

forth in the text. Above all, a certain aridity in the tonal quality interferes with the intelligibility of the musical proceedings. Even those who have traveled in the world of twelve-tone music and are familiar with post-Schönberg artistic materials will be astounded by its radical and non-sensual speech.

To the songs, operatically appropriate, Krenek adds contrapuntal ensembles, and choruses, purely declamatory stretches, melodramatic portions, and pieces of spoken prose. His vocal gift is clearest in the songs of Francis I and in the scenes of Eleanora, the sister of Karl. His skill in the field of music-drama is most apparent in the two finales with their polyphonic piling up of vocal and instrumental materials.

For the brilliant Prague premiere the Neue Deutsche Theater (whose further existence is now endangered) had solved the abnormal difficulties of the production by more than a half year of rehearsal. Under the leadership of the highly gifted opera head, Karl Rankl, one of Schönberg's students, and the intelligent direction of Dr. Friedrich Schramm, the performance won over its opponents and made the work an undisputed success.

*H. H. Stuckenschmidt*

## STRAUSS IN MUNICH; BLUM IN PARIS

**B**EFORE the drums and trappings of the German summer had passed beyond the premonition stage a memorable and curious event occurred that made a new date for operatic history. The world premiere of *Friedenstag*, a one-act opera by Richard Strauss, at the National-Theater, Munich, on July 24, not only revealed an important expression of the talents of the later Strauss, but provided that exceeding rarity, a pacifist opera.

The time selected for the action is the historic liberation from the long thralldom and horror of armed conflict, the last day of the Thirty Years' War. In this novel venture for Richard Strauss he had as collaborator a man who had never furnished him with a libretto before, though he had been a member of the literary group in Vienna which revolved around Strauss's librettist of long years' standing—the late Hugo von Hofmannsthal. This man, Joseph Gregor, has also supplied the texts of Strauss's

subsequent one-act opera, *Daphne*, and of a *King Midas* on which the composer is now working. Nothing could be franker, more forthright, more uncompromising than the *Friedenstag* libretto.

Within the citadel of a town held by the imperial troops and besieged by the Protestants, soldiers are complaining bitterly of the hardships of an interminable war. The commandant, whose god is war, is inexorable. From without the fortress come the cries of the starving populace. The burgomaster, the bishop, and a deputation of townspeople wait on the commandant, begging him to open the gates of the city. The commandant consents, but in his own mind purposes before surrender to blow up the fortress with the garrison and himself. His wife enters and pleads with him, but in vain. The fuse is lighted, ready for the explosion, when the pealing of church bells, the bells of peace, resound from the city. Bishop, burgomaster, and townsfolk return, accompanying the Protestant commander. The wife bids the commandant yield in the name of Peace. The two commanders fall into each other's arms. In one great fraternity the populace and the Protestant soldiers flock in. All jubilantly hymn peace and love.

Obviously the luxurious Strauss of *Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier* could find little opportunity in this staged peace tract. Some might cite *Elektra*. But even there horror and revenge are set forth with a prodigality of manifestation that is the hysterical converse of the astringent austerity of the first third of *Friedenstag*.

Nothing tempers the grimness of the unnamed fortress in the beleaguered city, except the lyrical Italian verses of a Piedmontese messenger. All is somber, spare, compressed. From the initial whole-note motive to the commandant's order to fire, the score is ascetic in its gauntness. The pages of dirge, the cries of the populace, the pleas of bishop and burgomaster, even the soldiers' songs are dark and threatening.

But in the second section, which opens with a soliloquy by Maria the commandant's wife, the mood passes slowly from despair to hope. Autumn sunlight gleams through loopholes in the masonry, and the music, from a doubting minor, bursts into a mighty major affirmation. In the duet between Maria and the

commandant, in which she implores him to give her his love again and frantically curses war, while he still exalts it as the "glorious prince of men," we have Strauss again in his most soaring and exuberant vein. The music, now relieved of shackling asceticism, takes on a typical polyphonic richness of texture.

In the conclusion the composer devotes all his resources to the celebration of peace. This opens with a cannon shot that the commandant mistakes for renewed battle. But the pealing of the church bells, silent for thirty years, precedes the joyous announcement that the treaty has been signed and "a new world awakened to life." The walls of the fortress split apart and the tower sinks (according to the strict letter of the stage direction; in Munich this is realistically set forth by the lowering of the drawbridge), and all humanity, under an explosion of noonday sun, shouts its joy and devotion to the Ruling Spirit. This long, climactic apotheosis, interrupted only by a brief doctrinal dispute between the Protestant commander and the Catholic commandant, is something that Strauss, with his enormous technic and experience and complete knowledge of the stage, handles with tremendous effectiveness.

In discussing the Munich premiere it should be borne in mind that it was something of a special occasion. For one thing, Strauss, whose stage works have oftenest been given first in Dresden, had never before honored Munich in that way. In the next place, the general excellence of the production—the Munich management evidently spared no pains in preparing it—could hardly be duplicated in the average repertory performance. And, further, the character of the auditorium must be considered. The reasonable size of the National-Theater was favorable to seeing and hearing alike. In no theatre where the audience was not familiar with the language of the opera and able to catch the words distinctly could *Friedenstag* emerge at its full value.

It is important, indeed, that in all the trenchant dialog Strauss has been unprecedentedly careful never to let the music obscure the text. Thus, particularly in the first third of the opera, the remarkable economy of means and the just balance preserved between music and word actually suggests the "exalted speech"

of such a music drama as *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the contrast that the simplicity, directness, and emphasis of this declaration of faith seem to provide to the menacing European situation. As regards the relation of *Friedenstag* and its pacifist message to the ideology prevailing in Germany last July, I observed two opposing points of view. According to one it harmonizes perfectly with the aims of the Third Reich; according to the other it stands out in contrast and protest. In any case, though the composer, his wife, and his son occupied a prominent box while Clemens Kraus, the Intendant of the Bavarian State Opera, conducted, the Führer himself was absent from this significant premiere of an opera by Germany's leading composer.

But, of course, the Führer had a perfectly plausible excuse in the opening on the same day of the Bayreuth Festival, a solemnity that enjoys his special favor and which he never fails to attend. Apparently, however, official approval has not been withheld, for on October 15 at Dresden *Friedenstag* shared the program with *Daphne*, when that one-act opera on a classical theme was given to the world with all due pomp and circumstance.

It fared otherwise with the immediate predecessors to *Friedenstag*, *Arabella* (1933) and *Die Schweigsame Frau* (1935), two operas which Strauss set to texts by non-Aryans, the late Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Stefan Zweig. These disappeared from currency shortly after their world premières. It is further worthy of note that Strauss in July, 1935, resigned from the presidency of the Reich Culture Chamber and the Federation of German Composers, under official pressure, it was rumored at the time, due to his collaboration with Zweig. Now in spite of his close association with Hofmannsthal, Gregor seems to be accepted as a suitable co-author for a dramatic composer whose pre-eminence not only in Germany but in the world today could hardly be denied.



On the other side of the Rhine, in token of the arts of peace, even if not expressly so denominated as in the case of *Friedenstag*, the American abroad came across a phenomenon which though in no sense a festival is perhaps more noteworthy than any festival

—the resurgence of the Paris Opéra, a focal point of France's artistic rearmament.

The use of resurgence in this connection may well be a surprise to the Americans who have long regarded the Académie Nationale de Musique et de Danse as hopelessly relegated to the artistic doldrums. Nor is this unfamiliar to Americans only. It is astonishing how few Frenchmen have yet digested the fact. But the fact remains that in an obviously different way the reform of the French national theatres brought about by the first government of Léon Blum, thanks mainly to the keen personal interest in the arts of M. Blum himself, is no less important than the reform of the Bank of France.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to maintain that the Paris Opéra, the aforesaid Académie Nationale de Musique et de Danse, is now threatening to become the world's foremost lyric theatre.

I will not dwell on the elaborate splendors of the reburnished interior consequent on the fire that destroyed scaffoldings set up for repairs. That is a setting for the pageantry of audiences. But at the same time the stage, one of the largest in the world and one of the most generous in its potentialities, has been provided with an absolutely up-to-date equipment, and along with that has come direction of a high order.

The scenic pictures at the Opéra are frequently all that one could desire. In particular there is an uncommonly successful use of projection (not that it invariably achieves its ends). For example, the problem of the phantom ship in *The Flying Dutchman* is solved as I have seen it done nowhere else, and with a startling impressiveness.

The company, which boasts so distinguished a singing-actress as Germaine Lubin for heroic soprano roles and so distinguished a young baritone as Martial Singher, one of the most remarkable actors now in opera, has been notably improved not only in its individual membership, but in general spirit and attention to ensemble. The chorus is far better than formerly. Only the orchestra still stands in conspicuous need of improvement, though progress has been made there also.

Typical of the Opéra's enterprise is the production of

*L'Aiglon*. Based on Rostand's play, it is musically the work of two composers no less eminent than Arthur Honegger and Jacques Ibert. Shortly after its world premiere at Monte Carlo, a year ago last spring, it came to the Opéra, where it has prospered not only because of its intrinsic merits, but thanks to a production that ranks among the unforgettable achievements of the lyric stage. The Duc de Reichstadt of Fanny Heldy is as extraordinary an operatic figure as the Jongleur of Mary Garden. There is also the striking embodiment of the faithful Flambeau by Vanni Marcoux. And the production as a whole, from the sets to the tiniest role, grazes perfection.

*L'Aiglon* is only one outstanding instance of a general broadening and quickening of the repertory. From the past has come a noteworthy revival of Gluck's *Alceste*, presenting Mme. Lubin as the antique heroine. Janacek's *Jenufa* some months ago was promised as a novelty for the autumn.

Two new French works of the contemporary school are to emerge in double harness on November 29. One of these, a *Jeanne d'Arc* by Arthur Honegger, the text by the poet and statesman Paul Claudel, has already had a concert performance at Basle. At the Opéra it will be paired with *La Sagesse* by Darius Milhaud, who once more, as often in the past, has M. Claudel as author of the words. Before these evidences of new life, it is obvious that the Paris Opéra bespeaks careful watching on the part of all who keep up an interest in the lyric drama.

Pitts Sanborn