

has several delightful passages. Gurlitt manipulates the orchestra in many respects in the manner of chamber music, and seeks to render the words of the text comprehensible by making the vocal parts thoroughly singable, an effort deserving endorsement.

*Hans Gutman*

## THE BACCHANTES OF WELLESZ

THOUGH a recognized composer for the stage, Egon Wellesz, the Viennese musician, had never had a dramatic performance in his own city. It was therefore, a point of honor for the Vienna Staatsoper to put on the world premiere of his new work, the two-act classical drama *Die Bakchantinnen* and to open the theatres of that city to a composer who had been much more frequently presented in Germany.

*Die Bakchantinnen* is based on the familiar drama of Euripides, the composer having prepared his own book. The story of the Theban king Pentheus, who becomes the sacrifice of the wild Mænads of Dionysius, is part of Greek mythology. However it is not generally understood today why Pentheus raged in unquenchable hate against the new god, and finally met death through his own mother, Agave. The chief motivating forces are not entanglement and guilt, although these are constantly potent, but the rivalry between Agave and her sister, Semele, who had recently borne Dionysius, and whom Agave had caused to be burnt to death—a sin for which she must now tragically atone. These sources also inspire the hate and jealousy of the power-craving king. Wellesz himself added the scene on Mount Cithæron, where Pentheus dies in a nocturnal orgy and the blind seer, Tiresias, reveals Agave's delusion.

This opera, as might be expected, is built on choral effects which demonstrate the composer's feeling for the theatre and his sensitiveness to the ritual and spirit of the classics. Through long research and intimate knowledge of Byzantine music, Wellesz has been able to lend something of the archaic to his melodic line. The invention and the rhythm of the melodies reveal Wellesz as research student, but the harmony is completely modern,

using mixed chords and only occasional three-tone harmonies. Apart from the independent choral pieces and solo songs, the form is attained not by composition in left-motifs but through the inter-weaving of broad melodic lines which are held together by their rhythmic strength and driven forward dynamically.

The work as a whole reveals a profound culture, a pure artistic inclination and a fine sense of sonority. Though sublime in conception, it is not readily assimilated by the public, for its primary objective is to expound a new idea of musical communication by the placing of the chorus in the foreground as the bearer of the action, a scheme which can be appreciated now only by a trained expert. It will be a long time before this work is generally comprehended.

The Vienna Staatsoper spared no pains to make this a worthy presentation. The execution of the choruses deserves special recognition. The songs, often requiring nine voices, were admirably rehearsed; the whole production was mounted in a spirit worthy of so earnest an artist as Egon Wellesz.

*Paul Pisk*