



BEVERLY SILLS AS LAMMERMOOR

... the bride wore black

## Beverly Sills 'magnificent'

### It was an opera of death and insanity

Opening night at the opera. Two minutes to go and people are milling into the auditorium. The lights dim and the music begins. It is heavy and haunting, indicating a sad tale to follow.

The curtain rises. The scene is a forest in 17th century Scotland. Lord Enrico enters, the story begins. And the critic comments.

The most immediately impressive fact—aside from the singing—is the co-ordination in this opera. For a change we have sets that make full use of the stage, as in the wedding scene. Phil Silvers deserves mention in the designing of these sets, and for his use of projections rather than backdrops (a very effective technique).

The costumes, by Suzanne Mess, are not only historically accurate but are pleasant to look at and complement the sets. The orchestra does proper justice to Donizetti's music: a special mention is due to the harp soloist (at the beginning of the second scene in Act 1), the flutist (accompanying Miss Sills voice in the mad scene) and the cellist (accompanying Ermanno Mauro's death scene).

The dancing, what there is of it, is adequate and the chorus for a change not only sings in time to the music but above it. The staging is excellent, notably the sextet at the end of Act II. As a whole his is the best performance of an opera that I have seen in Edmonton.

*Lucia di Lamermoor* is an opera performed to extol the voice of

one person and this it has done. Beverly Sills as Lucia is magnificent, and nobody in the cast come even close to her brilliant performance. The flexibility of her coloratura is awesome as it runs the gamut of emotions. She well deserves the title Superstar, one of "the three best prima donnas in the world". It is rare that we in Edmonton have the privilege to hear a voice of that calibre, and for this we should be grateful to the Opera Society.

I must comment on Miss Sills acting. Throughout her arias (except for the mad scene) she gives the appearance of being at a recording session, stiff and top heavy, seemingly unaware of her audience. The mad scene, however, almost compensates for any other apparent faults. It is slightly underplayed, changing from one mood to another, but intensified and giving the appearance of actual madness. Hopefully, we will be able to hear stars of such stature in the future.

Cornelius Opthof as Enrico makes a tolerable villain and his singing, like that of Ermanno Mauro as Edgardo, effectively complements Miss Sills. His acting, however, leaves a lot to be desired, although Mr. Westgate's comments on his singing prove unjustified.

The sextet is a fine example of what the various singers can do and is, in general, an extraordinary piece of workmanship. Donizetti's music is skillful in this blending of voices. The contrast

and fusion of voices in the sextet and in the scene with Lucia and her maid is a brilliant interplay of auditory perceptions. The music is extremely well suited to the story, justifying its reputation as the best ever composed by Donizetti.

The worst thing about this opera did not occur on stage. I was saddened and rather shocked by the lack of operatic knowledge of the audience. Not only can they not dress (Edmonton fashions being what they are), but they have no knowledge of how to behave.

It is unnecessary to applaud each time a singer appears on stage; this effectively ruins the mood of the scene. It is also unnecessary to applaud in the middle of an aria, as the audience did before the end of the mad scene. It would help considerably if Edmontonians familiarized themselves with the opera before they attended it. They might appreciate it more, and actually might applaud at points where applause is warranted.

Overall, the opera was well worthwhile. It exemplifies the constant improvement of the Edmonton Opera Association, being a genuine pleasure to see and hear.

If *The Consul*, to be performed in April, is as excellent a performance as *Lucia di Lamermoor*, Edmonton may well be on the way to becoming one of the opera cities of Canada.

—ANITA SATANOVE

## Films

*Bullitt* (at the Odeon) features the impassivity of Steven McQueen's famous face, behind which, this time 'round a razor-keen police mind is supposed to be operating.

The film is to set up that we don't get much idea of what sort of mind this may be.

But don't get the notion this is a film that doesn't delve deeply into the mysteries of the human heart.

The biggest mystery of the human heart is its role as blood-pumping device.

You will recall that Gabriel Harvey discovered that the heart pumps blood through veins and arteries and so forth, thus enabling the processes of life to be carried on.

**IF YOU SHOOT PEOPLE**, or they otherwise puncture themselves, this blood comes out. All over. A bit like ketchup; but it tastes different.

This is bad for people. They often die from it.

*Bullitt* sees a lot of blood. A buddy of his gets gunned down. A woman gets bloodied up and strangled. Two bad guys run their car off a cliff and burn to death—neat color-clash between red blood and orange flame. The arch-villain is gunned down in the San Francisco airport, in front of a thousand interested people.

*Bullitt* doesn't like all this, really, but he doesn't dislike it all that much either, really. The McQueen face registers this fundamental ambivalence well. It twitches occasionally.

This impassivity bothers *Bullitt's* mistress, Jacqueline Bissett. She's impassive enough herself, as she slides in and out of *Bullitt's* bed, but that's okay 'cause she's beautiful, and beautiful faces aren't supposed to move.

But she's worried about *Bullitt*. I mean, won't all this blood and killing and horror eventually—well, sort of *harden* him?

**SHE NEEDN'T WORRY, OF COURSE.** The McQueen face will never really harden, being rather like porridge—firm, a bit lumpy, but never all that solid.

The setting is San Francisco, which is a good deal more interesting than the action at any given moment. (The photography is no more than routine, and the color looks amazingly washed-out for an American film.)

The San Francisco urban hills afford *Bullitt* a chance to chase the crooks for about fifteen minutes straight, and if you like to watch cars being tortured and innocent motorists freaked out you'll be charmed.

Oddly enough, *Bullitt* is not a good movie to go to if you're interested in charting current American traumas about the fuzz.

**THE FOCUS OF THE POLICE** investigation turns to be a gangland figure who's trying to get away with money embezzled from the Mob—that is, a character straight out of the gangster movies of the 'thirties and 'forties.

Nothing wrong with this in itself. But those movies derived their power from a feeling of total division between the Underworld and the world of the Decent Little Man. And we have lost this feeling.

The police find themselves today fighting not the Mob, the professionals, but rather the Little Man demonstrating in Chicago, the Little Man harmless in his basement with his grass—us, in fact.

(I'm speaking of the collective consciousness of the continent, of course, not of Objective Reality, wherever that may lie.)

Or they are fighting the victims themselves, whether victim-turned-powerful (the Blacks, the Eldridge Cleaver-Huey Newton thing) or victims-pathetic (the creeps, queers, obsessives of *The Boston Strangler*).

God knows the ambiguities of the new situation are enough to keep the police-movie a flourishing genre for years. But *Bullitt* explores none of them. There are numbnesses and numbnesses, and *Bullitt* plumbs the depths of the boring kind.

—JOHN THOMPSON