

the score. The result is a very amusing story of no great significance, to be best enjoyed as a sort of dessert.

It is characteristic of our experimental age that almost every new work presents us with a new style. We no longer have a uniform conception of opera such as prevailed, for example, in the time of Mozart, with recognized rules of dramaturgy and laws of composition. All that we can observe as a common tendency in present-day operatic effort is a negative one—the revolt against the music-drama. For the rest, we have no rule book of new opera; every work demands individual appraisal.

Sometimes an opera wins to success despite or perhaps because of being *vieux jeu*. *Schwanda, der Dudelsackpfeifer* is such a folk-opera, written by the Czech, Jaromir Weinberger, who has learned much from his great compatriot, Smetana. It is a fairy-tale of the familiar pattern, about the goodnatured Schwanda who must go through many adventures and even descend into hell before he can return to his young wife. Like Smetana, Weinberger borrowed excellent material from the marvelous Bohemian folk-music. But being a pupil of Reger he burdened it with so much counterpoint that the effect falls far short of the beauties of *The Bartered Bride*. The success of *Schwanda* means a victory for conventional opera, while that of *Mahagonny*, symbolizes a triumph over tradition.

Hans Gutman

CHRISTOPHE COLOMB

THE premiere of *Christophe Colomb* was the long awaited high spot of the year's opera season in Berlin. The impression it made emphasized its quite extraordinary position in the field of contemporary opera. Putting aside for the moment the purely external distinctions of novelty and strangeness inherent in the use of films for scenic décor, *Christophe Colomb* deserves to be ranked among the noteworthy contributions to present-day opera because of intrinsic merit. It takes a new step toward the solution of the opera problem, attempting in every possible way to escape the long current conceptions. Milhaud's work may thus be regarded as an important experiment, and, like all experiments, it has its faults as well as virtues.

To classify it under one of the current operatic labels, and identify it with its "type," one may place it near Stravinsky's *Oedipus*, with which it has so much in common. Disregarding the use of the Speaker, who explains proceedings, and apart from the peculiarly pivotal position of the Chorus in both works, one finds the artistic ideals of *Oedipus* and *Christophe* tending toward the same goal: liberation from the traditions of the opera stage. If Stravinsky's aim is opera-oratorio, Milhaud's may be called opera "sacrale." Claudel's poem, its basis, is unlike the ordinary conception of an opera libretto. It has something of the character of a Catholic "Mystery." More than twenty scenes present various events in the life of Columbus at the time of the discovery of America. These react on the public, represented by the Chorus, one of the most important elements in Claudel's poem. It is not the Chorus of ancient drama but, according to Claudel's own interpretation, the Chorus of the Catholic Church, which stands on consecrated ground to mediate between priest and congregation. This Chorus, placed on either side of the proscenium, is not merely a spectator but plays an active part in the unfolding events. The latter are read from a book by the Speaker simultaneously with their presentation on the stage. The attitude of the Chorus varies. It reaches at times an extremely high pitch of excitement, expressed in spirited argument with the Speaker.

The scenes begin with a religious procession singing prayers and praise of God that culminate in a Hallelujah in keeping with the "sacred" character of the work. The consistent epic development of this theme would have provided a pitfall for many composers, but Milhaud knew not only how to contribute completely suitable music but even to bring life to many dull places in the text. Nevertheless, he could not entirely avoid the danger of monotony in the long course of events. He is persistent in pursuing an art hitherto foreign to the theatre and so it is that this defect becomes especially noticeable, since it makes its appearance in the second half, just in that part of the work which has the most beautiful and inspired passages, among the most impressive that Milhaud has created; especial mention should be made of the profound and tragic twenty-fourth scene.

But even in other respects the music, from start to finish, bears the characteristic stamp of Milhaud's art. Stylistically it is developed in polytonal sections, yielding at times to absolute tonality. The thematic development is diatonic practically throughout and is broken up with the greatest rhythmic delicacy. Once again Milhaud reveals that altogether personal rhythmic gift, whose great originality lies in his individual use of percussion. The percussion, often the sole accompaniment of the chorus, has an incomparable intricacy of rhythmic line, a chiseled perfection. The rhythmic-melodic treatment of the chorus, ranging from simple speech forms to the most complex polyphony, reveals Milhaud as a great master of his craft.

If, despite all this, the strong impression made by the work is not entirely satisfying, it is because of a certain lack of unity. The attempt to balance poetry and music demonstrates an impulse to shun the traditions of the grand opera stage, but, in contradistinction, the use of films, at least as they are employed here, places too much stress on the new scenic technic. Thus the attainment of a simplicity which would have been of great benefit to the work as a whole was impaired.

Apart from this, the Staatsoper Unter den Linden achieved an esthetic production of the greatest value. Unfortunately it will be unparalleled for a long time, for no other stage has the apparatus to handle such scenic problems. Kleiber as director again demonstrated his great virtuosity in overcoming all the score's difficulties, and led the ensemble impressively. The reactions of the audience were conflicting. At the end of the performance there was a "battle" between proponents and opponents which lasted for fifteen minutes. But this is just another indication that we are dealing with one of the most remarkable works of the new opera stage.

Nikolai Lopatnikoff

TRANSATLANTIC

IT is indeed a cause for rejoicing that a young American composer should concern himself about the problem of opera today. It is to be hailed hopefully and sympathetically by Europe as a sign of young America's cultural development. But if this