

MUSIC TO MY EARS

De los Angeles's First Stage Carmen

by Irving Kolodin

ALMOST, BUT not quite, too late in her memorable career, Victoria de los Angeles, after eight years' absence from the theater, recently achieved her lifelong ambition of performing Carmen on the stage. The great event occurred on November 4, 1978, not at the Met or elsewhere in New York, but across the river in Newark, in the building now called Symphony Hall, where the New Jersey State Opera performs.

To say that the result repaid the effort to cross the Hudson is to flirt with understatement. On records, the voice of de los Angeles in the famous version of Bizet's opera conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham has had a worldwide public since 1960. From the moment of her first appearance on the spacious stage of the Newark theater (known to pa-

trons of the early "talkies" as the Mosque), she added to memory of that sound the visual values without which Carmen has no Carmen—charm, allure, physical beauty, and above all, confidence in her power to attract any man who catches her fancy, and her heart.

Nor was there any need for her to strive, as do some other performers of the part, to prove her Spanish temperament—her father and mother took care of that long ago. How long ago being a matter of public record, it is no breach of confidence to mention that she celebrated her 55th birthday in the same week as she celebrated the fulfillment of her ambition to be seen as well as heard as Carmen.

The quality of her voice could be expressed as a glass half full or half empty. To my ears, de los Angeles's vocal

glass is half full of art, and completely empty of artifice. This gives her much more to work with, in subtlety, nuance, and vocal coloration, than many performers with twice her volume.

Further to the point, it is a voice with which de los Angeles has made her mark as Jules Massenet's Manon, as Claude Debussy's *Mélisande*, as Marguerite in Charles Gounod's *Faust*, and as perhaps the best performer in our time of Ernest Chausson's *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*. All of these accomplishments, across a broad range of French music, gave her access to the refinement and finesse in Bizet's score to a degree that has seldom been combined with such superb enunciation.

De los Angeles, in short, is an outstandingly accomplished performer of French music who also happens to be



Victoria de Los Angeles—her "artistry, variety of sound, and strength of feeling are beyond duplication."

Spanish, rather than a Spanish soprano belatedly bringing her native knowledge of the subject to a musical style in which she is a novice.

One of the better-known Spanish Carmens, Maria Gay, went in for an earthy realism that had little to do with Bizet; another, the great Conchita Supervia died too early (in 1936, at 40) to leave behind more than a tantalizing sample of vocal character contained in a few vividly recorded arias.

What time has taken from de los Angeles in vocal strength is beyond denial; but what life has given to her in artistry, variety of sound, and strength of feeling is, equally, beyond duplication. She had enough of both insight and output to convey Carmen's insinuation to Don José, especially in her singing of the "Habañera" and the "Séguedille" in Act I, as well as "Je vais danser en votre honneur" in Act II. The "Card Scene" of Act III was more than a shade too light in sound, the last act dramatically vivid, somewhat understated vocally.

Where de los Angeles triumphed was in her characterization of Carmen as a woman who is a maid as well as a minx, a mixture not often encountered in conventional Carmens, who are all hoyden and no heart. But, as Carl Van Vechten has written (in *The Music of Spain*, published in 1918), their behavior may be quite different from one circumstance to another. He quotes from George Borrow's *The Zincoli*, written in the 1800s:

It is lawful amongst them, nay praiseworthy, to be obscene, in look, gesture and discourse, to be accessories to vice, and to stand by and laugh at the worst abominations of the Busné [non-gypsies]... provided their *Lácha ye trupos* or corporeal chastity remains unblemished.

When, in Act II, Carmen confides to her incredulous fellow-smugglers that she is "amoureuse" ("in love") there is, in de los Angeles's attitude and expression, neither the mockery nor the self-deprecation assumed by some other performers of the part. The handsome Don José (well suggested, dramatically, by James King as the dragoon who goes to jail for aiding Carmen's escape) strikes her as the kind of man with whom her love of *liberté* may be shared.

Does Carmen throw him over simply because she finds the bold toreador more appealing? Not if one believes the body-language through which de los Angeles expresses her feeling for Don José, the play of eyes and the tonality of glances with which Andalusians communicate. Not until much later, when she is disenchanting by the soldier's vacillation between love and duty, and disappointed in her own judgment of the

risks such a man would take for her, does de los Angeles's Carmen begin to look elsewhere. Hence her gravitation to the toreador, to whom the taking of risks is a daily fact of life—and death.

In a range of "Carmens I have known" (of whom Geraldine Farrar was the first, the Russian Elena Obraztsova at the Metropolitan the most recent, and Risè Stevens the most intelligent as well as the best sung), such an expression of character is even more uncommon than de los Angeles's combination of Bizet's vocal line and a clear statement of the French text. She goes straight to the heart of the matter: Her Carmen craves a man strong enough to confess that his love for her reduces him to weakness. This was a detail cleverly spelled out in Irwin Guttman's staging of the "Flower Song" in Act II, which had King towering over the crouching figure of de los Angeles on the floor. When she finds that he cannot sustain that strength (or, as de los Angeles has expressed it, conversationally, "Carmen does not want a man who is always imploring"), she looks for it in another, and pays the price of her life to pride consumed by jealousy.

Along the way, in a conventional but far from unimaginative production designed by Paul Shortt, and well conducted by Alfredo Silipigni, de los Angeles revealed an aptitude for Spanish dance not hinted at before. In addition to lightness and grace, she bore herself with that indispensable adjunct to authenticity known as the Spanish back—the firm spine that supports shoulders and head at the apex of the arch. It should serve her well when she performs *Salud* in Manuel de Falla's *La Vida Breve* in Boston with Sarah Caldwell's company April 8, 13, 15, and 20.

To be mentioned more by contrast than in competition is the Obraztsova Carmen. She has the big mezzo voice, the vulgar view of the part, and the outgoing way of expressing it that give audiences the impression that this must be the kind of creature Bizet had in mind. But if so, why did he not put more of it into his music?

Obraztsova had a fine time with the "Card Scene" but not with much of anything else. Guy Chauvet as Don José was much like Guy Chauvet as anything else: loud, abusing his vocal chords and our ears. James Morris produced a Texas flavor for his Escamillo (more at home on the range than with the bull) and Giuseppe Patané conducted in a workmanlike way. Leona Mitchell, a fine upcoming soprano, saved the musical and dramatic meanings of the evening with her well-sung, strongly acted Micaela. ●



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Ohio Man Discovers The Secret of How to Escape The American Rat Race

7 Simple Rules Net This Working Man Without Any Money or Experience \$145,000 in First Year

By John Whitehead, Special Features Writer (Canton, OH) The secret to making a quick fortune in America has been reduced to a simple 7 step system by an entrepreneur from Canton, Ohio. It requires little or no money, a minimum of time and no elaborate plant or equipment. In fact, you can do it in your home or anywhere.

The man who did it is Ben Swarez from Canton, Ohio, the Pro Football Hall of Fame city. There are hundreds of rags to riches stories each year in America. However, his is very unique. Ben's system is geared to the working man who is living from pay to pay, no savings or assets, working an 8 hour a day job for a big company, no experience and no rich relatives.

For the secret of how he achieved his workingman's way to riches, I held the following interview with Ben.

My interview with Ben was very lengthy and detailed, and I could never come close to fitting it on this page. The most interesting part was towards the end. At the beginning of the interview Ben related how he arrived at the 7 steps to generate net wealth. He calls these 7 steps a Net Profit Generator System, or N.P.G.S. for short. The story on how he arrived at the N.P.G.S. system is lengthy and also incredible. It was no easy task. I will try to summarize.

It all started when he was typical of a majority of Americans, working for a large corporation and being unable to make ends meet. One day the last straw came in a string of frustrations which made him decide to go into something for himself.

He started out by trying to start orthodox businesses, but soon found himself, as all starting businessmen do, heavily in debt. Then one day while exercising, of all things, he had what he calls a tremendous insight on how to make money quickly.

As he put it, "the idea rolled out of my head like a computer printout." It was the 7 step method, the N.P.G.S. system. But even that didn't come easy. The first N.P.G.S. systems failed miserably. But, Ben could see that his concept was valid and only needed to be perfected. He finally did perfect the system and his first successful system was called N.P.G.S.-4. Within a few weeks N.P.G.S.-4 netted him enough money to pay off all his back debts and have \$80,000 left over for profit. It was such a glorious day that I wanted to pick up on the interview at this point.

QUESTION: That is incredible. Within a few weeks N.P.G.S.-4 netted you enough money to pay off all your back debts. You had in your hand \$80,000 in cash as net profit. I can't even imagine getting that much money all at once. What was it like?

ANSWER: It's almost impossible to verbalize. My wife and I just stared at the check for a long time. We had a two day celebration with a dinner and party. It's a fantastic experience to go into work and tell them you quit. The chance to say what you truly feel to people who have had you under their thumb for 10 years is truly a pleasant release of frustration.

The first thing I did was pay off all my bills. Then I paid off my house. I took the money to the savings and loan company who held the mortgage personally to see the looks on their faces. After, we had a "burn the mortgage" party. Next I went to the showroom of the local Lincoln-Mercury dealer and laid down the cash for a brand new Mark.

My wife and I went on a shopping spree for clothes. We had been making do with old clothes for so long they had become worn out. She always had to shop for clothes with very little money. I always joked with her that "If I gave you \$5,000 to spend on clothes could you do it in

one day?" She used to say "I could do it in a couple hours." So that's what I did. I gave her \$5,000 to go out and buy clothes.

We then took a long vacation. In New York I bought her a large diamond at Tiffany's — another thing we always dreamed about.

But, what money really does is give you precious time. Time to be with your wife and children before they grow up before you know it — and time to do things you really want to do. Another priceless thing you gain is your self respect. The words of Frank Sinatra's song "My Way" says it all.

QUESTION: This definitely could be a movie script. How did things go after that?

ANSWER: Excellent. The same year I assembled two more systems and made a total of \$145,000.

QUESTION: You've been at it for 3½ years now. Were the succeeding years as good?

ANSWER: Better. Here are the results by year: The 1st year as mentioned I made \$145,000; the 2nd year I made \$205,000; and 3rd year \$309,000. And already in the first half of this year I have made \$200,000. I have audited financial statements from certified public accountants and income tax returns to verify this to any agency or investigator of any kind who wishes to challenge me on this.

QUESTION: That's quite a system. I understand you have put how to do the system into a book. What can you tell me about this book?

ANSWER: It's called "7 Steps to Freedom, How to Escape the American Rat Race". It contains the complete step-by-step details on how to assemble an N.P.G.S. system which I finally reduced to just 7 simple steps. Here are some highlights of the system:

- The system requires a minimum of time and money to start.
- You don't need special experience or skills to do it, and it's not a salesman's job.
- You don't need to buy or rent buildings, buy or rent equipment and you don't have to hire people.
- You can do it anywhere — in your house, while you travel or a favorite vacation spot or retreat.
- With the system you can earn \$10,000 to \$500,000 in a matter of months and even within two days depending on which system you assemble.
- The money you make is all earned income which is subject to one of the lowest tax bites.

QUESTION: Did you say you can make big money within days?

ANSWER: No, that's an understatement. You can actually do it within hours in some cases. You can compile a system in an afternoon one day and start having spendable money in your hands produced by the system the very next morning!

QUESTION: How much money do you average on a system?

ANSWER: I'd say the average is \$200,000. That's the type I usually stick to. I'll tell you this, doing a system to make \$10,000 to \$20,000 is literally duck soup. I have these available all the time but don't even use them.

QUESTION: You said you need no special talent or experience. Who all can do it?

ANSWER: You only need to follow directions. All you need is common sense, a sense of pride in your work and the ability to see a job through to completion. This system is also perfect for people who are confined at home, such as housewives.

QUESTION: O.K. So, why do you want to reveal your system to other people when it's obvious you're making loads of money with it?

ANSWER: Everyone likes to brag when they accomplish something; and, I'm no different.

Says You Can Do It Anywhere. He Does It While Traveling In His Motor Home



Swarez does his system in his motor home while his wife, Nancy, drives and his two daughters, Sharon and Michele, play and sight-see. That's the family's pet shetland sheepdog on a favorite perch.

Second, I am in the position now to completely retire. I have put all my money into a diversified portfolio of blue chip investments that no one can touch, including myself. So, I'm protected from losing my money myself or someone taking it away from me.

Also, I think I can keep everyone from knowing my secret by only making the book available on a limited, controlled basis. The book is not in book stores.

QUESTION: I shudder to ask, how much does a book cost?

ANSWER: If it was priced at what it's worth, few people could afford it. There's at least a million dollars' worth of knowledge in this book. I'm not exaggerating when I say I don't know of any other book in which a person stands to gain and benefit so much. But, I will make it a very reasonable price of \$20.00. This book is being distributed for me under my control by Quality Consumer.

A most interesting interview and I would have to call this the book of the century. For those who want a copy of the book from this present press run, the following information is provided:

The book contains over 286 8½" x 11" pages containing detailed, illustrated instructions on how to set up a Net Profit Generator System (N.P.G.S.) complete with all necessary forms. It is written in clear, easy to understand language.

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THEATER

Of Mice and Masters

by Martin Gottfried

Pittsburgh
JOHN STEINBECK'S *Of Mice and Men* is one of the few American plays that is standing the test of time. It is a classic, profound and dramatic and immensely moving. Yet only lately has the play been staged with any regularity: at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis five years ago; on Broadway a few seasons back; and just last month by the estimable Pittsburgh Public Theater.

The test of a classic is its ability to be valid for any age; to sustain interest after repeated viewings; to provoke new and different responses. The first impression Steinbeck's play gives is an emotional one, for it is a story of pathos and tragedy. George and Lenny are a pair of itinerant farm workers drifting across California during the Thirties. They are friend and friend, man and child, brother and keeper. The huge Lenny is mentally retarded, a gentle giant. George takes care of him, seeing that he doesn't get into trouble—a constant threat because Lenny doesn't know his own strength.

The two men hire out to a large farm and move into the bunkhouse. When the other laborers hear Lenny and George discuss their plans to save enough money to buy their own piece of land, they are enthralled by the dream, and offer to chip in and share in the land. But when Lenny, frightened by the farm owner's daughter-in-law, strangles her, these hopes are dashed. Realizing that his friend is dangerous, that he will either be gunned down or jailed forever, George distracts Lenny. And slays him.

Like any work of art, a play must be good before it can be great; it must work before it can be profound. If it doesn't have basic theatrical value, then any other qualities it might have—language, imagery and metaphor, subtext and philosophy—become academic. *Of Mice and Men* is devastating on the gut level. Its characters are believable, its story is engrossing, its situations are dramatic, the tension builds to a final release of emotional energy. Solid, dramatic architecture is as necessary to a play as a good story. Perhaps Steinbeck didn't construct his play's architecture alone; George S. Kaufman, the well-known playwright and theatrical physician, was Steinbeck's director in 1937 and did help the fledgling playwright adapt his successful novel to the stage.



Pittsburgh Public Theater's Ben Shaktman.

Yet the power is Steinbeck's, for never in his life did Kaufman write so forceful and artistic a play as *Of Mice and Men*.

Ironically, though Steinbeck was famous for his fiction, and won a Nobel Prize for it, he may well be remembered for this first play. It is surely his best.

Any play must have more than one layer to be artistic. Implications and references and stimulations—the what-is-it-about?—are what give *Of Mice and Men* its layers.

The power of the story, for example, lies in its dealings with fundamentals. There are biblical qualities in this parable, and elements of fairy tales and monster stories. Isn't Lenny an ogre? How different is he from the Hunchback of Notre Dame or King Kong or Dr. Frankenstein's creature? He, too, is an innocent, a well-meaning but love-starved grotesque whose physical appearance is frightening, who takes that fright for rejection. Like the other monsters, he must be destroyed by his creator, the God figure, the father.

Of Mice and Men also has in it elements later used by Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*. Like Vladimir and Estragon, these two wanderers are seeking some fulfillment and justification of life, as symbolized by the farm they dream about. And like Beckett's two tramps, they somehow know that the dream cannot come true; that life won't be justified—their Godot will never come.

One can also see in the play some of the comradely, share-the-wealth aspects of Thirties left-wing thinking. But the

deepest and broadest subject in the play is the human being, represented by both Lenny and George. George is the mental side of us, and Lenny is the physical, emotional, animal side. As with most great literature, *Of Mice and Men* deals with our eternal struggle to control our own destinies, to make sense of our lives, to be rational beings rather than victims of nature. This struggle is one that artists traditionally think doomed to failure. Steinbeck may seem to differ; his rational figure survives the emotional one—the smart George does kill the animal Lenny. But who really survives? Is killing a rational act of the mind? By killing Lenny (his primitive part) did George destroy himself? After all, he is left with no hope.

Though the production of the Pittsburgh Public Theater was flawed, it touched off a deep responsive chord among its audience. Here was a regional theater doing exactly what a regional theater is supposed to do—provide polished productions of worthwhile plays in theaters outside New York. Its audiences have something created for them in particular, instead of the warmed-over Broadway hits that show up at the local dinner theater.

The Pittsburgh Public Theater is not among America's regional theater pioneers. It isn't even of the second generation. This season is only its fourth. Yet it has already established itself as a major cultural force in Pittsburgh, because of the drive and the belief and the considerable talent of its artistic director, Ben Shaktman. Coming to a city that had already rejected two regional theaters, he proved that no town is a bad theater town. There is a right theater for every city, for Pittsburgh. His house is a striking four-sided arena, dramatic in its own right, but—at 350 seats—not big enough. A new building is already being planned. The season has grown from three productions to six. The plays have been diverse and stimulating, from Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* to Shakespeare and Shaw. The productions have not always been brilliant but they have been unassailably professional, and never in my life have I seen a better *Menagerie*.

Shaktman's is not a flamboyant theater. New York and London don't hear about it as they do the latest *Annie* or *A Chorus Line*. But it is real and true theater, and high theater. ●