

## MUSICAL DIARY

Josef Tal: "Saul at Ein Dor" — Opera Concertante. Tape recording of the world premiere with the Ramat Gan Chamber Orchestra. Conductor: Michael Taube. (Moadon Beeri, June 27).

ON the basis of Mr. Tal's former works, we always knew that some day he was going to present us with music high above the level of the local output. Now, we feel justified in stating that despite its brevity (approximately 30 minutes), "Saul at Ein Dor" is one of the rare monuments of Israel music.

The texture of the opera is free atonalism: the composer abandons the use of functional harmony. Nor does he employ an established order of the 12-tone scale but deliberately selects his material from the chromatic dozen. "For the present-day composer who works in this idiom," Mr. Tal said in an introductory talk, "atonalism is no longer a fashion of modernism. It is a live and most natural language."

It was Mr. Tal's decision, in his libretto, to leave his plot free from any present-day interpretation, and to limit himself to the original biblical text of I Sam. 28 — spare enough to preclude an *al fresco* dramatic development of this sombre episode and permit magnificent economy in structure. And, as the composer's intention was to abandon even the mere thought of a stage performance (Opera

Concertante!), his choice seems to us a most clever one.

There are three singing parts, Saul, Samuel and the Woman, and the continuity is supplied by the narrator. Here, Mr. Tal exploits the expressive rhythmic possibilities of Hebrew accentuation in a fascinating way, preserving a concrete and logical sequence of drama despite the abstraction of the concert stage.

No less attractive is the composer's use of the chamber orchestra. Tension is maintained by incredible and original timbres (the imitation of a shout in the opening string passage), sharply cut syncopated beats, and, in the lyrical sections, delicate contrapuntal play between the woodwinds.

The listener will find no folklore and no cantillation in this opera. The author of "Saul at Ein Dor" did not intend to connect his story with archaeological research or ethnology. The characters involved were treated as individuals, each facing his own destiny, and the "national" significance of the work is only in that it brings to life (and to real life) a part of the Jewish past. From this point of view, we consider Mr. Tal's attitude more dignified than that of many a "folksy" composer in our midst.

Mr. Taube, who also commissioned the opera, did an excellent job with the youngest or-

chestra society in this country, and so did the soloists, Mr. Flaschner, Mr. Menkes, Miss De Bossy and Mr. Zohar, whose parts were by no means easy.

**OPERA FOR BROADCASTING**

Kol Israel, the Israel Broadcasting Service, recently presented *Saul at Endor*, an opera concertante for broadcasting, by Yoseph Tal.

The subtitle "Opera Concertante" stresses the intention of the composer to create a non-scenic performance. The score is arranged with particular regard for microphone technique, and the tonal balance between narrator and orchestra is calculated almost exclusively for the microphone. The mixtures of sound required at one point are obtainable only in a radio performance, and the sparing orchestration for an effect of high dramatic tension at a crisis in the action can never achieve its aim when performed on the concert stage.

However, all sound-effects are avoided which, by way of electronic amplification or distortion, such as multi-vibration, create a mystic illusion.

The text is taken from the Bible, Samuel I (Chapters 28, Verses 3—25). The story is recited by a narrator, and the dialogue is presented in songstyle. The music strives at expressing the purely human elements in the Biblical tale.

As long as Saul, the King, is aware and conscious of his might and power, his speech conveys authority and command. The moment he feels instinctively the impending disaster, he becomes—in the misery of his despair—a helpless, imploring child.

The woman, who is gifted with spiritualistic power, wisely chooses grave words in keeping with the great responsibility lodged with her. The woman of En-Dor is not a witch of the European fairy tale, but a priestess, full of dignity, comparable to the Sybils of the Delphic Oracle. Her prophecy is not that of a magician but is the outcome of a profound knowledge of the fatalism of the situation. After Saul has been told by Samuel of his dire fate, she turns into a helpful and loving mother. She prepares a meal for him to give him strength to bear the inevitable. Samuel's voice alone is of unwavering oneness. His words are severe, and severity is the form into which he forces them. In this mission there is no longer any place for human frailties.

Textually, the composition consists of five areas of tension: the narrative and preparatory introduction; Saul's way to the woman in En-Dor and the invocation of Samuel; Samuel's utterance of God's Judgment—the dra-

matic climax of the composition; the preparation of the meal for Saul and the woman's soothing words. Saul and his servants leave En-Dor, and go into the dark of night towards their unknown destiny.

The cast was as follows:

The Narrator . . . . . YEHOSHUA ZOHAR  
 Saul . . . . . LEIB GLANTZ (Tenor)  
 Samuel . . . . . EFRAIM BIRAN (Baritone)  
 The Woman ALIZA LEWANDOWSKA (Mezzo-Soprano)

Yosef Tal, the composer of the work, was born near Poznan in 1910. He received his basic education in Berlin, and studied music at the Staatliche Hochschule fuer Musik in Berlin.

Mr. Tal immigrated to Israel (then Palestine) in 1934, and in 1937 was appointed teacher of composition and piano at the Conservatoire and Academy of Music, Jerusalem. In 1949 he became director of the same institute, and in 1950 took up a post as lecturer in music at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

He has been awarded a number of prizes for compositions and has appeared as piano soloist and conductor with numerous orchestras.

## READER'S LETTERS

### THE WITCH OF ENDOR

To the Editor, *The Hornet*

Sir,

From the beginning I thought that your fixed descriptions of your opponents were beneath the dignity of hornet-stings.

Totally wrong is the application of the nickname "The Witch of Endor" to Geula Cohen MK, a political extremist. The real Witch of Endor is one of the wisest and kindest women in the whole of the Bible.

In fact the appellation "witch" applied to her is an

Anglo-Saxon mistranslation of the Hebrew term for a woman with a prophesying mind.

This woman was misled by King Saul into evoking the spirit of the prophet Samuel. Saul was then told of his impending doom. Thereupon the woman, like every good Jewish momma, got him to take some food before going on his way.

Rembrandt, in the enclosed drawing, characterizes her exactly correctly. So did Josef Tal in his composition "Shaul be-En Dor".

Jerusalem

Dr. Charles Boasson



*Rembrandt's picture of the Witch of Endor serving Saul and his servants.*