppered with reminiscences of Bellini and Offenbach, but the striking original and individual music with which he has clothed them. It is indeed as if Strawinsky's creative mechanism is set in motion only by the stimulus of an alien style. But this has nothing to do with pastiche."

Another visiting Company was the American National Ballet Theatre, which had previously been at Covent Garden. They seem to have started off on, so to speak, the wrong foot, but made a good recovery in their later performances. The two ballets for which Aaron Copland composed the music, *Rodeo* and *Billy the Kid*, were well received.

A.G.

THE HOLLAND FESTIVAL 1953: BERG'S *LULU*

One's memories of so large an international festival are bound to be mixed; while there were few classical performances of festival perfection to be heard, and little superior contemporary music to alleviate otherwise routine orchestral programmes, an occasional guest artist gave exceptional pleasure (Fischer-Dieskau, Schwarzkopf, Martinon), and one left Holland with renewed admiration for the Concertgebouw orchestra and with a somewhat broader knowledge of the work of contemporary Dutch composers. It was in the operatic field that the festival proved to be most enterprising and enlightened. The schedule included Falla's rarely performed *La Vida Breve* and *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, *Otello* (under Krips), *Der Freischütz* (Elmendorff), *Figaro* (Krips), and the Essen production of Alban Berg's second, last and incomplete opera, *Lulu*. The performances of *Freischütz* and *Figaro* gave one an opportunity to assess the achievements of Holland's very youthful national opera, "De Nederlandsche Opera," a company more recently founded than our own Covent Garden. While neither production was up to true festival standards (though *Figaro* was a considerable improvement on *Freischütz*), one was left with an impression of substantial promise for the future.

The festival culminated in three performances of *Lulu*, for which purpose the whole Essen company (including its orchestra) was transported to Amsterdam