"The boss wants to throw you in jail," snarled the burly security guard. I shuddered, suddenly cold beneath my motorcycle jacket. Only moments ago, I was standing on line at the Met to buy standing room for Ariadne, and now I... (continued on page 2)
Debbie Does Naxos

by Giovanni Fucina

Ariadne auf Naxos (Met, 4/16)

was to have been the capstone of
Carol Vaness's annus mirabilis,
but she was busy coaching Renée
Fleming's Desdémonas' (Verdi is
so much easier on the back than
Strausss') and so Debbie Voigt
(that's La Voigt to you) was
pressed into service. And the
usual Met squeeze-the-lens-
until-it's-dry stories hit the
streets: on at least one occa-
sion Voigt sang Chrysothemis
after a day of rehearsing
Ariadne. Why? Because if she
doesn't the Met (read: Jimmy)
will hire someone who will—and
for less money (no matter if
they can't sing it) As it turned
out, she came though with flying
colors, but pieces. Debbie, take
it easy!

And she's the real thing, all
right—the one we've been
waiting for, the Parsifal of
dramatic sopranos. The tone is
warm, rich, creamy, and well,
we might as well say it... volu-
tuous. And even, too, though
there's a little gets me more than
two octaves. Even the grunting
(low C and beyond) Strauss as-
signed Ariadne early in the
opera's proper left her unaided.
And that phrase we all wait for
toward the end of "Es gibt ein
recht, aber no one wrote me a
letter telling me to cease and
desist. "They" sent these
goons to tell me, "Get the
fuck out of the plaza," and
to call me a "faggot with a
bad attitude." (Let me empha-
size that the city cop was
innocent of any of this
verbal abuse. He merely told
me I should cut it out. Fair
enough).

Now, gentle readers, we have
received lots of mail from
those of you kind enough to
praise our little journal, but
not one letter of protest.
And it's not like I was
something really evil, like a
ticket scaper or a child
molester.

No, I won't distribute PB at
the Met any more. Please, Met
security force, don't throw
me in de brier patch.

But anyway, La Deb (the nickname
needs work. Ideas?) is an
efficient actress, really funny
in the prologue (despite this
productions lack of that sig
but not one letter of proto-
diary and moving in the seria (despite
Elijah Moshinsky's evident lack
of interest in the last half-
hour of the show—more about
that later)

PB welcomes our new critic— Fishbone. Logically, since his native
language is Italian, his first review will be...

Der Fliegende Höllander (Met March 30) The Flying Dutchman gets down
from his "vaisseau phantôme," and it's immediate queerness. His gloomy look,
its mysterious countenance do nothing but evoke queer dreams of impossible,
forever lost or never-found love. And Senta, what is she if not a metaphor for
gay men's mythic quest for the unrealizable and unattainable—love? Never
satisfied with what is ready at hand, the Dutchman is on a perennial quest for
the ideal.

Our Dutchman, in the world James Morris, was stupendous both vocally and
dramatically. He has the right fach of voice for this role, and his vaguely
mephistophelian aspect was not an indifferent help. He was efficiently
supported by a sturdy and vigorous Jan-Hendrik Rootering (this basso has
recently sung an incredible grab-bag at the Met: in a single week he has
appeared as Daland, Don Basilio and Orest!

Paul Groves gave a polished, belcanto-like rendition of the Steersman's ballad.
Unfortunately things were not so good with the two other high voices in the
cast. Klaus König was an effortful, throaty and visually clumsy Erik, and
Hildegard Behrens proved herself well past her prime, showing evident signs
of an aging and fatiguing voice, with a worn-out top that didn't match her
relatively powerful middle range.

Herman Michael, the conductor, gave an exciting and stirring reading of this
score, always ready, however, to underline important specific passages and
details. August Everding's production, now five years old, has lost none of
its original charm, and was as impressive, intriguing and disquieting as ever.
Eccomi, Cecilia Bartoli, pria di "Slimfast!"

Delightful young mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli has signed her first TV commercial contract. An A&R man at Decca (who control virtually every aspect of the diva's life) explains, "We had to find a way to make Sissy a household name in her native Italy, where for some reason they insist opera singers actually sing opera. Our success with Kiri te Kanawa and Dmitri Hvorostovsky (who tread the boards as little as possible) proves the rest of the civilized world is easy to hoodwink."

One of the lucky few who heard La Bartoli's recent concert with the Met orchestra reports, "You could put her voice and Kathy Battle's voice in the navel of a flea and still have room for James Levine's heart."

Speaking of Jimmums, we hear he is recovering nicely from the freak accident he sustained while following Miss Battle onstage. It seems she stopped suddenly, and the maestro fractured his nose. (Our apologies to Jay Leno.)

This is the first time I heard Tracy Dahl (Serbinita), and, frankly, I was disappointed. She pitched straight at Frank Sinatra and blew all three money notes—the E got away from her altogether. (She was really nifty on the second recast, though—maybe the 16th was just an off night. I will say this—she's game. This production gives 7-girl enough schtick for Flikermill, Olympia, Sophie and the Queen of Shemakhan with some left over for Beerbohm and a Beest. Run! Jump! Twirl! Dance! I kept waiting for fire batons, and when they weren't, I assume it's not her fault if the production shies away from finding meaning in the text, but let Dalil be so audioanimatronic?

And this is Teresa Stratas' year of years! Finally, a Komponist who is more than Che-rubino in a bad mood! For the first time since Trovatore, maybe saw a genius triumphant over backstage schreierei. Stratas made up for his voice (she took a few minutes to warm up, and had to yell a few lines in character with intense musician-ship and and and. "No saat!"

Speaking of her native Italy, where for some reason opera and Dmitri Hvorostovsky make Sissy as little as possible, explains, "We had to find a way to make Moshinsky dreams up to distract the audience from hearing the Komponist's aria (imagine getting to a Met audience that music is a holy art that should be treated with respect) otherwise, he hocked up the show and managed to miss all the jokes that are there. (Lesley Rosen staged this revival. Now it can be told—all her lousy ideas for Adriana weren't even original lousy ideas.)"

Most bewildering: why does Bacchus take the form of Vanderdecken? Perhaps because, at the Met at least, Baroness von Stoschke takes the form of Claggart. What's next, Floria Tosca in Pélléas?"

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Perhaps he was still in a state of shock from the tongue-lashing he received from his former favorite spinto The Divine Miss Millo. To paraphrase La Gran Scena's Sylvia Bills, "I won't tell you what she said, but it was pretty scathing."

Brava, Aprile! You go on like this!
My Own Private Montparnasse

(The "lost" scene from La bohème)

Colline: So they bought that story about the English guy?
Schaunard: Yeah. Marcello and Rodolfo would die if they knew that "poisoning the parrot" really means...
Colline: Choking the chicken?
Schaunard: (laughing) He spread his wings, and then I stuffed his beak with...
Colline: Parsley! (they laugh uproariously).
Schaunard: And Musetta's wondering if Alcindoro's found another favorite singer.
Colline: Poor girl! Too bad she lacks your "forward placement."
Schaunard: Allora, it's almost time to meet our friend Benoît.
Colline: The rent? Already?
Schaunard: He said, if you would demonstrate your "rope tricks," we'd be paid up through the spring.
Colline: I don't know. What's in it for me?
Schaunard: Afterwards, I'll teach you a little game I learned in Marseilles. It's called "cacher la saucisse."
Colline: Oh, you nasty bohemian! I'm hard already. Andiam! (They leave for Monus)

Contributed by "Peter Hunter" and "Richard Breath," who have confirmed PB's opinion of the level of taste among Lone Star opera queens. Congrats, boys!

Thank you, Peter Allen.

Our first question today comes from San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Peter Hunter asks if the panel can identify the "up and coming" American baritone who enjoyed frequent homosexual with his own brother before AIDS cut short his career?

Can the panelists name the soprano and conductor featured in the following steamy opera plot? She refused to continue with a performance until the maestro obligation her by placing his "enormousness" in her mouth. He balked at the idea, reminding her of his well-known gay inclinations. She told him to close his eyes and pretend she was F----- C-----.

Which operatic superstar has been sending his frumpy wife out on stage-directing gigs so he can enjoy cavorting in his hotel suite with blonde chorus cuties?

Can any of you identify the noted American bass who quotes Nellie Melba's dictum that fresh semen keeps the voice young and supple? At the rate this basso is going, he'll still be singing at the age of 100, unless he drowns first!

Will someone please explain why so many operatic superstars commit so many sexual peccadillos while in residence in Houston, Dallas or San Antonio? Do they perhaps think?

a) no one will notice?
b) no one will talk about it long distance to friends in New York?

I'm afraid that's all the time we have.

Panel, can you name the boyish farmer's daughter who changed her name because everyone confused her with a male basketball coach? Hint: She burned herself out too soon and is left with no voice, no career, and a phony name!

Do the panelists believe Rodrigo (Don Carlo) is gay, or does it just seem that way because practically everyone who sings the role is?

Mr. Richard Breath of Dallas asks if you can name the powerful but hideous general manager of a west-of-the-Mississippi opera company whose primary interest in life was diving cute young hustlers to distant motels and then scaring the beejeezus out of them by prancing out of the bathroom wearing the skimpiest of bikini briefs?

Will someone please explain why so many operatic superstars commit so many sexual peccadillos while in residence in Houston, Dallas or San Antonio? Do they perhaps think?
Dear Parterre Box,

Where have you been all my life? But seriously,

Unfortunately, I have new stories about Kuntleen Battle. However, I do have it from a reasonably reliable party that Ms. Warmth is, in fact, the illegitimate daughter of Al Jolson and Florence Foster Jenkins.

So, what's the word on Dmitri Hvorostovsky? I have a hunch his "Parterre Box" is rather impressive. I imagine it wouldn't be too difficult to find out. I mean, no one who records "Ochye tchornya" (or however it's spelled) can be exclusively heterosexual, can they? Personally, I find his voice to be somewhat wobbly, but who cares?

Re: Menotti's "Che mai fu alla Bambina Giovanna." Just for your information, you might be interested to know that the famous third act "Mah-Jongg" scene was performed in concert in Salzburg sometime in the mid-50's by Stella Roman, Nan Merriman, Giuseppe Campora and Nicola Moscona. No recordings have survived.

Dear Scott,

Hate to rain on your parade, but the "Mah-Jongg" scene is actually from Catalani's "Via Tramonta," which also includes the lovely soprano aria "Glorioso canto del cigno."

Dear Mr/Ms Box:

Yes, indeed, Dame Gwyneth has a "massive" voice and I too might have muttered "shit" had I been standing next to you because that is an excellent description of the quality of her voice. There are pig farmers in the midwest who can scream out and call in pigs from miles away with their "massive" voices. I would not want, however, to hear them at the Met.

My first experience with this dame was about 10 years ago when she hooted, howled, swooped and shrieked her way through Isolde without ever hitting a note on key. It was the most lamentably bad performance I have ever heard at the Met and I have tried to avoid her performances ever since--difficult since she is the only Brunnhilde performing in the Ring and, unfortunately, the only Kundry for next season's Parsifal. I'd like to ship her and Aprile Millo off to Opera heaven away from us all and, so as not to appear sexist, throw in Sherrill Milnes to accompany them.

Further to your comments in the issue, the hell with Debbie Voigt as Isolde in 2000, let's have Jessye Norman do it now. NOW! NOW! NOW!

P.S. - Bring back Battle (the purest, most perfect coloratura alive) and Jimmy Levine's conducting is still superb. Can't you get anything right?

"John"

Dear Ted,

No, I can't. For example, I deliberately left your letter in my breast pocket and then sent the shirt to the laundry... but it's still legible. Now, for your information, Jessye Norman has postponed her Isolde, due to the indisposition of Elizabeth Schwartzkopf, who was to repeat the cameo role she created in Furtwangler's recording. Don't be a stranger, darling.

Dear PB,

Hope you get a chuckle out of this one.

Translation: The Flaming Queen--"You know, I'm not a queen any more." (otherwise known as "de Nile aria."

Dear Unknown Prince,

I am helpless with laughter. Who are you?

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