

Verdi's "Aida"

IN 1869 the Khedive of Egypt hit on the thought of a new opera to commemorate the opening of the Suez Canal. Verdi was asked to compose it, but persistently refused until he read a scenario prepared by the French Egyptologist, August Mariette, about an Ethiopian princess called Aida. The premiere of the opera was delayed by the Franco-Prussian War, and *Aida* wasn't performed until Christmas Eve, 1871, when it was put on in Cairo at a new theatre that had been built for it. *Aida* has been described as the last and greatest of the grand operas, and it exhibits at its best Verdi's inexhaustible melodic inspiration, which was capable of pouring out one tune after another of the quality of the famous tenor solo, "Celeste Aida."

A new LP recording of *Aida*, performed by the Chorus and Orchestra of the Academy of Saint Cecilia, Rome, conducted by Alberto Erede, will be broadcast in a link of the YC stations at 6.50 p.m. on Sunday, August 22. Between the acts John Gray will give a brief evaluation of the work and discuss its importance in the history of opera. The part of Aida is played by Renata Tebaldi (soprano), and her lover Radames by Mario del Monaco (tenor).

Nowadays we forget that *Aida* was written at the command of a foreign potentate to celebrate the completion of a great engineering enterprise, and remember only its dramatic story of the star-crossed lovers, Aida and Radames, who are in love but have no business to be, since both duty and common-sense should have pointed out to them their incompatibility.

Aida is the King of Ethiopia's daughter held in captivity by the Egyptian court, and Radames is the commander of the Egyptian armies against the Ethiopians. When she persuades him to betray his country and escape with her to Ethiopia, he agrees to do so, but is in turn betrayed by the Pharaoh's



daughter Amneris, who also loves him. It is not surprising that the opera should end with the death of the lovers, who are buried alive in an airless vault, "the crypt of doom," by the white-robed priests and priestesses of the Temple of Vulcan.

The opera is notable for its exotic and at times almost oriental flavour. The chants and hymns of ritual by the Egyptian priests at such moments as that when Radames is consecrated before setting out to fight the Ethiopians, the famous march of the long trumpets, and the great choruses in the crowd scenes make a stirring background for the story of the doomed lovers.

Two other authors besides Mariette had a hand in the libretto: Camille Du Locle, who drew up a detailed prose-sketch in French, and Antonio Ghislanzoni, who finally rendered the drama into Italian verse. Verdi himself took an active interest in the preparation of the libretto at every stage, and was responsible for a number of alterations and improvements.

Mendelssohn's Small Masterpieces

MENDELSSOHN'S well-known *Songs Without Words* were written at odd moments between much larger works. In several instances they were hastily inscribed in the birthday books and autograph albums of his friends—especially in England, where his circle of acquaintances was immense. Twenty of these compositions—there were 49 altogether—are being played by Lola Johnson in *Masterpieces in Miniature*, four programmes which 2YA is broadcasting at 8.30 p.m. on Thursdays, the second on August 19.

In a note on these broadcasts, L. D. Austin says that publication of *Songs Without Words* extended over 36 years, from 1832 to 1868. The title page of Book I, published at the author's risk, describes them simply as "Original Melodies for the Piano-Forte." Mendelssohn was then 23. Only 114 copies of this first book were sold in the first four years, but when, chiefly on the advice of Mendelssohn's sister Fanny, the title was changed to *Songs Without Words*, the sales of this volume and its successors were so good that when the composer died in 1847 it was be-

lieved that there were very few musical homes in Britain that did not have copies. In fact, for a long time many people in Britain thought that the *Songs Without Words* were Mendelssohn's entire musical output. Mr. Austin says many people will be surprised to know that Mendelssohn's sister not only suggested the title for this series of compositions, but wrote at least two of them herself, and collaborated with her brother in writing others. Felix frequently spoke of Fanny in letters to friends as being more gifted musically than himself, and he never completed any of his compositions without consulting her and often adopting her advice. Mr. Austin says some of Mendelssohn's vocal music also was written by Fanny.

In the broadcasts by Lola Johnson four groups of five items each are being presented. The order of selection was determined not by chronology but with variety of character and tonality in mind, though as it happens the five items heard in the first broadcast this week (August 12) are in almost their original sequence.

Take a restful mid-year break

when you need it most!



take a

Discovery holiday

7 enjoyable, bracing days in the South Island Scenic Wonderland! —at reduced rates—only £14/14/9

for travel up to December 14

A truly glorious and "uplifting" holiday, with never-ending joyous and bracing pleasures... luxurious days at Ohau, Wanaka, Queenstown... carefree time to "discover" real living... amongst ever-thrilling grandeur.

DISCOVERY HOLIDAYS leave Christchurch on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday every week.

All for only a fraction over £2 a day; excluding travelling meals and side trips you take. You travel as an individual—not conducted! Cruiser Coaches—comfortable, heated, address system, etc. Extra days at cost can be arranged at any point by prior arrangement.

See and enjoy the majestic mountains, scenery and walks at Lake Ohau—beautiful Lake Wanaka with its congenial tourist hotel—glorious Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu, and Coronet Peak (the snow sports playground—June to September 30, snow permitting). Enquire at any travel agent, or—

Mail this coupon for Free Pamphlet, 'Discovery Holiday'

Principal Agents:

MT. COOK & SOUTHERN LAKES TOURIST CO. LTD., P.O. Box 226, Timaru.

Name

Address

C.

Mount Cook and Southern Lakes Tourist Company Limited

BEST FOR ALL LIGHTERS

RONSONOL Lighter Fluid

For the famous Ronson "first time, every time" light, insist on Ronsonol lighter fluid. It's best for ALL Lighters.

RONSON Literkit

Contains a complete selection of Ronson accessories—5 extra-length "fire-bronze" flints • wick • inserter • brush. In the handy pocket pack. 2/6.

By the makers of RONSON, world's greatest lighter. Representatives: Ponsford, Newman & Benson 1948 Ltd.

RONSONOL DISTRIBUTORS: Delopac (N.Z.) Ltd., Wellington.

S.A.P. 10



PRICE 2/6

