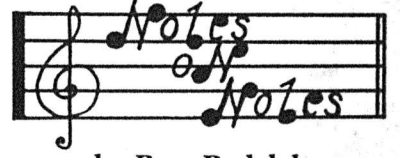




FINE ARTS



Il Trovatore Appraised



by Ross Rudolph



photo by Wm. C. Stenton

IRVING LAYTON

Adventurous Orient

By Bob Pounder

The Edmonton Film Society opened its season recently with a Japanese film called "Ballad of the Narayama," directed by the estimable Keisuke Kinoshita. In this film he has attempted to transfer the techniques of the traditional Kabuki theater to the screen in the telling of a folk legend of Japan.

He has succeeded to a remarkable degree in his task. Realism is shunned, and although it is somewhat disconcerting to see flying crows bump into a painted sky, we do not miss it. The mysterious and fantasy-filled atmosphere sets the right mood for a pathetic tale of an old woman who is exposed, according to custom, on a desolate mountain in time of famine.

Lighting and special effects play a key role in Kinoshita's scheme, and the use of mute autumn colors and eerie night lights is excellent. Tortured close-ups of the old woman's face steal the show, perhaps too often, and an especially gruesome sequence in which she bashes out her upper teeth against a grindingstone to the accompaniment of a twanging stringed instrument is chillingly effective.

If the director has succeeded in transferring mystical stage elements to the screen, he has perhaps failed

in having allowed his story to linger too long on its way to a protracted climax. By the time the withered granny (a veritable angel in the community) has undergone interminable verbal abuse at the hands of her neighbors and her own grandson, and her son has wrestled with his feelings of filial devotion, we feel relief rather than sorrow when she finally comes to her end. The culminating journey up to her skull-strewn resting place is far too drawn out, and the son's fervent moanings and gesticulations, whereas perhaps suitable for the stage, are a melodramatic exaggeration on screen.

All the actors display this tendency to overact, which doubtless accompanies the Kakuki tradition. But they are effective, and there is an especially poignant performance by the actress who plays the old woman's daughter-in-law.

It is a strange and often beautiful movie, and its faults, though considerable, do not prevent "Ballad of the Narayama" from being an interesting and sometimes entrancing motion picture. Most Western film makers could benefit from a thorough examination of the daring and adventurous style that Kinoshita employs. The East may be inscrutable, but perhaps the West is too obvious.

By Elan Galper

I did not expect the Alberta Opera Society to encroach upon La Scala's standards. I was not disappointed in my estimations—although the opera was surprisingly good. *Trovatore* was not *Il*, but there is still some need for improvement.

Certain things about the performance were irritating. Nothing major, but a profusion of petty annoyances. One would lament the lack, at times, of the right balance between the orchestra and the singers, the use of some of the very magnificent scenery over again, the imperfect singing of the chorus, and the general lack of physical action in an opera which calls for duels, fights and fainting spells. The famed *Miserere* was a bit disappointing. It was not the "contrast between the whole orchestra accompanying Leonora, the darkness, and the flowing strains of Manrico's lute: the con-

trast between the heavenly praises uttered by the chorus and the melodious love-regrets of Manrico, which unite and merge with the fervent sighs or Leonora" that Francis Toye describes it to be.

Some of my remarks will also be aimed at the tenor, who butchered the lyrical role of Manrico, transforming it into an ostentatious pre-Gluck applause-perking cacophony. Singing quite loudly and stiltedly, he drowned out in some of the more tender moments the delicate soprano of his ladylove Leonora.

There were some praiseworthy points, too. The mezzo-soprano who sang the part of Azucena, the Gypsy, was quite impressive. This character, doubtless, is the most powerful in the whole opera: that of a woman who, like Hamlet, alternates between the sane and the mad, driven by an overpowering search for revenge.

Poet Pontificates

By Jon Whyte

Irving Layton, one of the most dynamic men in Canadian letters, after his reading in Convocation Hall last Friday evening was engaged in conversation by Gateway's Jon Whyte, sometimes columnist.

Layton, whose quips and statements always make interesting reading, talked about two subjects primarily—the author and the University, and his theories of poetics. The conversation was recorded and later transcribed.

The major portion of our Canadian writers at the professional level are involved with universities. Do you feel that this is detrimental to Canadian letters?

I have very strong opinions on that. I feel that the university is no place for the creative writer. I have a feeling that the poets must crawl out of the universities, and out of the colleges and academies to roam the streets of the cities, the megalopolis and absorb the tensions, and the neuroses of the time if he is going to write anything significant and if it is going to move people. It's unfortunate that the poet can not support himself by his writing in our society, and so the only patron of the poet today, and of the novelist is the university.

Well, all right, it gives him a livelihood, it gives him security, but I think it demands too much from him. It is at best a compromise. You get something like this—either the poet is not going to write anything at all because he's too busy earning a livelihood—perhaps having to work in a warehouse. It's a lot better, it's a lot easier to work in a university, it gives you at least some free time. But then his poetry seems to take on a certain color, a certain air of academia. It seems to be too remote; too abstract; and this is unfortunate.

Do you think there is a fairly good crop of young university writers coming up at the present time?

They don't have very much to show. So I couldn't really generalize from the conference of university writers I attended last spring. They didn't have anything to show me except their aspirations, their ideals and their hopes and, of course, that accounts for almost nothing in the actual business of writing. For every hundred people that want to be a writer, maybe one can turn out to be one. But if they had shown me something I would have been able to say "yes" or "no" as the case may be, but here my generalization would mean nothing.

Are the young poets reading in the coffee houses to any extent?

Yes, we have that in Montreal, there's a place known as "The Potpourri", and you do have poetry readings there of young poets. It's catching on.

Would you have the young poet obtain a university education?

Oh, yes, by all means. I would say to a young poet, "Go to university, get everything the university can give you." Mainly the opportunity, of course, to read a lot of books, lots of books in different subjects. The more that the poet absorbs of astronomy, and psychology, sociology, economics, philosophy, the better for him.

But keep the poet out of the English classes though?

Oh, but above all, NOT TO TAKE COURSES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE. THAT'S FATAL. That's fatal because what happens if he is very bright, there's always a professor there who'll get hold of him and steer him into criticism. So he should avoid taking any English courses. I never took a single English course while I was at the university except the one which was compulsory. I avoided all the others.

Then, once he has read a great deal in the university, then let him go out into the world, roam around, and have all kinds of mad, wierd and wonderful experiences. He should hold up before him the idea of a Rimbaud, a Baudelaire, a Verlaine. Lead a disorderly life, you see, and gather lots of materials, lots of things to write about.

First, dear reader, I wish to issue a disclaimer for any responsibility for typographical aberrations and editorial emendations which in past have done violence to a German tyrant and a composer, and have transformed artless choristers to artful ones.

With my conscience salved, I can proceed with the business at hand which is the prescription for a sure emetic. The stiff medicine moved your reviewers to leave the October 23 concert by Richard Leibert, "organist," during the intermission.

When a writer pontificates on any subject, it is only fair to the readers that any judgments be acknowledged. I find the sonority of the Hammond organ which Mr. Leibert played a distasteful experience in itself, though I could hardly deliver myself of a competent explanation in the differences between the electronic and wind production of sound, as might an organist. The instrument's treble is shrill to the point of stridency, and the bass is too obscene to permit a published description. Moreover, the Hammond's ability to X-ray performances did the recitalist a constant disservice.

The Widor Toccata (from the Fifth Organ Symphony in F minor) shows to remarkable effect in virtuosos hands on a typically "reedy" sounding French pipe organ. The performance was an ideal caricature, with weaknesses in oeuvre and execution mercilessly shown up.

No one should play Bach because of a felt obligation. The conception of the popular Bach Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV 565) struck me as totally misguided. The whole sonority is wrong for the dramatic dissonances of the Toccata, and in such hands as Mr. Liebert's the fugue's thematic coherence was a matter of sheer coincidence. As to the playing, it was shot through with note and rhythmic inaccuracies, and the fugue especially suffered from the visitor's inability to maintain a steady tempo.

These were the only works originally composed for organ that I heard before my strategic withdrawal. Mr. Liebert also rendered his own moderately interesting Valse Rhythmique in what must be a definitive performance. Kreisler's friend and chamber partner, the great pianist Rachmaninoff transcribed the former's Liebeslied for the keyboard in an arrangement that subjected the vignette to a Rachmaninoffization totally alien to the spirit of the music. But the piano playing was ever so artistic. Mr. Liebert's rape of Liebeslied had no such redeeming features that I could detect. The innocuous Rubinstein and Puccini transcriptions were quietly executed.

I have not left myself enough room to pay adequate tribute to the Music Club performers of last Sunday. I want to ensure that Pat Colvin gets more credit for her piano part in the Beethoven sonata than the title "accompanists" would imply. Assisting artist is more like it. Mrs. Gibson's quiet and unhackneyed choice, if even on the Con Hall organ, was a blam to injured aural equipment. Misses Walker and Mossop displayed exceptional musical gifts which I hope future columns and performances may document.