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SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 20, 1969, AT 7:30 P.M.

LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE

AND SINFONIA ORCHESTRA

MEMBERS OF THE UCLA A CAPPELLA CHOIR

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GREAT OPERA CHORUSES

ROGER WAGNER, Conductor

ISRAEL BAKER, Concertmaster

WAGNER Tannhäuser

Act II — Entrance of the guests

Act III — Pilgrims' chorus and final chorus

Lohengrin

Act III — Bridal chorus

Parsifal

Act I — Grail scene

Die Meistersinger

Act III — Chorale and final chorus

GOUNOD Faust

Act II — Kermesse waltz

BIZET Carmen

Act IV — Procession to the arena

BORODIN Prince Igor

Act II — Polovtsian dances

INTERMISSION

VERDI Otello

Act I — Storm scene

JOHN HYDEN, *Tenor*

Il Trovatore

Act II — Anvil chorus

Nabucco

Act III — Lament of the Jews

PUCCINI Turandot

Act II — Procession and final chorus

Madama Butterfly

Act II — Humming chorus

VERDI Aida

Act II — Triumphal scene

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PROGRAM NOTES

by ARTHUR F. EDWARDS

It is inevitable that a program of choral excerpts from the great operas be dominated by the works of two giants: Wagner and Verdi. It is also inevitable that, in a program of this nature, one concert can present only a portion of the wealth of material available in the treasury of operatic literature.

Rather than retelling the complete plots of the thirteen operas herein excerpted (which would tend to leave the reader in a state of shock), the writer will merely attempt to set the scene for each choral number.

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Tannhäuser was first performed in Dresden in 1845, with the composer conducting. It is still in the form of grand opera, rather than the *music-drama* of the composer's later works. In the second act, the guests assemble to witness a contest of songs in praise of love. The chorus, *Freudig begrüßen wir*, is in praise of the "bright abode" of their host and prince, the Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia. *During the ensuing contest Tannhäuser commits the monumental gaffe of praising the profane love of Venus and is sent to Rome to beg forgiveness of the Pope.*

A group of pilgrims return from Rome singing of their joy in beholding their homeland (*Beglückt darf nun*). *Tannhäuser returns, broken in spirit and body. The Pope has withheld forgiveness until the dead wood of his staff sprouts leaves again. As Tannhäuser dies, a group of youths arrives, bearing the Pope's staff (Heil! Der gnade Wunder). God has reversed the harsh decree: the staff has blossomed; Tannhäuser is forgiven.*

Lohengrin was premiered in Weimar under Liszt's direction in 1850. Wagner was not present, being in exile for revolutionary activities.

In the third act of the opera, Lohengrin and his bride are conducted into the bridal chamber to the strains of the chorus *Treulich geführt*. *In spite of this auspicious beginning, the marriage is not a success. Elsa asks too many questions, and Lohengrin goes home to his father, Parzival.*

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg was premiered at Munich in 1868. In contrast to *Tannhäuser*, which treated of the courtly medieval *Minnesinger*, this opera deals with his sixteenth century

descendant, the more plebeian *Meistersinger*, a product of the trade-guilds.

On the banks of Pegnitz river, the guilds gather to watch the Meistersingers as they meet to award the laurel crown and Eva Pogner's hand in marriage to the best of the vocal contestants. In the chorale Wach' auf! the crowd salutes Hans Sachs (1494-1576), the most famous of the Meistersingers. Sachs cautions the winner, Walther, not to scorn the traditions of German art. In the final chorus Ehrt eure deutschen Meister the people take up Sachs' praise of the German masters and acclaim the great cobbler-poet, Hans Sachs.

Parsifal was Wagner's last opera. According to the composer, it was not to be considered an opera, but rather a "consecrational festival stage play." It was first performed at Bayreuth in 1882, a year before Wagner's death.

The reader may wonder at the different spellings of Parzival, the father of Lohengrin, and the hero of *Parsifal*. A German philologist, one Goerres, endeavored to find oriental origins for the Grail myth. Wagner evidently accepted his theory that the name of the *Guileless Fool* came from the Arabic words *parseh*, meaning pure, and *fal*, meaning foolish, simple. Wagner changed the spelling of his hero's name to agree with this theory. Unfortunately, according to Pitts Sanborn, there is no such word as *fal*, in Arabic. Oh, well.

In the first act, Parsifal is brought to Monsalvat to witness the solemn unveiling of the Grail, the cup of the Last Supper. The Knights of the Grail sing of the Last Supper, Zum letzten liebesmahle. A chorus of youths continues from above, followed by a choir of boys' voices wafted from the dome of the castle.

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

Faust was first performed in Paris in 1859. The libretto, by Barbier and Carré, is rather loosely based on Goethe's great drama of the same name. It is carefully tailored to the needs of the operatic stage and Gounod's rather lyrical talent, but most of the philosophical content is lost in the process.

The second act waltz and chorus *Ainsi que la brise légère* is a delightful piece of mood-music, but it is a bit anachronistic, since the waltz achieved its popularity in the nineteenth century and *Faust* is supposedly set in the sixteenth century.



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Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Carmen was premiered on March 3, 1875. On June 3, 1875 Bizet died. The loss to the operatic world is incalculable. It is as if Wagner had died after the premiere of *Lohengrin* or if Verdi had died before *Rigoletto* was completed.

In the fourth act, the crowd comments on the gala procession of officials entering the *plaza de toreros*. The scene comes to a climax as Carmen enters on the arm of her new protector, Escamillo.

Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)

Prince Igor, mostly by Borodin, was completed by Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov. It received its first performance in 1890 at the Imperial Opera House in St. Petersburg. Borodin, a successful professor of chemistry, had to be constantly exhorted by his friends to work on his musical projects. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote of the problem in his autobiography:

"Alexander Porphyrievich, have you — finally — transposed such and such a number of the opera score?"

'Yes, I have,' he would reply earnestly.

'Well, thank the Lord! at last!'

'I transposed it from the piano to the table,' he would continue with the same earnestness and composure!

... but there was no end to the waiting for the orchestration of the Polovtsian dances and of the closing chorus. ... In despair I heaped reproaches on Borodin. He, too, was not over-happy. At last, giving up all hope, I offered to help him with the orchestration. Thereupon he came to my house in the evening, bringing with him the hardly touched score of the Polovtsian dances; and the three of us — he, Liadov, and I — took it apart and began to score it in hot haste. ... Thus, thanks to the concerts of the Free Music School, some numbers were finished partly by the composer himself and partly with my help, during that year as well as during the following season of 1879-80."

Prince Igor and his son, Vladimir, have been captured by the Khan of the Polovtsi, Kontchak. They are entertained by their hospitable captor. The Polovtsian maidens dance and the warriors sing of their mighty leader.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Verdi's career almost ended before it began. After the modest success of his first opera *Oberto*, he had been

commissioned to write a comic opera. During the composition of this work his wife suddenly died (their two children had died during the two preceding years). Not surprisingly, the comic opera was a disaster and Verdi decided to give up composition. Fortunately, the director of La Scala, Merelli, had not lost faith in him and finally persuaded him to write a new opera, *Nabucodonosor*.

"With this score my musical career really began. . . . It was a group of carpenters that gave me my first assurance of success. The artists were singing as badly as they knew how and the orchestra seemed bent only on drowning out the noise made by the workmen who were doing some alterations in the building. Presently, the chorus began to sing, as carelessly as before, the *Va, pensiero*, but before they had got through half a dozen bars the theatre was as still as a church. The men had left off their work one by one and there they were sitting about on the ladders and scaffolding, listening. When the number was finished, they broke out into the noisiest applause I ever heard, crying, 'Bravo, bravo, viva il maestro!' and pounding on the woodwork with their tools."

Nabucco, as it is usually known, was a triumph, and the lament of the Jews on the banks of the Euphrates, *Va, pensiero*, was taken as a symbol of the Italian longing for a unified country. The twenty-nine year old Verdi was on his way.

Il Trovatore was premiered at Rome in 1853. Verdi was in the middle of his most productive period — within two years, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore* had come from his pen.

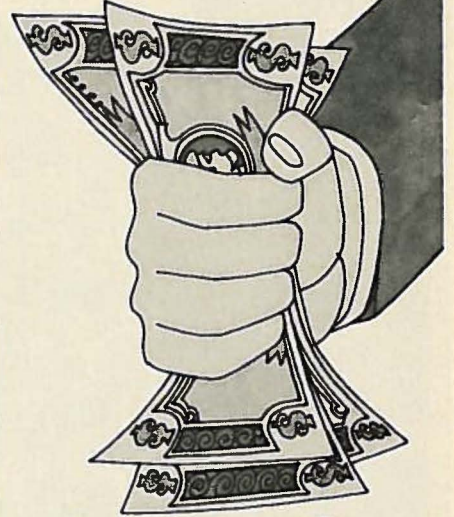
As the curtain rises on a gypsy camp, it is dawn (*Vedi! le fosche notturne*). The men begin to forge on their anvils as they sing of the one who cheers the gypsy's day — the gypsy girl.

Aida was commissioned to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Due to libretto problems and the Franco-Prussian War, the premiere did not occur until 1871. The libretto, by Ghislanzoni on a scenario by the French Egyptologist, Mariette, was beautifully suited to the fully mature talent of Verdi.

At the end of the second act, the Egyptians celebrate the triumphal return of their armies, victorious over the Ethiopians (*Gloria all' Egitto*).

Otello, premiered in 1887, when Verdi was 73, had the immense advantage of a librettist of superior ability,

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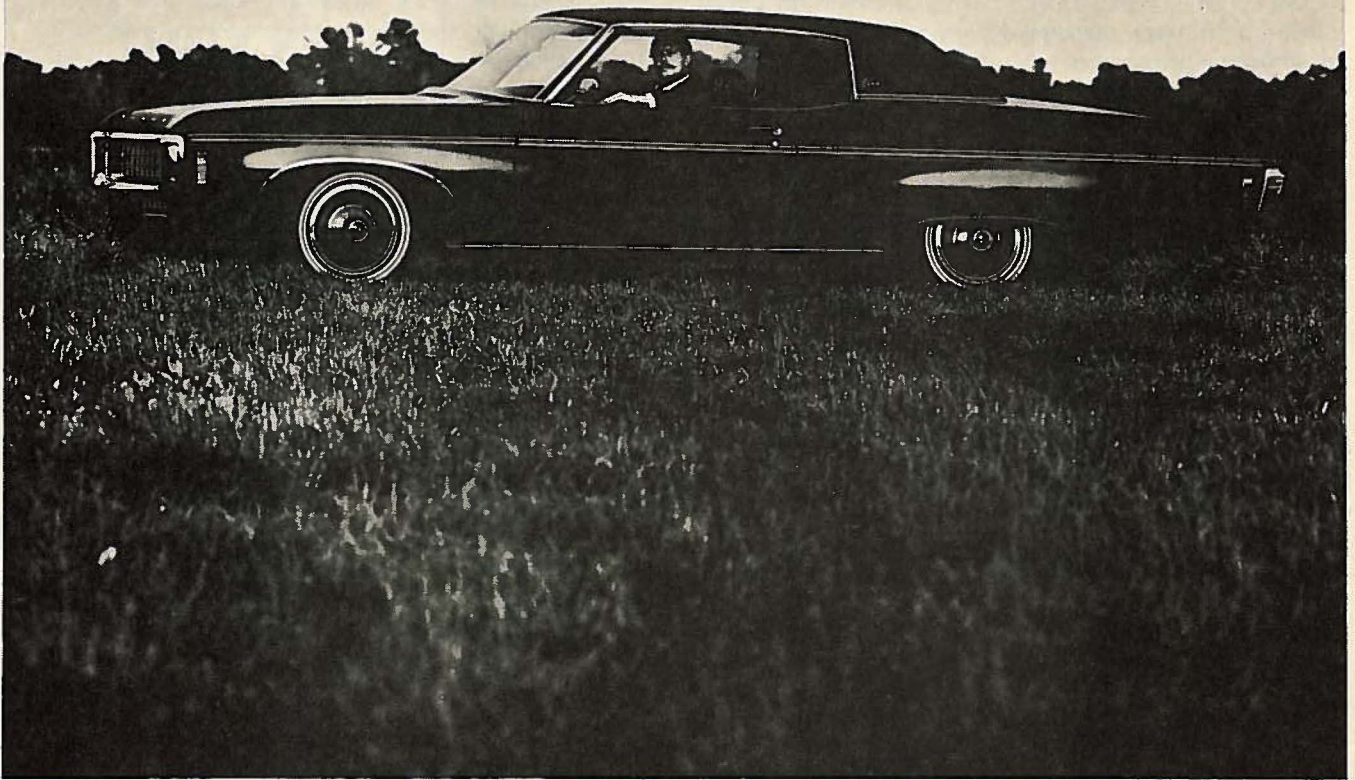
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the composer Boito (1842-1918). His decision to eliminate the first act and begin immediately with the storm on the island of Cyprus made possible one of the strongest openings in operatic literature.

Otello has been engaged in a naval battle with the Turks. In the midst of a raging storm, the populace awaits the outcome (*Una vela!*). With few exceptions, all hope for Otello's success. Iago hopes he ends at the bottom of the sea.

Otello enters triumphant and tells of his total victory. The people rejoice, the storm subsides.

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Music came naturally to Puccini. His was the fifth generation of musical sons born in Lucca — Giacomo (1712-1781), Antonio (1747-1832), Domenico (1771-1815), Michele (1813-1864) and Giacomo, the Puccini who achieved world renown. It will be noted that Michele was born in the same year as Verdi and Wagner. 1813 was not a magic year for everyone.

Madama Butterfly was a fiasco when first performed in 1904. One of the reasons was the ninety minute long second act. The opera was reintroduced with the offending act divided into two acts. In the new version the second act ends with Butterfly, her maid, Suzuki, and the child, Trouble,

waiting for the appearance of the ship bearing Butterfly's American husband back to Nagasaki. The *Humming Chorus*, scored for voices and strings, creates a mood impossible with instruments only.

Turandot, Puccini's last opera, was completed by his pupil, Alfano. Puccini had had a successful operation in Brussels for throat cancer, but the strain was too much for his system and he suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after the operation. Fortunately, he had completed all but the final duet and closing scene. The opera was presented at La Scala in 1926, with Toscanini conducting.

In the second act, the crowd gathers to see another suitor for the hand of the icy princess, *Turandot*, fail his test of three riddles (the day before, the Prince of Persia had lost his head over *Turandot* — literally). The sages appear in solemn procession. Less solemnly, Ping, Pang and Pong arrive. Finally, the clouds of incense disperse and the Emperor, *Turandot's* father, is seen seated upon his throne. *Turandot* asks her three riddles, but this time the Unknown Prince answers them correctly. He then proposes a riddle of his own: *Turandot* can remain single if she can discover his name by the next morning. The populace again wishes the ninety-year-old Emperor ten thousand more years of life as the curtain falls.

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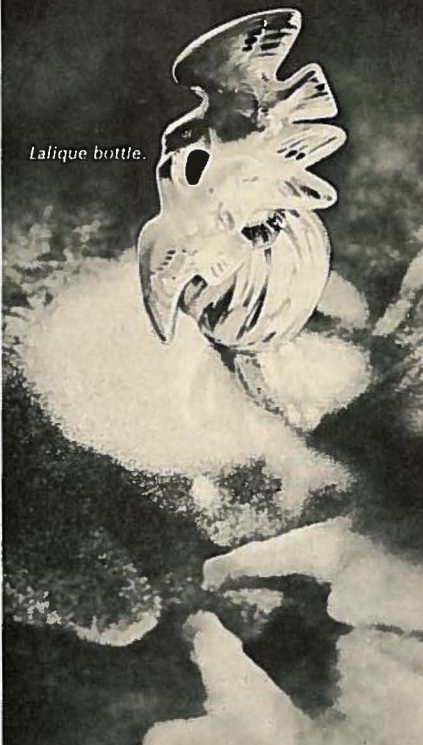
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(continued on p.55)



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A NOTE IS A NOTE IS A NOTE

by Nicolas Slonimsky



Rossini was approached by a group of admirers with a project of erecting a statue of him in his native town of Pesaro, Italy. The pedestal was already in place, but ten thousand francs were needed for the statue itself. Could Rossini raise this amount to see the project through?, they asked him. "Ten thousand francs!" Rossini exclaimed. "For that kind of money I will stand on the pedestal myself."

A young lady wrote to Paderewski asking him for a lock of his hair, and he obliged. "If you do that," his manager told him, "you will soon be bald." "Not I, my dog," Paderewski replied.

The German conductor Hans Richter was asked the secret of his perfect timing in conducting the classics. "My upbeat always equals my downbeat," he replied.

During his professorship at Columbia University, Edward MacDowell received a testimonial from his students with the inscription in large letters: "O singe fort . . ." (O sing forth), quoting from the line of Flosshilde, one of the Rhine-Maidens in the first act of *Das Rheingold*. MacDowell thought the dedication was in French and was momentarily stunned. In French the words mean "O powerful ape!"

Rossini used to address his letters to his mother as follows: "To Signora Rossini, mother of the celebrated Maestro."

Moritz Rosenthal, the "little giant of the piano" was famous for his quick wit. Asked for biographical information, he wrote: "I was born at an early age and sang a chromatic scale when I was one hour old. I practiced piano whenever I was whipped. I am never nervous when I play in public, but pianists in the audience usually are."

There was a composer of note
Who stole many tunes that he wrote.

And it was with pleasure,
That in the last measure
He signed with a flourish: Unquote.

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