

GERMAN OPERA IN TRANSITION

IN Germany and Austria the current season has brought forth little that requires extended comment. This is especially true of novelties in the opera field. The year has been marked by all the phenomena traditionally associated with periods of great change, the principal effect having been to restrict the production of new works and works in new styles. Although *Gleichschaltung* has been consummated, different interpretations of it prevail everywhere. A unified artistic policy cannot yet be guaranteed; it is apparent only in its broad outlines.

Every active theatre director in Germany is supposed to be an advance guard for National Socialism. How to make this theory an actuality, what works to include in programs and which to shun, have become the responsibility of the directors, in accordance with the new "leadership" policy. The result is contingent on the skill and taste of the person concerned. The Ministry for Public Instruction and Propaganda has a dramatic expert to whom doubtful cases may be submitted. Yet this official is not to be the predominant factor in the formation of programs. More significant is the influence of the "Deutsche Bühne," an organization of theatre-goers. All previous associations of the kind have been merged in this group; now even the individual subscribers have been included. Through the gathering together of these subscribers, the Deutsche Bühne has become a powerful influence, with a decisive effect on the planning of the programs. It is no longer possible for a German theatre to accept and work on a production for which there is no guarantee by a "backlog" of assured subscriptions. The Deutsche Bühne therefore has a veto power and often makes quite definite demands on the director. So far the opera has

been little affected, for naturally the chief interest in these preliminary stages has been the drama. The National Socialist demands on art are concerned almost exclusively with content, the social nature of the work, and not with form. For this reason opera is not of primary interest to the authorities, because in opera the structure occupies the principal place at the expense of content.

Judgments are frequently made according to the personality of the creator, rather than in relation to the work itself. One would hardly describe *Mona Lisa* as an opera corresponding to the National Socialist ideal; its frequent performances are a tribute to the German composer Schilling. The case of *Arabella* is similar. Its great success—though the text is derived from the non-Aryan Hofmannsthal—is chiefly due to the general worship of the great German personality, Richard Strauss.

A large number of new productions are reconstructions of older works. Among the living composers, operas by Paul Graener, Vollerthun, and von Resnicek's *Donna Diana* in a new treatment have been brought out. Botho Sigwart, Felix Draeseke, Adolf Vogl belong pretty much to the same generation. The reconstruction of their operas will probably prove as futile as the many attempts on the music of Siegfried Wagner.

The really interesting new works are quickly enumerated. Ottmar Gerstner has taken the road of folk-opera with his *Madame Liselotte*; certainly it is definitely in the field of operetta. The text of *Michael Kohlhaas* by Paul von Klenau classifies it as a folk-opera according to the standards of National Socialism. This work, whose libretto the composer also wrote, on a novel by Kleist, may become strikingly significant in the development of German art. Klenau uses modern materials, basing his work on the twelve-tone system. The method is used for the first time in an opera whose text is a pattern for creation in new Germany.

The presentation of *Kreidekreis* by Alexander Zemlinsky illustrated the rather precarious position of modern opera. Its predecessor in the theatre, a drama in the Chinese style, by von Klabund, appeared on practically every German stage with great success and met no objections. The first German

performance of the opera took place in Stettin where the audience gave Zemlinsky's sensitive emotional music, rich in conception, an extremely friendly reception. However the Stettin Police Commissioner denounced the work as seditious, and forbade any future performances. But a few days later no protests were heard after performances in Coburg, Nuremberg and at the Berlin Staatsoper. The German drama administrator thereupon objected to the proscription of the work in Stettin, so that the opera is again permitted in that city.

With the mention of Malipiero's splendid *Fabel des Vertauschten Sohn* to Pirandello's text, which has just met with tremendous success at Brunswick, I come to the end of the list. We are still awaiting the new Casella opera *Münchhausen's Letzte Lüge*, text by Hansheinrich Dransmann, whose premiere will take place at the end of April simultaneously in Frankfurt, Kassel, Dortmund and Karlsruhe. (Another Münchhausen opera by Marc Lothar had a recent premiere in Dresden.)

Preparations for next season have already begun. Hermann Reuter will submit a new Faust opera; Hindemith is working on an opera about the tragic painter, Matthias Grunewald; Rudolf Wagner-Regeny, a gifted young composer, has completed an opera with Caspar Neher, which will be produced under the title *Der Günstling*. We hope that Krenek's twelve-tone work, *Karl V*, scheduled for performance this season in Vienna, but postponed, will also have its premiere. Above all, Alban Berg's *Lulu* is finally to be presented. This last season has been one of change; the next will determine the fate of opera.

Alfred Schlee