

Wagner's 'Dutchman' flies high for Solti, Symphony

Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Sir Georg Solti conducting, at Orchestra Hall Thursday, "The Flying Dutchman," Wagner. With Norman Bailey as the Dutchman, Janis Martin as Senta, Rene Kollo as Eric and Martti Talleja as Daland.

By Robert C. Marsh

Thursday night at Orchestra Hall we had Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman." In concert form with Sir Georg Solti pouring out the high voltages that carried the 2½-hour music drama to a sizzling close. The audience responded with a triumphal cheer that couldn't have been louder if the Cubs had won a World Series.

But you can speculate that one reason we had the Dutchman in the evening is that the great buffalo caper, scheduled for earlier in the day, had been

a flop. A full-grown bull buffalo, one of the more cantankerous beasts, has been donated to the fund-raising marathon the Women's Assn. of the orchestra is staging later this month, and the grand design was to bring the critter to Orchestra Hall, corral it in front, and have Solti photographed with it.

I take a dim view of all publicity stunts of this type, but especially those that put animals in traumatic situations. My active imagination pictured Solti's conducting arm impaled on a curved buffalo horn, or a Michigan Av. buffalo roundup in traffic.

My fears were in vain. The buffalo arose Thursday morn-

ing, looked at the weather and decided it wasn't going anywhere. And the more it was pushed and shoved, the more the vehicle standing by to transport it to Chicago took on an unwholesome aspect. It was the only party to these proceedings to exhibit sterling common sense.

The original intention was to give "The Flying Dutchman" in one unbroken sequence of scenes, but those who calculate orchestral overtime decided that money could be saved by inserting the usual intermissions, so they were observed. For the recording, to be made the week of the 16th, the original plan can be restored.

In effect, this was a dress rehearsal, the first time Solti had been able to combine all the elements of the score and take it straight through from the top. Thus there were a few obvious mistakes lingering, and the implication clearly was that the performance would continue to mature. I hope that Solti slows down a few passages, removes the exaggerated accents from Senta's ballad, and solves the problem of the same male chorus representing townsfolk one moment and the Dutchman's accursed crew the next. The potential recording, here foreseen, is up against severe competition from Otto Klemperer and others.

How does "The Flying Dutchman" work as a concert opera? Wagner invariably puts everything essential into the music by way of stage cues, so a little imagination carries you a long way, but still, this is an opera that can produce spectacular visual effects. (I remember a performance in Leningrad when two ships sailed both on and off the stage in Act I.) Some moments, such as Senta's first sight of the Dutchman in Act II, simply do not work without staging. With a hand less confident than Solti's, this is not an opera well suited to concert format.

Solti, however, made it work. He did so by grabbing your attention and never let-

ting you lose contact with exciting events in the orchestra, chorus and solo voices. At first glance, it looked as if Herbert von Karajan was part of the cast. No, it was Werner Krenn, an able steersman. Martti Talleja is the best Daland around and Norman Bailey found the full range of emotions the Dutchman must project.

I was rather disappointed with Janis Martin's Senta until the voice was fully warmed up, but Rene Kollo got all there was from the ungrateful role of Eric. Isola Jones' Mary was well achieved. The chorus was once more Margaret Hillis' pride and joy. But Solti and the orchestra were the superstars first to last.

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The Symphony

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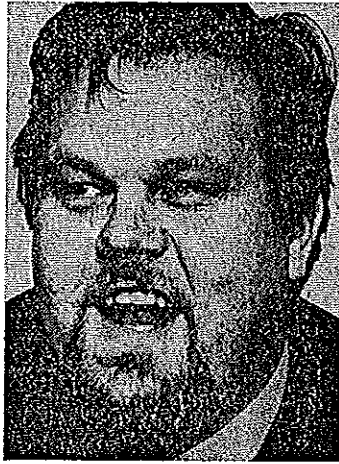
Solti leads 'Dutchman' on flight of unequalled precision

RICHARD WAGNER'S "The Flying Dutchman"—all 2½ hours of it—swept into Orchestra Hall Thursday evening with Sir Georg Solti at the helm. For sustained sweep, surge, and thrusting forward motion, this concert version of Wagner's tempest-tossed musical legend has not been equaled here in many seasons. The ebb and flow of its gothic romance created a tidal pull which lasted from the initial horn call to the final transfiguration.

A stellar cast, splendid sound, intense drama, and the sea so strongly in evidence that you could almost see, taste, and smell the salt spray—this was one of those rare performances with everything to recommend it.

In so many ways it is the perfect opera for Solti. He is a romantic, but no sentimentalist; Wagner's youthful excursion into the Fantasy world of German literary romanticism fails the moment it becomes slushy. Solti relishes drama for its own sake, preferring the surface reality of action to the psychological, spiritual, or supernatural; of all Wagner's operas, "The Flying Dutchman" survives best with such treatment.

YOU CAN TREAT this music as if it were Verdi's "La Forza del Destino" and it will succeed brilliantly. Pull out the stops, keep the character relationships clear, scale the transitions with exactitude, and concentrate



Martti Talvela enfolds all present with his magnificent voice.

on the shifting surface tensions. Even the two characters with important inner lives—the Dutchman and Senta—project best in fully lighted emotional surroundings.

The three men in the quartet of principals

were as perfect in their roles as can be found today. Norman Bailey, who is remembered for his John the Baptist in the symphony's earlier "Salome," is a singing actor of enormous concentration, energy, and understanding. His Dutchman captures our sympathy with the monolog's opening line.

He is the archetypal displaced person granted a momentary home, the prisoner, allowed out to exercise, the hopeless made momentarily hopeful. When he reaches the climax of his narrative—"Nowhere a grave! Never Death!"—we experience his desolation with him. Every phrase is colored with emotion, each word tuned to the proper feeling. And although we sense his sorrow always, the mood is never gloomy.

THAT GIANT of basses, Martti Talvela, is unequalled in the international operatic world. As Daland, the Norwegian captain who trades a daughter for the promise of wealth, he enfolds all present in the breadth, beauty, and power of that magnificent voice. He is a counterfoil to the Dutchman, of course, opposing him with a bluff, practical realism.

As Talvela is at the crest of his career, so is Rene Kollo, the tenor who sings Erik, the innocent hunter. It is not a large role, but his declarations of love and fidelity are shaped in pure Lohengrin gold. Kollo's voice is a miracle blend of freshness, phrasing

artistry, and flexibility. Each inflection of vowel or consonant is exactly where it belongs, making listening a continuous pleasure.

Janis Martin was not the ideal Senta, although her virtues are unmistakable. The dream-struck daughter who chooses to redeem a supernatural love rather than marry the boy next door is almost impossible to bring off. Martin sings with conviction and on pitch. Except for the highest and loudest phrases, which spread into shrillness, she is easy to listen to, and her duet with the Dutchman had the soaring line which the rest lacked.

THE SUPPORTING roles of the Steersman and Mary were ably discharged by Werner Krenn, a sweet voiced, somewhat tentative tenor who was making his American debut, and Isola Jones, who once again proved she could hold her own in the best company. As spinners and sailors, the symphony chorus sounded as though German were its native tongue and Tanz- und Trinklieder preferred forms of expression. Solti brought in the extra piccolos along with the ghost sailors and produced a monumental melodramatic climax. A few orchestral beginnings were shaky and intonation among the woodwinds was an occasional problem. Otherwise, it was a stunning virtuoso display.

Thomas Willis

'Dutchman' flies high, if not fast

By Karen Monson

Orchestra Hall turned into a rocking ship, a haven for romantic refuge and salvation, and a lover's leap Thursday night as Sir Georg Solti conducted the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus and soloists in a concert performance of Richard Wagner's "Der fliegende Holländer."

Naturally, it was the high point of the musical season. What else would one expect from our resident virtuosos and their distinguished guests? The cheers and the horn calls are probably still echoing in the auditorium rafters. Saturday's repeat performance undoubtedly will have the same effect, and we can be sure that when "Dutchman" flies to Carnegie Hall next Friday he'll leave the New Yorkers screaming wildly.

We can hope, too, that subsequent performances will find fewer mishaps in the brass, and neater attacks all around. From the great Overture right on down the line, our brass-playing stars had their problems Thursday night, and there seemed to be nothing

they could do to court and corner Lady Luck.

They'll rest before Saturday, and so will their cohorts. This was a performance into which everybody poured each last drop of energy. That's what made "Dutchman" soar.

TECHNICALLY speaking, though, the "Dutchman" didn't fly as fast as he might have, and he made some time-consuming pit stops. After an intermission separated Act I (52 minutes) from Act II (55 minutes), Solti broke briefly before Act III (28 minutes).

With the extra music that opens and closes the acts when the opera isn't performed without a break, as Wagner intended and Solti planned, our forces made it to the wire in 2 hours and 15 minutes. If they keep that pace when they record the piece for London



Janis Martin

Records starting May 18, Chicago's "Dutchman" will not be the fastest on disks.

But it seems fast, because the music moves with such vigor, color and grace. Even the slowest sections lean forward with a feeling of urgency

that is not only appropriate, but crucial to the mood.

THURSDAY'S soloists recognized the import and the potential impact of their assignments. Partly through hard work and partly through physical quirks of fate, they gave the music much more theatricality than one might expect from an unstaged reading.

Norman Bailey somehow managed even to look like the Dutchman — poised but eager, slightly pale and quite thin, haunting and haunted. The British baritone, the Jokanaan in our December 1974, "Sailome," sang exquisitely on Thursday, especially in the treacherous, unaccompanied beginning to his duet with Senta, "Wie aus der Ferne."

His bearded, bear-like basso colleague, Martti Talvela, also

looked good as Daland, Senta's seafaring father. Even the people in the gallery could notice Talvela's eyes lighting up when he sang about jewels and treasures, and it was difficult to keep from applauding after his masterful delivery of the aria "Moegst du, mein kind."

His "Kind" daughter Senta, was Janis Martin, whose performance was perfectly adequate, but not inspired. Rene Kollo was Erik, the romantic loser. Tenor Werner Krenn introduced himself all but inaudibly as the Steersman, and Isola Jones served well as Mary.

All across the back of the stage were the sailors and their girls, otherwise known as the Chicago Symphony Chorus. They had a great deal of fun singing their dances and ringing "Hoe, hoe, huissas."

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