

FORECAST AND REVIEW

TABLOID HINDEMITH

HINDEMITH'S *Neues vom Tage*, the only work of contemporary origin introduced on any of the three Berlin operatic stages last season, is of considerable importance because it not only is characteristic of the author's present status but also throws light on the general condition of opera in Germany today.

His previous stage work is easily surveyed. We can ignore the three one-act operas of 1921; they are almost entirely forgotten and cast little light on the composer's present personality. They were followed by *Der Dämon*, a dance pantomime, the music of which is now relegated to occasional performance in the concert-room. *Cardillac*, completed in 1926, was Hindemith's first grand opera—an extraordinary, in fact almost double-visaged work. For its rigid adherence to modern polyphonic style within the strict limitations of its form is in direct contradiction to the romantic, almost Wagnerian events of its drama. This "musician's" inclination to make himself independent of the stage, to give free scope to his talent for the orchestra, this disdain of unity between the scene and music, manifests itself in even greater degree in the new opera, *Neues vom Tage*, which, in other respects, is a striking contrast to its forerunners.

The title in itself is a program. The libretto was the work of Marcellus Schiffer, the entertaining variety show writer who supplied Hindemith with the sketch, *Hin und Zurück*. Here he has prepared an operatic libretto,—three acts, eleven scenes. However, one bright jest does not easily fill an entire evening. The conception of the libretto is better than its execution. That a serious musician like Hindemith should decide to compose to a farce created by a cabaret mentality, is symptomatic. The title, that of a well known column in the daily papers, indicates the

most up-to-the-minute present as its subject, and though not the first occasion on which this has been developed, it has hitherto not been carried out so unmistakably. Krenek's much discussed and abused *Jonny* is so closely connected with a romantic love story that its modernism may be regarded as mere setting. A locomotive alone does not make a modern opera.

The introduction of realism, of every-day life, even of banality into opera has long ceased to be a novelty. With us in Germany, for almost a century, the exclusion of all reality was held to be the basic law for music-drama, a consequence mainly of Wagner's preference for mythological and medieval subjects. Strauss was the first to rebel. But it was reserved to our own time to find the operatic stage prepared to consider present-day people, their lives and their world. France, guided by the prudent satirist, Eric Satie, led the way. Later Krenek, Weill and Hindemith followed suit each after his own fashion. With *Neues vom Tage* we have an opera which in its "every-day-ness" becomes an exalted revue.

The plot concerns Laura and Edward, an ordinary married couple, who fail to agree. The curtain has barely risen for the first scene when they are found in a bitter quarrel. Cups are



SCENE FROM NEUES VOM TAGE
In the Darmstadt Production

smashed, we hear abuse, even revolver shots. Suddenly the relieving thought occurs to them: "We will get a divorce!" No sooner said than done! The next scene finds them at the registrar's! But the matter is not so simply solved. Their

friends, another married couple, by means of a feigned case of adultery, quickly succeed in getting a divorce, yet Laura and Edward have no end of difficulty. As a cause for divorce they

hire handsome Mr. Hermann; but Edward interrupts the first rendezvous at a museum, and, in a sudden fit of jealousy, flings a valuable Venus at the professional adulterer's head and is taken to prison. Handsome Mr. Hermann now actually, not professionally, in love with Laura, makes a surprise call on her in the bathroom of her hotel. The hotel-staff also appears on the scene. Indignation, excitement, scandal! Since both Laura and Edward have aroused public interest a manager presents himself to engage them for his theatre. As the headliners in a variety show they abuse each other, smash cups and statues every evening, and end in discovering that, after all, they are well fitted for each other. They decide to remain together, but the chorus of newspaper readers object. "You are no longer private persons; you appear in the papers; you are the News of the Day! You must be divorced! The reader is entitled to his rights!"

This, it will be seen, is a novel kind of opera. The combination of many short, loosely connected scenes which Hindemith has united by magnificently scored intermezzi, indicates the form of the revue. It would have been natural to cut up this libretto partly into parlando dialogues, partly into unrestrained jazz pieces. Kurt Weill would probably have done so; but not Hindemith. From the first to the last word he sets Schiffer's book to music in the spirit of modern opera. On the superficiality of the text he has superimposed an immense amount of splendidly worked-out music, every bar of which reveals a conscientious, masterful hand. Jazz, which has been so plentifully abused on similar occasions, plays an insignificant role, and when it does appear, it is transformed and infused with Hindemith's personal style.

In this work Hindemith has deviated from the strict contrapuntal technique of *Cardillac*. But, rigorous instrumentalist that he is, he remains too strongly immersed in his characteristic style not to permit a noticeable conflict between stage and music to arise. A great deal of good music is wasted on a trifle, with the unique result that as a musician Hindemith has been reproached for putting too much "quality" into his work. On the other hand comprehension of the text is imperiled by the instrumental coloring of the voices. What good are jokes if

they are not understood? Occasionally, it is true, the contrast between word and tone produces a humorous effect, as when Laura, in her bathtub, sings a most serious aria eulogizing the advantages of the hot water supply. Or when the hotel guests intone a pathetic chorus to the words: "How embarrassing!"

This work of Hindemith's is superabundant in sharply drawn themes, in originality of design, and, last but not least, in the peculiar vitality of its scoring. The orchestra favors hard color, two grand pianos emphasizing this tendency. One of the most successful scenes is achieved by means of the two pianos and two voices. The stage is divided. Edward, lying on a bed of planks in prison, and Laura, on a couch at home, read their fate in the newspaper. The chorus of men at the registrar announcing births, marriages and deaths, and handing in divorce pleas, is a highly amusing scene. The chorus of stenographers at their typewriters is another; as they sing, "In reply to yours of yesterday regarding the delivery of a smart marriage witness," the opera chorus executes the business letter.

One need not assert that Hindemith lacks the humor for a comic opera, but his wit is obviously more intellectual, his entire manner more serious than this libretto permits. *Neues vom Tage* attempts to revive the opera-bouffe in the spirit of the twentieth century, but it remains an experiment. Hindemith's further stage productions will be successful or not according to whether he finds the right poet, a person who, up till now, has eluded him.

Hans Gutman

JÜRIG JENATCH

THE outstanding performance of Heinrich Kaminski's *Jürg Jenatch*, given under Fritz Busch at the Dresden State Opera last summer, contained all sorts of surprises.

Kaminski of the *Concerto Grosso* and of the *Magnificat*, a rather conservative, though original creative power with an apparently polyphonic mind, revealed himself as a stage composer of the first order. *Jürg Jenatch* is really a spoken drama in a framework of orchestral preludes and finales, interpolated with vocal dialogues and mass scenes. But Kaminski's musical and