

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. ■

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SR Competition No. 17

Your recent success with the Clerihew convinces us that you are now ready for an even more demanding form, the Double Dactyl (and we thank Constance A. Sancetta of West Nyack, New York, for reminding us of it). The poet Anthony Hecht invented it in Rome in 1951 (his definitive book *Jiggery Pokery: A Compendium of Double Dactyls*, New York, 1967, may be consulted with profit), though the good nature of our reader Sancetta appears to have been abused by persons claiming to have originated it at Swarthmore College in the mid-1960s. In the strict-constructionist version the rules are ironclad, sort of. Eight lines, divided into two quatrains, each line a dactylic dimeter (or double dactyl: '— —' — —), except for 4 and 8, which are truncated, lacking the two final unstressed syllables ('— —'), and which must rhyme. Line 1 must consist of nonsense syllables, line 2 of a proper name, and line 6, or preferably 7, of a *single word*. Under the sway of celestial inspiration, these rules show a happy tendency to relax. After all, winning is not everything. At any rate, we offer as a model our own composition, in which we gratefully immortalize Miss Sancetta:

Omigosh! Omigosh!
Constance A. Sancetta
Came to our rescue in
The nick of time!

How could we thank her ex-
cept by this stupidly
Sesquipedalian
Effort to rhyme?

At the rate of \$25 each, surely three of you can do better than this. Kindly state that the entry is your own unpublished work.

Entries for Competition No. 17 must be received by March 6 and the winners will be announced in the May issue. Send submissions to SR Competition No. 17, *Saturday Review*, 150 East 58 Street, New York, New York 10155. All entries become the property of SR.

Winners of No. 14

You were to dream up some fanciful ancestor who was responsible for your being, in the ultimate fine-tuning of ethnicity, a macaroon, harpoon, etc. One correspondent, Peggy Fox of Brooklyn, New York, whose letterhead

suggests a familiarity with publishing, guessed that this was sure to be "a 12-sack contest." She was right—well, almost right—for though the number of English words ending in the sound -oon is obviously limited, there seems to be no limit to the number of SR readers who want to squeeze all the available fun out of this tiny inventory.

Speaking of correspondence, we wish space permitted us to print (and answer) all the lively comments that accompanied the entries. Here are samples of what we might say. No, Mr. X, this was not an exercise in "cryptoracism" (the best way to get rid of absurd terms like *octaroon* is to laugh them out of existence). Thanks, Mrs. Y, for telling us that you got through a root-canal job by concentrating on entries. We will inform NC of this new therapy. And apologies, Ms. Z, that you and your friend kept waking each other up all night long with even funnier and more ribald genealogies for a "balloon." None printable, we fear.

Despite the numerous entries, we only found two that were truly worthy of prizes. First prize to Esther Whitehead of Tyler, Texas:

Alas, I'm a picaroon—a rogue, a brigand, a pirate; the disreputable offspring of a father who played both the piccolo and the bassoon. (His favorite tunes were from *Brigadoon*.)

I grew up spooning down my Cajun grandmama's spicy langouste gumbo—watered down somewhat for an infant. With that epicurean heritage (and overlooking all my ups and downs), I'm proud to be called a lagoon.

I have the misfortune to be labeled a "prune." Though rather prudish in nature, my great-grandmother Plum Blossom—a native of Muscat, Oman—believed in raisin' her children in the sun. Thus did I inherit the dominant, wrinkled gene. . . .

Second prize to Mary Lines of San Francisco, who imbedded her three entries in a single paragraph:

The forbidden photo album was finally mine. The old-fashioned pictures, with their neat inscriptions underneath, were curious in the extreme. Many of the stern top-hatted men and crinoline women appeared to be identical twins. Many of their ringleted offspring seemed to be suffering or recovering from fevers. Most shocking of all was the sight of a buxom great-aunt straining the seams of a man's tuxedo, or a brawny great-grandfather in a frilly dress. I had

long suspected the hereditary nature of what I share with them—my being both a DOUBLOON and a TYPHOON. Now, however, that I realize no inherited tendency can be blamed upon me, I freely admit what I have long concealed from the world: I am a DRAGOON!

Puzzles

Literary Crypt No. 162

BIG QUEBEQ AQLUQGYX
ALP BIG JYLX LB LYY STU
PLBQIERZ IEA UGLQBETR BT
EB. G.O. PIEBG

Wit Twister No. 174

EDITED BY ARTHUR SWAN

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash with a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.

The _ _ _ _ _ board the ship, cut
down the crew,
And force from fops who _ _ _ _ _
the upper deck
The last _ _ _ _ _ , crown,
doubloon, or sou,
Before their _ _ _ _ _ quit the
corpse-strewn wreck.

A.S.

January Answers

Literary Crypt No. 161

Self-discovery is more likely to take place. . . . in the fiction called fiction than in the fiction called autobiography.

Jessamyn West

Wit Twister No. 173

septa, peats, pates, spate, tapes, paste

Middleton Double-Crostic No. 203

MARIO PEI: THE STORY OF LANGUAGE

An account of the way an exasperated Cockney tried to spell out the name of the town of Ealing for. . . the telephone operator runs. . . : "E for 'eaven, A for wot 'orses eat, L for where you're going, I for me, N for wot lays eggs, and G for gawd's sake keep your ears open!"