

This is the second of my little communications here and it's dealing with the problem of being politically engaged as a composer. To be or not to be politically engaged is a question that has been put to a composer, or that he would ask his own conscience, only fairly recently. Before the 19th century a question of this kind seemed to be entirely <sup>irrelevant</sup> out of order. We can't imagine that Palestrina or Bach had any pronounced political views and how they would have expressed them. In Mozart's work we think to discover traces of political consciousness: his choice of Beaumarchais's Figaro that carried some revolutionary implications; and The Magic Flute, with its Freemason's humanitarian background seem to point in this direction. Flashes of political awareness are ascribed to Beethoven and much of his work has been interpreted as revealing certain ideas about the social constitution of mankind.

The instances in which a composer's political engagement manifests itself in real-life action are rare. By far the most decided position was certainly taken by Richard Wagner, when in the year 1848 he partook most actively of the revolutionary upheavals in Dresden. There is evidence that he not only, on behalf of the communist rebels, ordered, personally, explosives and other tools for making bombs, but occupied an observation post ~~from~~ <sup>on</sup> ~~a~~ the church steeple when the battle between the revolutionaries and the forces of law and order was joined. He escaped persecution but had to live in exile for 20 years. In his later life he worked hard to erase memories of this embarrassing escapade and after his death his widow Cosima took great pains to expurgate the records so that the details of this story only recently came to light. But even in his later life, Wagner did not hesitate to dabble again in politics, when he entered in some nearly treasonable

negotiations with foreign agents, promoting the elevation of his benefactor, the King of Bavaria, to the German imperial throne. His motivations were quite egocentric, not to say selfish. He was willing to overthrow the royal government in Dresden because they didn't appreciate and play his operas as much as he thought they should. And if his king had become emperor he would have had more power and riches to lavish on his beloved composing.

In our own time the composer often asks himself whether writing music is a sufficient exertion in a world that seems to require lots of work in order to ~~be~~ <sup>become</sup> liveable. Should he at least write articles, give speeches, perhaps run for elective office or proceed directly to the barricades and fight? Or should he inspire the fighters with exhortative music? Since Wagner's brief revolutionary foray, not many composers were seen on the barricades. But quite a few have reflected their ideas about social and political life in their work in various ways. Whether "absolute" music, that is, music without words, is able to disclose anything of the composer's extra-musical thinking is a moot question. But assuming this question is answered affirmatively, ~~then how such music is doing it~~ <sup>deciphering this music's message</sup> depends entirely on the explication that its ~~inner~~ meaning is given. And this, as we know, is entirely arbitrary.

Thus, for instance, it has been said that the most esoteric music, such as the type represented by Webern and his followers, reveals an attitude of protest against present social conditions because in its lonely unpopularity it underscores the alienation that has become the curse of mankind. Such identification is of course rather vague and inconclusive. As a matter of fact, music as such does not reveal any specific political ideology or attitude. It is completely neutral. Even if it seems emotionally loaded to the brim, its movement can only be felt or understood as an

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*that may have generated it*

*of that emotion*

image of the intensity of the emotion, but never as a likeness of ~~its~~ <sup>the</sup> object. Any political or other extra-musical implications that a composer may wish to communicate are conveyed by the words he attaches to his music or to which the music is attached.

The most direct way of communication of political contents by musical means is primitive songs and hymns to be performed in order to stimulate or accompany political action by masses of people. It is obvious that the artistic interest of such materials is extremely low, for its design has to be elementary in every respect. The most effective items were not created by composers of stature but by humble amateurs with a profound feeling for the cause they served and a special flair for the requirements of the style. It is also well known that such tunes may switch party lines with the greatest of ease and serve the adversary just as well if given the proper lyrics.

*On a more demanding level,*

The most efficient medium combining words and music is, of course, opera because the message that may be carried by the words is drastically strengthened by the impact of dramatic action.

~~Now, as I mentioned the last time,~~ I have written about 20 operas, and ~~many~~ <sup>several</sup> of them carry some political implications. For instance, the very first opera I wrote, in 1922 <sup>(at the age of 22)</sup> ~~when I was 22 years old,~~ is called Die Zwangsburg in German, which means The Tyrant's Castle. ~~Now that~~ <sup>It</sup> was written ~~(at the time)~~ shortly after the First World War under the impact of the chaos which had been caused by that war.

~~It was just a few~~ <sup>In those following</sup> years ~~after~~ the Russian Revolution and ~~after~~ the destruction of the imperial governments in Central Europe, ~~so~~ there was a great deal of awareness of revolutionary change and upheaval, and in this opera some of this is reflected. ~~The text was written by a friend of mine;~~ I was at that time still a student in Berlin and a friend of mine, a young doctor, who later

*and I prepared sketch / see p. 15*

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perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz - <sup>he</sup> wrote the words for this opera, a very nice but rather amateurish attempt, influenced by the expressionistic playwright Ernst ~~Tollup~~ <sup>Toller</sup> (sp?), who had written plays ~~about the revolution~~ <sup>about</sup> the coming up of the masses. And ~~The~~ <sup>The</sup> idea of this ~~play~~, rather ~~of this~~ <sup>the</sup> opera, was that ~~there is a mass of people~~, ~~they~~ are dominated by a tyrant who is never seen. He lives in a castle which also has the look(s) of a factory and these people are forced to go through a mechanistic routine. ~~The symbol~~ <sup>This condition symbolized in the character of</sup> is an organ grinder who is cursed to play <sup>ceaselessly</sup> this organ, and to <sup>the pounding</sup> ~~this~~ <sup>of this</sup> rhythm ~~instant~~ <sup>the</sup> music people have to perform their jerky motions. ~~Now~~ <sup>whimsically</sup> ~~The~~ tyrant decides ~~just out of whim~~ to liberate the people for one day. ~~He gives them their freedom for one day and~~ ~~The~~ organ grinder is tied to a pole so he can't play his organ and the people are suddenly free. ~~Now they develop~~ <sup>The unaccustomed freedom puts them in</sup> a sort of delirium, ~~of freedom and liberty~~ and at the climax they decide that even this poor organ grinder has to be freed: he should partake of their freedom. ~~So~~ ~~They~~ untie him from his pole and, naturally, ~~immediately~~ he has to start again to play his machine, ~~and~~ <sup>signaling the</sup> ~~end of freedom~~. ~~So~~ <sup>Thus</sup> the tyrant was ~~absolutely~~ right when he said it would last but one day.

~~Now that was a rather pessimistic view of the possibility of freedom. But later this text was revised and rewritten by the great Austrian playwright, Franz Werfel who remodeled it in his own style, which became a little bit gripe (?) and maybe sugary, but very elegant. But the main tendency of the piece was the same.~~

~~The idea of freedom <sup>kept</sup> intrigued <sup>ing</sup> me from thereon and it has become <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ main, ~~the~~ dominant concept of ~~all~~ <sup>many of</sup> my dramatic works. The next opera which I wrote, <sup>only</sup> ~~already~~ a year later in 1923, was a comic opera called <sup>Der</sup> ~~Die~~ Sprung ~~über~~ <sup>über</sup> den Schatten (The Leap over the Shadow). There is a German saying that~~

When I had started sketching the music, the Austrian playwright, Franz Werfel, revised and rewrote this rather pessimistic libretto as a courtesy for me and gave it a more hopeful slant, indicating at the end that salvation was beckoning somewhere in an ever so distant future. As much as I appreciated his effort, I found his style a little glib and sentimental for my taste.

The idea of freedom in its many aspects kept intriguing me ever since and has become a dominant concept in many of my dramatic works. My second essay for the musical stage, which I wrote only one year later, in 1923, and for the first time with my own libretto, was a comic opera, called Der Sprung über den Schatten (The leap over the shadow). There is a German saying (or perhaps in other languages too) that nobody can skip over his own shadow, meaning that he can not get over what today is called his hang-ups, his personal idiosyncrasies and inhibitions. This idea has haunted me through all my adult life, for I have always entertained wish and hope that I could rearrange some traits of my personality. While, then, this opera was mainly concerned with liberating the individual of his own inhibitions, the political aspects of freedom were not neglected. The principal character was a shy, inhibited poet, hopelessly in love with Princess Leonore, the wife of the ruler of that little principality. His counterpart was an extrovert, go-getting psychoanalyst who through his treatments made it possible for people to skip over their shadows. The ruling prince was a caricature of ancient aristocracy, an abject debauchee, vile and ridiculous. After much intrigue, masterminded by the doctor, the people overthrew the old regime while the poet was freed of his inhibitions and united with the princess to live happily ever after. Today the most interesting aspect of this rather sophomoric libretto seems to me the fact that it contains a number of motives that I somehow stored away in my mind and picked up many years later. The music of the Sprung derives from the then current expressionistic vocabulary, but this is off and on shockingly interlarded with what today would be called "pop" elements.

My next opera, Orpheus and Eurydice, was written on an adaptation of a play by the great Austrian painter, Oskar Kokoschka, at his request. Together with my Second Symphony I consider it the most mature part of my early output, but I refrain from discussing it here because the libretto does not directly reflect my own ideas.

Jonny spielt auf, my next operatic effort, certainly does. (The title approximately means Jonny strikes up the band. As to the spelling, it reveals that at that time I knew next to nothing about English or American. I had seen the name "Jonny" in the lyrics of a German hit song and simply accepted it. Later, when Americans thought that an "h" must be missing, I explained that my hero's name was derived from Jonathan.) Here I again took up the problem of personal freedom. The shy poet became an introvert, problem-ridden composer, and what happened to him was not without autobiographical implications. His troubles were viewed in a larger frame of reference; he was seen as representing the typical mental situation of the ponderous, inhibited Central European intellectual. Opposite to him I placed Jonny, the American jazz fiddler, a child of nature, totally free of inhibitions, acting on impulse at the spur of the moment. Obviously the invention of this antithesis was inspired by my first contact with the western world and my experience of the very evident contrast of mentalities and life styles between east and west. America, at that time entirely unknown to me, seemed to lend itself most convincingly for localizing the epitome of natural grace and uninhibited freedom which I had in mind. Needless to say that this was an utterly Romantic view of America, such as some of the early nineteenth century writers had entertained. Of course, here the hapless composer is eventually freed of his bondage, and in the railroad station which became one of the several sensational trappings that made this opera famous, he reaches in the last suspenseful minute the train that will take him west. He is off to America where he too will live happily ever after -- or so we hope.

Political overtones were entirely absent in this opera, which may have been caused by two circumstances. In those years I was living abroad, in Germany and later in Switzerland, and I felt that it was not correct for a foreigner to become engaged in the political problems of the guest country. I felt this way even in Germany although at that time many Austrians thought that their country was -- or better should be -- a part of the great German fatherland. I have always been vehemently opposed to the Anschluss ideology and emphasized my being a foreigner in Germany.

At the same time my interest in political affairs had somewhat subsided. In my adolescence I had developed strong sympathies for left and far left causes, and I have retained them to this day. But I also noticed that the systems that the revolutionaries promoted did not exactly recommend themselves as substitutes for what we have here and now. I remember suggesting that ideally government should be efficient, noiseless, and inexpensive. Obviously I was entirely out of tune with reality, for in all three respects the exact opposite has materialized.

My political detachment did not last very long. I gave it dramatic expression in a one-act opera, The Secret Kingdom, which is a fairy tale of my invention. The king, a lovable but weak character, pressured by his ambitious queen and threatened by rebellion, abdicates and retires to the woods where he will live out his days in communion with nature because he recognizes the vanitas vanitatum of all earthly power. The first in this group of three one-act operas, The Dictator, reveals a reaction to the phenomenon of fascism which at that time shockingly asserted itself in Italy. The story, however, is again basically apolitical. It deals with an anecdote from the private life of the "strong man" and depicts him as a fascinating though repulsive character. The third of these plays is a short skit, called Heavyweight, or The Pride of the Nation. I was prompted to this satire by reading that the German envoy to Washington on occasion of an American tour of Max Schmeling or another such hero had declared that in his opinion the stares of the world of sport were the true ambassadors of the nations, not the

scholars and artists. It clearly foreshadowed the coming open season for the egghead-hunters and irritated me a great deal. In my skit I showed up the boxing champ as an unmitigated dunce who was cuckolded by his wife with a dancing gigolo while they practiced for a Charleston marathon. In the end he is seen glued to a training machine while a professor from the university appears to present him with an honorary PhD and a high official of the Ministry of Education proclaims him the "pride of the nation".

Soon after my return to my native city of Vienna in 1927 I started working on my next operatic project, Life of Orestes. In keeping with the neo-Romantic phantasies that still inspired my thinking I wanted now to revive the accoutrements of nineteenth century grand opera, as we had known them in Meyerbeer and Verdi. Dramaturgically the opera is a tour de force because I compressed into the frame of one operatic evening the whole saga of the Atrides family that had been treated many times in separate plays -- a challenge that tempted me again later. My intention being to bring the colossal story close to contemporary modes of perception, I made it over into a fast moving, violently colorful, folksy spectacle full of anachronisms, the most conspicuous of which was perhaps the somewhat Italianate music richly sprinkled with jazz idioms. Another anachronism that I mulled over for some time was to bring the wandering Orestes, when he is searching for his sister, Iphigenia, into present-day America whose image apparently still haunted me. I dropped the idea probably because I was not yet ready to handle so outrageously absurd an element. I mention this here as a footnote because the idea surfaced many years later when I conceived The Golden Ram. I noticed more than once that the creative mind is peculiarly stingy and hates any of its outpourings to go to waste. In retelling the ancient story I took pains to find for most of its miraculous turns second motivations that would make them appear plausible to modern psychological thinking without obliterating their wondrous aspects.

The rising tide of Nazism in Germany, which soon began to threaten Austria too, revitalized my interest in political affairs.



It is reflected in Life of Orestes mainly in the characterization of Agamemnon as an ambitious fuhrer type whose obsession to become the leader of all Greece in the conquest of Troy is so overpowering that he does not shrink from wanting to sacrifice his son, Orestes, when his villainous relative, Aegisthos, talks him into it. This twist of the ancient story is my invention: Klytemnestra, his mother, saves Orestes by having him spirited away, whereupon Agamemnon, to save face, decides to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, who is rescued by the gods being transported magically to the far away northern realm of King Thoas.

While in Jonny spielt auf contrasts of psychology, life style, character, and temperament were geographically symbolized along an east-west axis, the axis now had turned by ninety degrees to stretch north-south. The brooding, mystical land of Thoas with its snowy darkness and polar storms stood against the straightforward, down-to-earth, colorful ambiente of Greece with its brilliant light and permanent serenity.

The concept of freedom comes again to attention when Orestes, after being saved from his father, wanders aimlessly about through the Grecian lands and eventually asks himself whether his boundless freedom makes any sense. Responsibility is recognized as the corollary of freedom when Orestes finally is brought to court to stand trial for having killed his mother when he came home and found her an accomplice of Aegisthos in the murder of Agamemnon. The miracle wrought by the goddess Athena by which Orestes is acquitted symbolizes the transition from the ancient matriarchal rule to the new paternal order. Again this last miracle of the opera is explained rationally without being deprived of its character of divine chance.

To bring in the concept of justification was perhaps the most significant anachronism in my treatment of the story, for it hinted at ideas typical of Christian ethics, such as guilt and redemption. It seems that even at these early portents of the approaching storm I began to see such values in a new, more positive light. But before I made a decisive turn in this direction, I gave vent to my feelings about the political situation in an opera with the title Cleaning up around St. Stephen's (this being the saint to whom Vienna's cathedral is dedicated). The story, taking place at

the time of the collapse of the old regime in 1918, made impartially satirical fun of all political creeds and principles. I had in mind to write a folk comedy in the Viennese tradition of the nineteenth century, in the spirit of Johann Nestroy, the great satirist whom I much admired. In the tense political atmosphere around 1930 my play was not unexpectedly rejected by everybody and never produced anywhere, which caused me much anguish. I should have learned from this experience that you can not count on people's sense of humor; they prefer to be irritated and exercised.

When the aggressive Nazi schemes against Austria became more evident, I developed a political attitude that today might be called left-Catholic. Seeing that the liberal and socialist forces in Germany did not offer any sufficient resistance against the totalitarian onslaught, I imagined that the Catholic substance of Austria, so deeply rooted in its history, would give more protection. I reapproached the Church from which I had been alienated since the days of the revolution and I began to think of a major operatic project that would emphasize my position and strengthen my country in its struggle for maintaining its independence. Thus it was particularly inspiring that I was asked by the Vienna State Opera House to write a new work for them.

I chose as subject matter the story of Charles V., the emperor who in the sixteenth century ruled over half of the known world and before the end of his life abdicated, giving away the unprecedented array of power that he had assembled. I had always been attracted by the mysterious anti-heros of the Hamlet type, as they moved through the twilight of history, and my emperor was one of them. Again I was faced with the challenge of condensing the enormous material into manageable size and shape. As emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation Charles had to deal with the religious revolution of Luther and the nationalistic tendencies of the German princes, he had to battle the king of France who was intent upon rounding out and centralizing his territories, he had to fight the Turks who overrunning his empire from east and south, and he had to deal with Popes who had little understanding for the emperor's universalistic dreams.

Remembering the device used by Paul Claudel in his libretto Christophe Colomb that he wrote for Darius Milhaud, I found a solution by splitting the drama in two layers so that it would be enacted and discussed at the same time. In the sources that I consulted for more than a year I noticed that the emperor at the place of his retirement, the monastery of San Yuste in Spain, had a painting which Titian had made for him -- called La Gloria and now in the Prado Museum in Madrid. It represents Charles after his death praying at the feet of the Trinity for salvation. This gave me the idea that the emperor, upon receiving the news that his abdication was accepted by the princes of the Empire, imagines that he voice of God asks him out of the painting whether he was justified in giving away his power because he thought that he had accomplished what God had wanted him to do -- that is, unite all Christianity under one temporal rule. Thereupon the emperor calls in his father confessor (who, according to the sources, was a young monk of the monastery) and asks him to evaluate his deeds as he would recite his life's story. The monk, protesting his ignorance of so formidable world affairs, consents to listen only after making sure that he would be allowed to interrupt the recital with many questions. The questions which I put in the mouth of the monk are of course those which I would feel a contemporary audience might ask wondering why we should be concerned with these bygone affairs. At the same time this device made it possible to break the continuity of the story at any point when the monk asked a question. Thus the real drama is the dialogue between Charles and the monk, in which they wrestle with the problem of the justification of the emperor's deeds, while the happenings of history appear as fragmentary illustrations of this dialogue on a different level. This dramaturgical device seemed to be the best way of both condensing the drama to reasonable size and bringing the story into the focus of modern perception, for -- unlike Life of Orestes -- the music would presumably not further this purpose since I had decided to employ the comparatively esoteric twelve-tone technique.

Both, the very pronounced anti-nationalistic tendency of the play and its praise of supra-national Christian universalism as well as the "kulturbolschewistische" character of its progressive music

made it intolerable to the Nazis who even then had already gained enough underground power in Austria to prevent the production of my work at the very opera house that had commissioned it. My own position which I had stated in many lectures and articles (one of these had the typical title "Conservative and radical") had not endeared me to the rulers of Austria either who, while fiercely defending the country's independence, tried to outdo the Nazis in the cultural sector by promoting the worst of moronic provincialism. Knowing that my name was on the blacklists of Germany where performances of my music were forbidden, and sensing that Hitler would soon take over my homeland, I decided in 1937 to emigrate to the United States.

At that time operatic facilities in this country were practically limited to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and considering its prevailing negative attitude toward new works, I felt no incentive for writing another opera of large format. At Vassar College I became associated with the playwright, Emmet Lavery, who obliged me by writing for me a libretto for a chamber opera, entitled Tarquin. It fitted well into the line of religiously flavored political thinking that I had developed. The central idea was the confrontation of the dictator with a saintly woman and the tragedy that engulfs both of them. The play had very few characters and I used only six instruments, for we had in mind to create something suitable for college workshops. But in 1939 this was an illusion nearly thirty years ahead of reality. Our essay was far beyond the reach of then existing capacities so that the piece was produced only much later in Germany.

Another chamber opera, with only four singers and one instrument (piano), a little drawing-room comedy What Price Confidence, with no political but perhaps a few autobiographical overtones, had the same fate, but not because it was too difficult, for it was written for a group of singers of the Met who would have easily mastered it, but they never had enough time to do so. Twenty years had to go by before it began to come into its own.

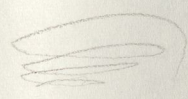
Only after I resumed contacts with Europe, I started again to think of opera on a large scale. In the early 1950s I

wrote Pallas Athene Weeps, an opera with very definite political implications, deriving its subject matter from Greek history. The goddess weeps over the downfall of democracy in Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian war, when Athens is conquered by Sparta, which is depicted as stronghold of sinister fascism. The story revolves around Socrates and three of his pupils: Alcibiades, a dashing playboy, unscrupulous and reckless, ready to betray his country, go over to the enemy and swing back again, as it serves his ego; Meletos, the old-fashioned type of republican patriot who pretends to stand up for the liberties of true democracy while he actually is undermining them with authoritarian, reactionary schemes; and Meton, a radical pacifist who asks why the Athenians are waging war when they supposedly want peace, and hides in a cave to escape the service.

Some traits of the character of Meletos I saw prefigured in the late Senator Joseph McCarthy, and the destruction by unknown agents of the Hermes statues in Athens, as reported by Thucydides in his history of the war, was interpreted as being similar in intent to the burning by the Nazis of the German Parliament building in 1933.

While working on this opera I planned to dedicate it to Adlai Stevenson. But when he became a candidate for President, I felt he would, before accepting my dedication, have to have me carefully investigated in order to make sure that this was not a communist scheme to compromise him, and it seemed to me that his staff would have more important things to do. Thus instead of dedicating the work publicly to him, I presented Stevenson an English translation of my libretto that I had especially made for him as a Christmas gift after he had lost in the election.

The question whether a composer should engage in this kind of messagework probably can not be answered in a



general way. It will depend on his inclinations and his feeling of urgency in regard to communicating his philosophical and political ideas. He ought to benefit from realizing that his musical-dramatic communication will not accomplish any noticeable results in the outside world. Operas, no matter how successful <sup>or</sup> ~~and~~ popular, are ~~frequented~~ <sup>patronized</sup> only by a small minority of the population, and, if the composer couches his message in the so-called progressive musical idiom, they will be perceived and appreciated only by a still smaller minority within the first one.

It is well-known that nowadays revolutions have any chance of success only when they are joined or inaugurated by the armed forces, and the top brass ~~which~~ do not usually belong to the opera-going minority, ~~nor~~ are they likely to be swayed in their philosophy by hearing atonal music. As a matter of fact, the powers-to-be, regardless of their denomination, invariably prefer the thoroughly conformist traditional music that suggests the image of an unshakable, perfect universe in which everything is at permanent rest, because they have to entertain the illusion that the order they have established is perfect and immutable, while they distrust any progressive type of music and prosecute its practitioners because such music reflects a higher and more alert status of consciousness and therefore might induce doubt and dissent. Characteristically, the Nazis, under Hitler, promoted exactly the same type of music that was supported by the Soviets in Stalin's period, and both regimes, no matter how diametrically opposite to each other ideologically, were ~~that~~ <sup>dead-</sup> set against atonality and 12-tone technique, which to the one conveniently symbolized godless communism and to the other bourgeois decadence.

Be that as it may, the composer who realizes the relative validity of his message and its absolute inefficiency will probably have a somewhat

although my <sup>own</sup> earlier experience with this attitude was not exactly encouraging.

detached attitude. Instead of withdrawing into the shell of embittered frustration, he might adopt a kind of active neutralism that in controversial cases tends toward "wishing" a plague on both of your houses," He might still express himself to the problems of the day according to his conviction and temperament; like any other citizen, by writing letters to ~~the~~ editors and congressmen and by casting his ballot. But in his work he will be more inclined toward viewing the foolish aspects of the whole business. ||

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In this mood I wrote another opera, in 1963, called The Golden Ram. That has again to do with Greek mythology and it's again an enormous story compressed into one evening. It's the story of the Argonauts, but (at that time) it's not particularly serious. It is prompted to some extent by my preoccupation of the problem of time and that has to do with the whole concept of serial music. (I shall talk about that more in my final installment here. But > (the problem of time has kept me busy ever since the last 15 years or so. )

And in this story I wanted to deal with this "time," so I needed a subject matter which would involved time and space, somebody traveling through time and space. So I hit upon the character Jason, who was commissioned to retrieve the golden fleece, the hide of the golden ram which was created by magic in order to take away the children of a certain king in Greece to save them from destruction. This ram in the old story took them to Colchis, to this country in the Black Sea, and there the ram was killed and the hide was hung up somewhere and watched by a dragon. (and) But the Greeks wanted it back, naturally, for prestige. So Jason was sent out to recover this golden fleece and that was the origin of endless stories. There are 50 or 60 different versions of this story. It lends itself to extremely colorful interpretations and so I didn't see any harm in my adding another one to this 60.

This mood gained the upper hand when through my preoccupation with the principles of serial music I became more and more interested in the philosophical problems of predetermination and chance, of time and space. Two one-act television operas, one written for the Austrian, the other for the Bavarian networks, bear witness of this trend. Ausgerechnet und verspielt (in German a pun that nearly defies translation) is a comedy dealing with the contest between computer and roulette game. The Magic Mirror presents an Italian painter who in the thirteenth century is separated from Marco Polo's Chinese expedition and taken in by one of the local sovereigns. When he has a falling out with this Lord, and his life is threatened, he paints himself into the canvas he is just working at -- a portrait of the Lord and his mistress. The story switches to our own days: a physicist has invented mysterious rays by which dead matter may be brought to life. At the museum they try the rays on the Chinese painting, and, sure enough, the Italian painter jumps out of it straight into the twentieth century. Obvious conflicts arise and are resolved only when he decides to repaint himself into his work and the raymaking gadget is eliminated. A very peripheral political touch concerns the interest in the rays shown by a commissar of an unnamed far-eastern power who has the inventor's laboratory bugged with secret microphones and sends a female agent assigned to seduce him. I noticed that in my short operas I exhibited a penchant for cloak-and-dagger type goings-on. This shows also in two one-act operas that I wrote in the 1950s: Dark Waters and The Bell Tower, the latter after a short story by Herman Melville.

A full-length opera in which the attention is predominantly focussed on time and space is The Golden Ram. I decided to use the Greek legend of the Argonauts because it offered possibilities to rove heartily in both media. The golden ram, created to fly the endangered children of King Athamas to safety, is by some magic deflected and lands a few thousand miles and years later in present present-day Navajo land. Jason who, in my version is a playboy and anti-hero, is ordered by his relatives to go and retrieve the precious golden fleece. But because they enjoin him with a solemn



course not to come back without it, they have to wait for those thousands of years at the gate of Hades. Eventually Jason finds the fleece guarded by a dragon which, when approached amorously, turns out to be an enchanted Indian princess named Medea. After their American adventures, which become increasingly bloody and gory, Jason is finally deported back to Greece and delivers the fleece so that his waiting relatives are allowed to enter Elysium. However, they have waited so long that nothing seems to make any sense any more. There are many episodes and subplots that bring the story even closer to what has become known as the theater of the absurd.

Obviously I was taking opera not any longer very seriously, and I came to the conclusion that the theater of the absurd perhaps did not have to be invented, for opera as such seemed to be absurd enough. In this mood I conceived my latest operatic effort, Sardakai, which was meant to be a lightweight, fluffy farce poking fun at a few holy cows that happened to stand around. I invented the South Sea kingdom of Migo Migo ("south-southwest of Pago Pago") and its highstrung virgin queen, Sardakai, who was in trouble because of a war of national liberation conducted by her rebellious subject, Urumuru, from his secret hideout in Romadra, a European capital (between Rome and Madrid...) When the queen decides to travel incognito to Romadra in order to subdue her adversary by seducing him, she gets involved with two men and their respective girl friends: a psychoanalyst who excels as a ladykiller, and a poet of the "angry-young-man" type who feels that he should become engaged in some revolutionary movement. I realized only later that some traits of these characters were closely related to those of their counterparts in the Leap over the Shadow, whom I had conceived nearly fifty years before. There are also again the conventional trappings of good old opera buffa -- disguise and mistaken identity. In the process Sardakai not unexpectedly loses both her virginity and her throne, and Urumuru becomes president of the people's republic.

When I was commissioned to write this opera, part of the assignment was to contrive something for the same six singers

as there are in Cosi fan tutte. I accepted this a special challenge, and for additional spice I quoted Mozart by having somebody at a beach party switch on a transistor radio, I had Gluck coming out of a TV set and indulged in similar mischief, giving free rein to a certain impish trait in my make-up.

The opera had not yet been produced at the time of my San Diego lectures. As a post mortem I may add that I had never anticipated the amount of indignation and anguish that the performance<sup>†</sup> caused. One could expect the conservatives being outraged. But they were just as vociferously joined by the "radicals" on the left, although in my opera the "people" were victorious after all and the Establishment inflicted on my engaged poet the ultimate humiliation: that the last refuge where he could indulge in making a poem was the men's room in a police jail, which I thought was sharp enough an accusation. But they were furious because they felt that I was making frivolous fun of the liberation efforts of the Third World and accused me of being sponsored by the CIA.

For a while I am tired of Opera and its political implications.

† which eventually took place in Hamburg,