

★ The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN ★

MAKE no apology for devoting the whole of this week's column to a piece of witticism at the thought of which I still chuckle: namely, the BBC feature *Emily Butter* (YC link), which was a satire not so much on opera—both traditional and modern—as on our attitude towards it. Henry Reed was apparently responsible for it; and it was gratifying to find that the BBC could laugh at itself in such good spirit. All the stock devices of publicity were done and overdone: the interviews with Hilda Tablet, the mannish composer, and her effeminate librettist; the commentator groping for words on the first night; the foreign singers taking leading roles—one coloratura actually singing in Italian! Then there were the special

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Klee's paintings, and though remote, never inhuman. I hope that this magnificent work will be played again and again.

The Ethos of Pathos

MY appetite whetted by the interview in this journal with the great composeress Hilda Tablet, I looked forward to her opera *Emily Butter* with the liveliest anticipation. And my answer? Yes and no. The BBC, through Henry Reed, tried to give us an hour of elegant fun; unfortunately, they thought it such a scream that their asides took the edge off my risibilities. The third programme pretentiousness which it was the aim of the programme to expose, suffered because of the self-consciously revealing *sotto voce* comments of the ideally suave compères. Suavity must go the whole way, with deadly seriousness, if the mock-heroic joke is to come off. There were some choice things in the score, some of which were prodigiously witty; recitative lines such as "are you being sarcastic with your old friend?" one can treasure, and it was a charming device to have all the singers but one, Welsh, and this one singing in Italian. There was a great deal of clever Menotti pastiche, echoes of Britten, and even Offenbach. But the joke was an Arts Council family affair, for those in the know. And even for them, I don't think it was funny enough.

—B.E.G.M.

Two of a Kind

"[I]t has been said that when two Englishmen meet abroad they establish a club; where there are two Irishmen there's the making of a fight, but if there are two Scotsmen you have a Caledonian Society. Whereas the Englishmen require a couple of easy chairs, the *Times Weekly Review* and a decanter, the Irishmen another opinion, you will discover the Scots earnestly seeking for two things—bottles full and Haggis canned." —Thomas Thomson, a Scotsman, talking in the "Scottish Magazine," broadcast in the BBC's General Overseas Service.

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effects in the use of films, the heavy accent on the soloists' *avoids*, the plummy musical critic with his illustrated talk, and the distressing misunderstanding with the Consolidated Instrumentalists' Union.

We were privileged to hear a good deal of the ten acts of the opera itself: Donald Swann has written some faintly Brittenish music for this jape, and has made use of most of the possible means to banality without polytonality or even the advertised atonality. ("It's an English opera with an all-female cast, and English women are such diatonic types.") Neither have the more obvious references been omitted: W. S. Gilbert's ears would burn to hear the recital of Emily's multiple identifying marks, there is a small collaboration with Tchaikovsky, and, of course, the heroine has to die of

a broken heart, sobbing a last aria in the powder-room. "I shall never never see Mrs. Bottomley again." This proves too much for her.

There is pure farce here and there: for instance, the scenes where, owing to Union defections, the opera proceeds practically without accompaniment; the policewoman, who turns out to be a bass-baritone, with one line only, "Good morning all"; the "very English" trio which lapses into Italian and French from the outset; and the utterly memorable liftmotif.

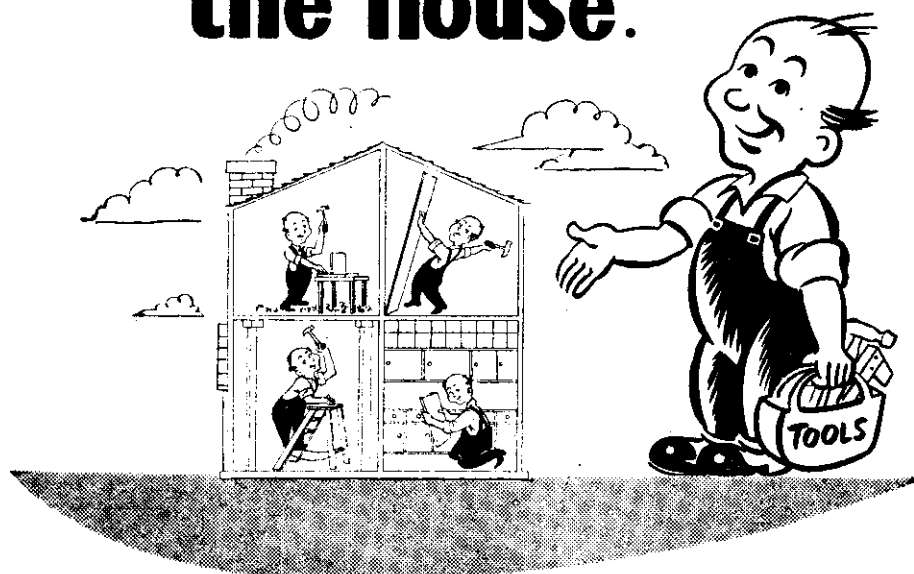
As an opera it has its points, and its setting in a department store is perfectly credible after some of the less likely scenes of modernistic operas that we have heard, or at least heard of. It is, in fact, good humoured and often caustic banter which, without much strain, could be taken nearly seriously. It will remain topical as long as grand opera and the BBC survive: and when it is broadcast again, I for one will be at home with my radio.

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