

RUM, RELIGION, AND VOTES

1928 Re-examined

RUTH C. SILVA

Alfred E. Smith's defeat by Herbert Hoover in the presidential election of 1928 has often been cited as a classic example of a candidate beaten by his own weakness and the prejudices of the voters rather than by his opponent's strength. In this reevaluation of the election, the author ignores the ballyhoo and emotionalism of the campaign and concentrates on actual electoral behavior.

In a surprising conclusion that runs contrary to accepted political history, she establishes that Smith was, in fact, a strong Democratic candidate in an overwhelmingly Republican year; that his party affiliation hurt him more than his religion or his stand on prohibition and that these two factors may well have helped him.

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RECORD NOTES

BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY No. 4. Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, William Steinberg, cond. (Command Classics 11016SD, stereo \$5.98.)

The alliance of Dr. Steinberg's admirable orchestra with Command's astute sound crew continues to produce some startlingly beautiful recordings. This Beethoven Fourth is one of their best efforts, and one would be hard put to say exactly how much of its success is owing to art and how much to technics. To be sure, the zestful spontaneity and good humor of this interpretation have nothing to do with microphone placement, nor the instrumentalists' nimble articulation with wide-range magnetic film. But where goes the credit for the keenly adjusted balances between strings and woodwind or for the scintillant tone of violins and cellos? At any rate, the sound of the Beethoven orchestra has never been put on record with more seductive clarity; here every strand in the symphonic fabric can be plainly differentiated, yet without the tendency toward fragmentation that sometimes afflicts recordings of marked presence and separation.

RAFAEL PUYANA: "THE GOLDEN AGE OF HARPSICHORD MUSIC." Rafael Puyana, harpsichord. (Mercury MG 50304, mono \$4.98; SR 90304, stereo, \$5.98.)

Though there is hardly a harpsichordist before the public today who did not receive a few lessons at one time or another from Wanda Landowska, that exigent lady viewed many of these "Landowska pupils" with a jaundiced eye. For one of her students, however, she had nothing but high praise—and the highest hopes. It has taken several years for this remarkable young Colombian harpsichordist, Rafael Puyana, to be "discovered" by a record company, but at last we have a full-length recital by him. Puyana shares many of his teacher's most winning qualities—a talent for commanding an apparently limitless variety of sonorities from his instrument (like Landowska, he uses the large Pleyel harpsichord), an irresistible rhythmic flair, and the ability to put scrupu-

lous scholarly knowledge at the service of a magnetic and instinctive temperament. His discerning recital ranges from "My Lady Carey's Dompe" of 1500 to a classical sonata by Mateo Albéniz (1760-1831), with stopovers en route for Bach (the Concerto in D minor, after Alessandro Marcello), Scarlatti, and the French *clavecinistes*. All told, Puyana has made a distinguished record debut.

WAGNER: DIE WALKÜRE. Birgit Nilsson, Gré Brouwenstijn, Jon Vickers, et al.; London Symphony Orchestra, Erich Leinsdorf, cond. (RCA Victor LDS 6706, stereo, \$30.98; five records.)

Now that stereo recording techniques are able to capture the full breadth, depth, and range of Wagner's sonic discourse, one's living room has become the ideal locale for savoring the master's music dramas. Instead of gazing across the footlights at beefy, broad-chested gods and mortals—and having to make continual allowances for their cumbersome, sometimes ludicrous deportment on stage—we can allow our fancies to roam unhindered, envisaging for ourselves the resplendent spectacle suggested by Wagner's poetic and musical imagery. At home, moreover, we are able to listen with libretto in hand and thus to appreciate details of plot and characterization that pass unnoticed in the opera house. When our attention focuses on Wagner's words instead of on his all-too-heroic interpreters, certain passages assume an entirely new significance.

For example, the long colloquy between Wotan and Brünnhilde in the second act of *Die Walküre* can seem almost unbearably tedious in the theater—the two singers standing immobile amid a landscape of papier-mâché rocks, while Wotan holds forth at interminable length in a gruff, unmelodic parlando. But when you set the scene in the mind's eye and follow the train of Wagner's thought word by word, the drama of Wotan's predicament springs to life and for the first time one sees this scene—with its complex interweaving of word and *leitmotiv*—as one the composer's grandest achievements.

So much for the general delights of Wagner via loudspeaker. To get

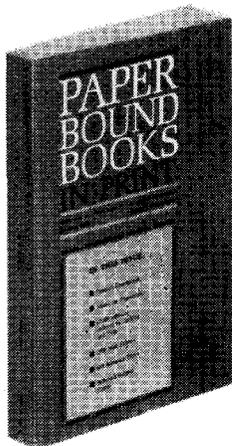
down to particulars, we are offered this fall a new stereo recording of *Die Walküre* impellingly directed by Erich Leinsdorf and performed, with one or two possible exceptions, by as fine a cast as can be assembled today. The Canadian tenor Jon Vickers is assuredly the most believable Siegmund since Lauritz Melchior—with much the same ability to encompass tender warmth as well as ringing exultation—and the Dutch soprano Gré Brouwenstijn is one of the few postwar singers who come within hailing distance of Lotte Lehmann's ardent, womanly Sieglinde. David Ward is perhaps a bit too refined for Hunding (the black-voiced Gottlob Frick would have been a more apt choice for this sinister character), but there is no possible cause for complaint about the passionate, imperious Fricka of Rita Gorr or about Birgit Nilsson's recklessly precise Brünnhilde. George London's Wotan, good though it is, will undoubtedly be better in a few years' time. His well-sung and intelligently conceived characterization falls short as yet of the regal grandeur and the sense of doomed helplessness that Hans Hotter can bring to the role.

Fortunately, much of Hotter's Wotan—together with Lehmann's Sieglinde and Melchior's Siegmund—is available in a recent microgroove reissue (German Electrola E 80686/88) of Acts I and II in a prewar recording. For sheer interpretative magic and vitality this ancient recording remains in a class by itself, a sort of Wagnerian yardstick by which other performances must be measured. But the yardstick is truncated (Act III was left unrecorded, Act II is cut), and the sound by contemporary standards seems fairly dim. As a total re-creation of *Die Walküre*, then, the new stereo set is the one to have. It is complete down to the last note, and the engineering provides a thrillingly reasonable facsimile of the real thing. The booklet—as usual with RCA's Soria Series productions—has been edited with care and taste, and the typographic layout of the libretto allows the listener to follow both German text and English translation without having to play the customary game of ocular Ping-pong.

—ROLAND GELATT

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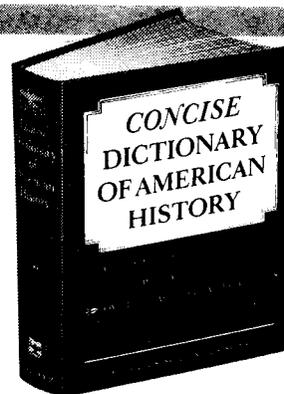
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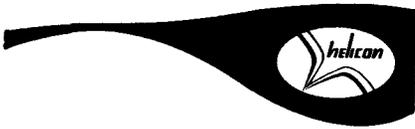
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BOOKS

'I Know Where I Am From'

A. B. GUTHRIE, JR.

WOLF WILLOW, by Wallace Stegner.
Viking. \$5.95.

I grew up, if a man ever may be said to have grown up, in the raw little stockmen's town of Choteau, Montana, where perhaps 999 other people lived in the days of my early boyhood. It was thirty miles from the nearest railroad, a narrow gauge, and sixty miles by stagecoach from the metropolis of Great Falls, which boasted streetcars, the world's largest smokestack, and a population of eight to ten thousand. North of us was the Blackfoot Indian reservation; and one of my early memories is that of having been chased from a temporary encampment at Choteau where my senior companions tried to snap pictures of the visiting braves and squaws. The Indians, it was said, thought a camera transferred their souls from person to picture. Anyhow, they ran us off.

For my parents Choteau was a lonely place, I know now, a place made tolerable to my father especially by its physical setting alone, a place made remote and alien by the want of intellectual excitements except those provided by books. Father was a bookish man, a teacher, the first and long-time principal of the Teton County Free High School; and here was a community whose prime if not quite only interests were cattle and sheep and grass and, to many, Kentucky corn liquor, which he frowned on. Like him, Mother was a Hoosier and a college graduate, the possessor of a gentle but inquiring mind, and they turned more and more to each other in this great and lonely land.

But if it was lonely to them, it wasn't to me. Just outside, within easy walking, were the fields and the fringes of woods along streams clear as air where suckers and whitefish and trout lay and flood water had scoured swimming holes at the bends. Gophers inhabited the fields and could be snared and sometimes

tamed and sometimes, for fun, forced down the throat after being half-roasted on a stick. Prairie chickens with their nervous laughter fluttered from the thickets and could be shot when a boy was old enough. So could the teals and mallards on the potholes, the cottontails that sat fluid-eyed and sunning at the edges of the brush, the jack rabbits that bounced over the flatlands, leaving puffs of dust in seasons when stockmen searched the sky for rain.

And the wild fruits. The chokeberries. The bullberries. The serviceberries, which Father insisted against all local tongues properly were serviceberries. We harvested them, we youngsters particularly, for employment in pies and jams and syrups.

Shooting small game, catching fish, gathering berries, we got the feeling—I did at least—of self-sufficiency, the cozy comfort of being one with Robinson Crusoe or the Swiss Family Robinson. Nature wasn't too much for me. By wit and skill I lived on it.

Even winter had rewards. Skating. Sledding. Trapping muskrats. Daring blizzards while the snow cried to the step. Napping warm behind the big wood range, our dog alongside. The good cries of voices, sharpened by below-zero. The appearance of the cultural nonentity on the lyceum program, the cultural event of most importance. And after frost the chinook would blow, the benevolent wind from the west; and it sighed or whistled the promise of spring and all the waiting glories of the resurrection.

It was all good to a boy, all grand. He could look to the west, to the blue or snow-mantled wall of the Rockies, and find assurance there. Or he could look east or south or north and feel at home in distances beyond reach of the mind. He was a natural part of this world, friend and killer of animals, eater of wild flesh and wild fruits, dipper in the