

RECORDS

Stephen Wadsworth

Hidden Haydn

Some of Franz Joseph Haydn's 21 operas are lost or incomplete. None has ever been considered important, either in Haydn's oeuvre or in the operatic canon. Yet by 1982, when we'll all be celebrating the 250th birthdays of Haydn, Fragonard, and George Washington, every known operatic note by the father of the symphony will probably be available on disc.

In the forefront, with Antal Dorati as guiding light and maestro, Philips has been busy with a cycle of Haydn's nine major operas. The seven so far released span the years of Gluck's maturity and Mozart's middle-period operas, 1775-1783. Every summer, Dorati—kept *au courant* by a phalanx of ardent Haydn scholars—takes a cast of fresh, characterful voices to Lausanne and breathes life into an opera or two for Philips's skillful producer and crew.

On a long list of mammoth recorded sets and cycles that appeal to the consumer who aspires to Have It All, Haydn's operas don't sound like a big buying priority. But this cycle, besides unfailingly maintaining a high standard of musical performance, is actually a creative project, not just another block of Beethoven symphonies.

For one thing, in festival-class performances with the most musical singers money can buy, these operas are revealed as plenty major, *qua opera* and also *qua Haydn*. For another, opera houses and festivals, from Glyndebourne to Aix-en-Provence to Caramoor, are now regularly giving Haydn's operas new life onstage, and for that blessed resurgence of faith Papa Haydn's papa scholar, H.C. Robbins Landon, claims these Dorati

records are "solely and completely responsible." The Haydn series has been recognized with major awards for both musical and musicological distinction.

Haydn's operas are insightful and felicitous in the extreme but rarely achieve the psychological depth and truth that Mozart, one of the great musical dramatists, commanded concurrently at only half Haydn's age. However, a surprising number of Mozart's most profound musicodramatic inspirations are eerily foreshadowed by Haydn's, which were in every case committed to paper several years before Mozart got around to



them. Haydn's vocal and orchestral writing is comparable to Mozart's, though, and the end-of-act ensembles in *La Fedeltà Premiata* (No. 6707028, 4-record set, \$39.92) and *Orlando Paladino* (No. 6707029, 4-record set, \$39.92) are, in Dorati's words, "just as good as the big Mozart finales."

Both Dorati and Landon recommend either of these two operas above the others in the cycle to the collector who only wants one. Asked which of Haydn's qualities the operas bring out, Dorati stresses wit and Landon compassion. In general, wit keeps Haydn's operas moving, and compassion, while deepening them, slows them down; in Landon's words, "In opera after opera he suddenly gets monumentally side-

tracked with these downtrodden people, and the action sort of stops." Not in *La Fedeltà Premiata* (Fidelity Rewarded), though. This numbskull pastoral, ripping with character and event, combines pathos and humor delectably. *Orlando Paladino*, a tongue-in-cheek yet touching song of Roland, isn't far behind.

How important are the operas in Haydn's oeuvre? Dorati says, "Haydn himself rated them very high. That should give you a clue." Dorati would include an opera in a basic library of five Haydn recordings, but Landon wouldn't: "An opera comes sixth."

More important for him are one recording each of the Opus 20 and 76 string quartets, some late London symphonies, a mass, probably the "Nelson," and a big oratorio, probably *The Creation*.

Nevertheless, Landon, whose worldwide roamings and ravings on behalf of these operas (and indeed

everything Haydnian) could be labeled, like *Orlando Paladino*, a *dramma eroicomico*, calls the Philips Haydn opera cycle "the finest thing Dorati has ever done, even finer than his complete Haydn symphonies for London. He's got the *pace* so marvelously. I cannot imagine Haydn himself having conducted them any differently."

You don't have to be H.C. Robbins Landon to enjoy these operas. They can no longer be considered a back alley for Haydn, nor should they be regarded as an indulgence of the recording industry or some musical elite. They are a new and happy fact of our operatic lives. ■

Stephen Wadsworth, former managing editor of *Opera News*, contributes articles to many musical publications here and abroad.

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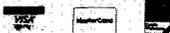
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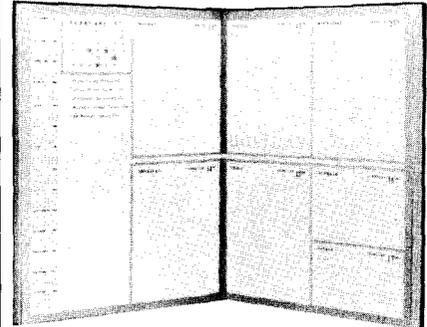
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Irving Kolodin

How to Cure the Met

As the starter for a normal Metropolitan Opera season, Alban Berg's *Lulu* brings together everything unsuitable for such an occasion: grim stage action from the playwright Frank Wedekind, nonvocal music that is consistently hard to deliver, little that can be called entertainment.

But as the starter for an abnormal season that was delayed for two months by labor disputes, it aroused a surge of artistic vitality that transcended almost everything heard in the Metropolitan Opera House during the last five years.

Bringing together the brilliant best of conductor James Levine's abilities in the pit, a historically outstanding *Lulu* by Teresa Stratas, the advent of a new singing-acting personality in Franz Mazura as Dr. Schön, a neatly purposeful Countess Geschwitz by Evelyn Lear, and a potent Alwa by Kenneth Riegel, under the skillful direction of John Dexter, this example of the Metropolitan at its most fulfilling provided much needed momentum.

In the aftermath of such an accomplishment and its ongoing influence, it is worth remembering that in the labor-management "unpleasantness" last fall, management won a four-year contract that will carry through the Met's centennial season of 1983-1984.

Crucial to this time period is a well-publicized campaign to raise an endowment fund of \$100 million. What happens then? The inescapable reality is that opera seasons are now planned more than two years in advance. With 1980 gone, barely 24 months remain before the season *after* the centennial will be taking shape. Will it be along the same lines as those of the past several decades?

Before Rudolf Bing took command in 1950, the Met cultivated a cadre of subscribers who paid in advance for

their tickets and thus were assured of the best locations at prices they could afford. Fine idea. But to provide useful flexibility, management held an option on the number of performances included in the subscription pattern:



Lulu: Stratas, Andrew Foldi, Riegel.

When a new artist of great ability or an important production earned a warm welcome, more performances could be worked into the schedule. Out of Bing's orderly mind (and an understandable desire to lock-in the talent he needed), came the plan for an entirely presubscribed season, *and* the working capital it would bring in.

But the idea didn't work so well in the Sixties, and it hasn't artistically, in the Seventies. Top artists are less available for extended engagements than they used to be. The most desirable conductors have dwindled in quantity. The best of them have too many other concerns to give the Met six or more

weeks to rehearse a new production and then to conduct it the number of times Met subscription patterns require.

Now the question is: Why preserve a subscription pattern when the period of artistic justification has run its course? If the Met wants a \$100-million endowment fund, shouldn't it be required to guarantee some new life and flexibility in its scheme of presentation? Won't that amount of money, suitably invested, reduce the need for preseason cash? Isn't it urgent that the Met's mode of scheduling performances work, for a change, *with* the artists it wants rather than the other way around? Isn't it absurd that a singer of Birgit Nilsson's greatness cannot be accommodated at the Met because schedules are set for several seasons to come? San Francisco does its job better.

The investment of time and effort to create a working relationship between the Met and the artists its public deserves has benefits and by-products that look to the future as well as the present. When Karl Böhm was given the opportunity to create the Metropolitan's first, fine production of Richard Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in 1966, the public profited from his pride in achievement that brought him back whenever the work was rescheduled a decade later. Such an investment of time and effort could produce the same enduring results with a production of Schoenberg's *Moses and Aaron* under Georg Solti, Michael Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* under Colin Davis, Rossini's *La Cenerentola* under Claudio Abbado, etc. etc.

Ways to reshape the subscription system can be suggested anytime the Met management makes up its mind the time has come. The sooner the better, beginning with Season I of Century II. ■