

BRITTEN'S "LUCRETIA" Small-scale Opera

GLYNDEBOURNE Opera House, in Sussex, famous before the war for its productions of Mozart and Verdi operas, re-opened last July as an opera house after six years as a London County Council nursery school. Things were different. Prices were lower, fewer people were in evening dress, and the operatic fare was Benjamin Britten's small-cast opera *The Rape of Lucretia*. The most expensive seats (formerly £2/2/-) now cost 25/-, dinner costs 7/6 instead of 10/6 and the wine which always accompanied it has mostly gone—15,000 bottles of it were sold by the owner John Christie in 1942.

News Review, reporting the re-opening, says that the critics were mostly pleased with Britten's new opera—his second. Its libretto is by the farmer-poet Ronald Duncan (for whose play *This Way to the Tomb* Britten wrote choral music in 1945) and is described in the programme as being "after the play *Le Viol de Lucrèce* by André Obey, and based on the works of Livy, Shakespeare, Nathaniel Lee, Thomas Heywood, and F. Ponsrad."

The Rape of Lucretia is opera on a small scale, having about the same relation to standard opera as a string quartet has to a symphony orchestra. It has a small cast, a small orchestra, and two undramatised figures who act as Chorus (in the Greek, not the operatic sense.)

"A New Form"

The *Daily Telegraph* said it made a deeper impression than *Peter Grimes* (Britten's first opera) and *The Times*, which was less enthusiastic about it, said that "a new form in which the age-old balance of music and drama is struck anew" had been created. In the *Observer*, Cecil Gray called the opera "powerful and effective."

Not long after the opening at Glyndebourne itself, the company went on tour for the first time—heading first for the provinces and then for the Continent.

News Review says there was only one point of similarity between the season and Glyndebourne precedent—the work was rehearsed extensively. There were 16 members in the company, under the producer Eric Crozier, and they worked hard beforehand in the big music room, the morning room, and the tea-rooms (all equipped with grand pianos).

Crozier was once with the Sadler's Wells opera company (with the tenor, Peter Pears, and the soprano, Joan Cross), but he had broken away because of prolonged trouble which came to a head when *Peter Grimes* was produced. Though that opera had been a tremendous success, the Sadler's Wells administration decided not to include it in

the standard repertory. There followed a series of what Scott Goddard (music critic to the *News Chronicle*) called "internecine jealousies worthy of the Ministry of Information at its best." The new Glyndebourne Opera Company appears to owe its origin in part to those rows.

SUNDAY afternoon concerts, including organ, vocal and instrumental items, broadcast from the Wellington Town Hall by 2YA at 3.0 p.m. have been so popular that they will probably become a regular feature of the Sunday programmes.

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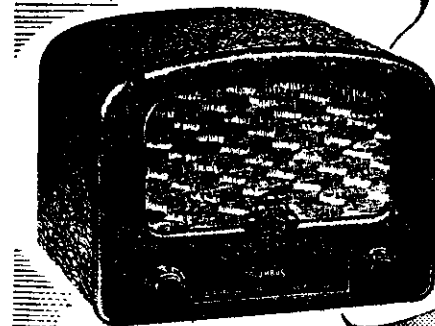
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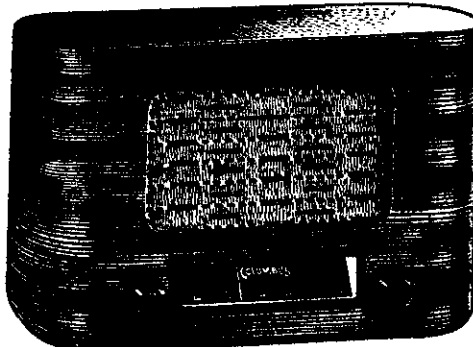
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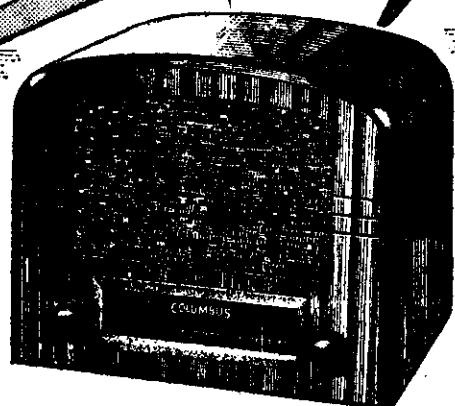
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