

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.

Musik RUNDSCHAU

Opernabend des Kammerensembles

Das fünfte Abonnementskonzert des Israelischen Kammerensembles hatte die Gestalt eines Opernabends. Es dirigierte Georg Singer, und Solisten waren Stella Richmond (Sopran), Sylvia Greenberg (Sopran), Mira Zakkai (Alt), Nissim Tagger (Tenor), Tibor Herdan (Bariton) und Gideon Singer (Sprecher); das Programm enthielt Auszüge aus Glucks „Orpheus und Eurydike“, „Saul in En-Dor“ von Josef Tal, und den „Schauspieldirektor“ von Mozart.

Glucks umstürzlerische Oper kam dabei als einzige zu kurz, es konnten ja nur Teile aus ihr gegeben werden, da die Oper allein schon abendfüllend ist; ausgewählt wurden die Orpheus-Amor-Szene aus dem ersten Akt, der Reigen seliger Geister und die unsterbliche Flötenmelodie aus der Elysium-Szene des zweiten Aktes und die Arie des Orpheus „Che farò“ aus dem dritten Akt, nachdem er sich umgeblickt hat und seine Frau wieder tot zusammenbricht. Stella Richmond als Amor war anmutig, Mira Zakkai mit ihrer an sich sehr schönen Altstimme fehlte das Leben. Sie sang ohne Elastizität und in sich hinein. So ein herrliches Material, das man nicht erwerben, sondern nur als Glücksgeschenk der Natur mitbekommen kann, müsste unter die richtige Kontrolle kommen. Die Mängel fielen noch mehr beim zweiten Werk auf, „Saul in En-Dor“, wo Mira Zakkai die Wahrsagerin sang und mit den rhythmischen und intonatorischen Schwierigkeiten fertig wurde, aber insbesondere hohe Töne steif und ohne Dekkung sang. Gerade weil sie die Gabe besitzt, sollte sie sich in der Kunst des Vortrags vervollkommen.

Josef Tal hat sich als Opern-

komponist schon einen klingenden Namen auch ausserhalb des Landes erworben. Seine Oper „Aschmedai“ entstand auf Bestellung der Hamburger Staatsoper, wurde dort 1971 uraufgeführt und wird nun in New York gespielt werden; „Masada 967“ wurde 1973 genau neunzehnhundert Jahre nach der geschichtlichen Tragödie im Rahmen des Israel-Festivals präsentiert, und für die diesjähri-



Komponist JOSEF TAL

gen Münchner Festspiele hat Tal die Oper „Die Versuchung“ komponiert. — Vor diesen drei abendfüllenden Opern entstanden zwei kurze Opern auf biblische Stoffe: „Saul in En-Dor“ und „Amnon und Tamar“.

„Saul in En-Dor“ ist 1955 von Michael-Taube für das damals neu gegründete Ramat-Ganer Kammerorchester bestellt worden. Das Werk ist von vornherein nicht für die Bühne bestimmt und ist formal eine Kantate. Aber der dramatische Schwung der Musik und die

Einteilung in sechs Szenen sind opernmässig obwohl sich ein Sprecher beteiligt, der den Dialog ergänzt und sogar Teile der Handlung selbst erzählt. Deshalb bezeichnete der Komponist das Stück als konzertante Oper. Der Text ist (mit ganz geringen Auslassungen) wörtlich die Erzählung vom König Saul bei der Wahrsagerin von En-Dor im Zweiten Buch Samuel (Kap. 28, Verse 3 bis 25). Der Dialog im Text wird gesungen, während die in erzählender Form gehaltenen Textteile vom Sprecher vorgetragen werden.

„Saul in En-Dor“ ist ein kraftvolles, konzentriertes Werk, das an die Ausübenden hohe Anforderungen stellt. Für die Sänger gibt es grosse Sprünge und schwierige figurierte Passagen, die auch in der Intonation nicht leicht sind, und der Sprecher muss genau nach Noten deklamieren. Den König Saul sang hervorragend Nissim Tagger mit dem tiefen Ausdruck der Schicksalsangst, die schaurig-würdevolle Erscheinung des Propheten Samuel gab überzeugend Tibor Herdan wieder, und Gideon Singer deklamierte den Text des Sprechers eindrucksvoll. Einige rhythmische Ungenauigkeiten im Vortrag des letzteren fielen nicht ins Gewicht, ebenso wie einige „Sünden“ der Musiker die Gesamtwirkung nicht vermindert haben; dass allerdings der Spieler der kleinen Flöte wichtige Figuren verschief, war schade. Georg Singer verlieh Tals erschütterndem Werk eine spannende Gestaltung. Solisten und Orchester hatten — wie immer, wenn er dirigierte — eine verlässliche Führung und gaben ihr Bestes. Die Nachwirkung war so stark, dass man den Eindruck hatte, die

Dinge auch gesehen zu haben.

Mit dem tiefen Ernst des Stücks von Tal kontrastierte die heitere Atmosphäre des „Schauspieldirektors“ von Mozart, mit welchem der Abend beschlossen wurde. Georg Singer hob die feinsten Verborgenheiten der witzigen Partitur hervor und zeigte die „Komödie mit Musik“; in all ihrer „humorvollen Lieblichkeit“. Er hatte dazu einfallsreiche Partner: Edna Shavit, deren flotte, charmante und genau ausgearbeitete Regie das Geschehen beseelte, und Lydia Pincus-Gany, die ein effektvolles Mini-Szenenbild und geschmackvolle Kostüme entwarf.

Es war klug, die Dialoge auf ein Minimum zu reduzieren und ein wenig zu aktualisieren und die Gestalt des Schauspieldirektors Frank mit der des Tenors Vogelsang zu verbinden. Die beiden konkurrierenden Sängerinnen Mme. Herz und Mlle. Silberklang wurden von Stella Richmond und Sylvia Greenberg glänzend dargestellt, letztere brillierte noch mit ihrem angeborenen Bühnentalent. Den Tenor, den Mozart weniger bedacht hat, gab vorzüglich Nissim Tagger, ebenso Tibor Herdan den Buff. Diesen lässt Mozart nur einige Takte — allein — singen, weil er in der ursprünglichen Handlung Schauspieler, nicht Sänger ist und auch nicht singen kann. Damit er das Ensemble nicht stört, schweigt er in den übrigen Teilen. Kann man aber von einem Sänger verlangen, dass er die einzige Stelle, die er zu singen hat, so vorträgt, als könnte er nicht singen? Tibor Herdan sang also richtig, und da hatte es Sinn, ihn die Stelle sogar zweimal singen zu lassen...

Yehuda Cohen

THE MUSIC OF ISRAEL

FROM THE BIBLICAL ERA
TO MODERN TIMES

Peter Gradenwitz

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ment work dedicated to the memory of the cellist Joseph Weissgerber and developing around a lament-like expressive violoncello theme. Tal's Second String Quartet (1964) already belongs to his electronic period and proves the impact which a composer's preoccupation with electronically produced sounds must necessarily have also on music he creates for traditional musical instruments.

In the symphonic work *Festive Vision* (1957) Tal tries to give musical form to the outstanding architecture of the Fredric R. Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv, home of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra since October 1957. The vast open space of the hall unsupported by pillars is musically depicted by way of a themeless sound; the breadth and width of the hall, as suspended from the roof, are translated into the musical form of a fugue.

Josef Tal is among the few composers of Israel who have always been strongly interested in opera; with his first work in the operatic medium, the biblical drama *Saul at EnDor*, he gained an immediate, resounding success. Not concerned—as have been composers before him—with the magic and supernatural aspects of the biblical episode, Josef Tal was attracted by the human tragedy behind the dramatic tale. The Prophetess of EnDor is not a witch, as she is described in most modern literary and musical versions of the biblical scene, but a priestess, full of dignity and human insight. When Saul comes to her hiding place, he is still the mighty king, conscious of his authority and commanding power. But after hearing Samuel the Prophet pronounce the dire fate that is in store for him, Saul breaks down and becomes miserable and helpless. The Prophetess of EnDor then shows her warm, almost motherly, understanding. She prepares a meal for him and does not permit him to proceed on his way toward the inevitable before he has rested and gathered new strength. Her charity is in stark contrast to the severity shown by Samuel imparting to Saul the voice of the Lord whose commands the King has not followed.

Tal's next operatic work was the short opera *Amnon and Tamar* (book by Recha Freier), based on the tragic relations between King David's son and his stepsister; this work was completed in May 1958 and in dramatic style and expression is related to the earlier operatic composition.

Tal's First Symphony was written in Jerusalem in 1952 and first performed under the baton of Heinz Freudenthal in various European coun-