On the Aisle
Inge Borkh’s Curious Salome and Georg Solti’s Valid Strauss

BY CLAUDIA CASSIDY

AMES makes news, if not always opera. Inge Borkh, probably the most sought after soprano for the role today, made her debut, in the Civic Opera house last night, singing a most curious “Salome.” For very far more was Georg Solti’s debut in the Straussian plot, the only a totally deaf optimist could maintain that he had the ideal “Salome.” Such things seldom go well. He prounced orchestra stages, and they are almost unknown in the opera house. This one was happiest in the strings, and from them Mr. Solti imparted eloquence. Perhaps he prayed

for the winds and brass, but not always loud enough to be answered.

Still, a mesmeric Salome could have won the night. Put such a Salome and such a conductor in the opera house and their field of magnification is so strong that all outside it becomes, not unimportant, but more precious, like a star in the distance blur in the blaze of hypnotic light. From what he did under difficult conditions and what I have heard him do in European opera houses, I think Mr. Solti qualifies. But he needs a Salome.

When Miss Borkh sang excerpts from “Salome” and “Elektra” with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony orchestra last season, there was no doubt that “Elektra” was better for her. If you could choose. Still, that big, shining soprano had its merits for “Salome,” especially when she stood quite still and let the orchestra take charge of the listener’s imagination.

In the opera house Miss Borkh is never still. You never saw such an active Salome. Blonde and hearty she skips around the stage. Her head is a constant source of activity. Indeed, does a Dance of the Seven Veils with a touch of the danse du ventre and some rolling on the floor, and neglects Jochannan’s head which appears little but for the purpose of addressing the audience instead. There is in her performance none of the mesmeric monotony of the necrophile’s insistence on that bloody trophy, some of the strange perversity that can make Salome as alluring as she is depraved. Nor, in her own style, was her voice as big and shining as the concert hall, but I suggested it must be. There were not many times when it rode in triumph over the whirlwind of the score.

Hers is primarily a German “Salome” with no French seasoning. The opera was right when she knew it for a French opera. Oscar Wilde was an Irishman, but he wrote it in French for Sarah Bernhardt, who never played it. Still, French it remains, despite the German text, for Strauss was internationat and cosmopolitan. The heavy German touch spoils it, in characterization and staging.

The music had the beautiful old sentiment that is so apt to glimmer in the dusk of the queenly night. It behooved her to be a superior Herod, a tortured man in a tupten gowns of flowers—about as far as a man can go from his Parsifal at Bayreuth last summer. Martha Lipton had more than the look that the sound of Herodias, as John Alexander had more than the look for the young captain of the Teutonic guard in “Der Rosenkranz” at Bayreuth last season. Alexander Weitzel lacked the prophet’s power. Mariantoni made the small part a jewel, and several members

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of the ballet kept straight faces while happy Salome was dancing.

Signs Two for "Trovalore"

Herva Nelli and Gertrude Ribla have been engaged by the Lyric to replace ailing Anita Cerquetti in two productions of "Il Trovatore," with Jussi Bjoerling and Ettore Bastianini. Miss Nelli will sing the first performance next Tuesday night, Oct. 23, and Miss Ribla the second on Saturday night, Oct. 27. Both sopranos have appeared here in "Aida," Miss Ribla with the Chicago Opera company in 1945, Miss Nelli with the New York City Opera in 1951. Miss Ribla joined the Lyric last season for "Il Tabarro" and "Lord Byron's Love Letter," and was to have returned this season in "La Juive," which was canceled.