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Smirnoff The Vodka that leaves you breathless.

Farmer Plishka's king dominates Don Carlos

BY JOHN KRAGLUND Chances that a bass will steal the show in a singers' opera whose heroine and hero are the traditional soprano and tenor are pretty remote.



Plishka as Philippe II: his performance one of the more memorable aspects

"It's the greatest bass aria in the operatic repertoire," Plishka said in an interview, referring to the scene that begins with Ella giammai m'amo (familiar Italian version) or Elle ne m'a jamais aime (in the French original of this production).

"You can go too far with that kind of research, too," Plishka said. "A historically accurate interpretation may not have a real bearing on the operatic version. But I think it gave me a better insight into Philip's character, which has its good as well as its bad side, and it made it easier to understand the conflicting aspects of the operatic character."

"There is always the likelihood of having to make substitutions during the run and the Met was afraid it would end up with performances in which some would be singing in Italian while the rest were singing French. For me the Italian version is comfortable, because it is familiar, but I now find the French more comfortable, vocally, (Verdi's original was in French for the Paris Opera). There is a dramatic difference in the languages. The French is more specific and more subtle. The Italian is more exciting."

Born in Old Forge, Pennsylvania, Plishka has had a wealth of operatic experience since winning the Baltimore Opera Auditions, at the age of 23, shortly before joining the Met's National Company. When this company visited Canada, he was singing

the roles of Bartolo in Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro and Colline in Puccini's La Boheme.

Since making his debut with the Met, in 1967, he has sung 30 different roles there, including that of Pimen in Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov, which he will be repeating this season on Oct. 10. Highlights of the past season include his debut with the San Francisco Opera, as Padre Guardiano in Verdi's La Forza del Destino, and his first Mephistopheles in Gounod's Faust, at the Met. His recent recording of this role, in a performance with Monserrat Caballe and Giacomo Aragall, is currently available in Toronto on the Erato label.

He even survived the colorful chaos of a production of Faust in Mexico City.

"Their concept of a costume that fits is one that stays more or less where it is supposed to. But I refused to wear the pink gauze wings they had designed for one scene. They had an aluminum frame and a span of about 15 feet."

Verdi has become something of a specialty for Plishka, in concert as well as in opera. While his debut at La Scala, Milan, (home territory for Verdi), was in Berlioz' The Damnation of Faust, he will return to Verdi when he comes back to Toronto to take part in this composer's Requiem, with the Toronto Symphony, in the spring.

Among his most memorable productions was the Met's Tristan and Isolde, with Jon Vickers and Birgit Nilsson, in which he sang his first King Mark, in the 1974-75 season. "They are both superlative artists and marvellous to work with. I especially remember working with Vickers in a production of Bizet's Carmen, where I was singing the role of Zuniga. In the second act, when Don Jose and Zuniga cross swords over Carmen, Jon and I decided to stage a violently realistic confrontation. It was very effective, for we were about the same size (large, that is). I hate scenes in which I have to be bested by a puny tenor."

"Later in the season, Richard Tucker was substituting for Vickers and I wanted to discuss the scene with Tucker. He told me not to worry, that it would work out fine. When the time came, I made a sweeping grab for my sword, pulling off the metal scabbard with the sword. I swung the sword to get rid of the scabbard, which crashed against the wall, then banged the sword on the table. The end of the sword broke off and flew into the orchestra pit. By the time I turned to Tucker, he apparently thought he was facing a madman and was covering with his arms crossed over his face. Fortunately, the smugglers grabbed us both at that point."

However, music is not Plishka's only passion. In Freehold, New Jersey, about 50 miles south of New York City, where he lives with his wife and three sons, when he is not on tour, he has a huge garden in which he helps to cultivate the quantities of vegetables (including the 300 pounds of tomatoes put down last season). He indicated an interest in more extensive farming, but has put that off for the time being, feeling it would tend to make him reluctant to devote as much time as is needed for his operatic career.

"My main hobbies are hunting and fishing — another reason why I am always happy to come to Canada, where both are great — but I am not doing a great deal of hunting. Open seasons always come at the time of year when the weather is cold and miserable, and I can't take chances with colds. But I have been shown some great fishing places in Canada, including one in Ottawa, where the whole family spent some time when I was singing there. Even my youngest son (now 8, but at that time only 5) landed a large bass. When I suggested having it stuffed and hung in his room, he said 'We're not going to hang that ugly thing in my room. We're going to eat it.' It's nice to have one practical member in the family."

TELEVISION Space 1999 is still in, Atlantis is airworthy, Logan's Run grounded

BY BLAIK KIRBY

There are now three weekly science-fiction shows on the air, with two more on the launching pad. Star Wars is the biggest current hit in the movie theatres. After 10 years, Star Trek is still a favorite in TV re-runs. Together, they are seen as a flight from the painful problems of reality and toward purely escapist entertainment.

The three are one well-established old one, Space 1999; one not-quite-new one, Man From Atlantis; and one that is a new version of an old story, Logan's Run. But how well are they airborne? Based on the debuts of the two recent ones, I'd rate Man From Atlantis as airworthy, Logan's Run as grounded. Space 1999 is, in at least one way, better than either.

Science-fiction has, I think, three main elements in addition to what you might find in other adventures. One is a just-barely-credible scientific basis; the second is some weird characters, most often more than human; the third is a setting in which you can credit what's happening.

I'd rate Space 1999 as tops in the scientific and setting categories, thanks to the veteran skill of Gerry Anderson and his crew who have, for years, been doing scientific tricks with models in children's series such as Thunderbirds. Man From Atlantis, on the other hand, comes far ahead in its characters, with a weird hero and an even better villain.

Logan's Run has a passable superman, a pleasant middle-aged robot, but falls far short in its other characters and especially in its setting. Anything outdoors looks (horror!) as if it was filmed in the deserts of California.

Man From Atlantis (Tuesdays at 8 on Channel 9, Thursdays at 9 on Channel 2) is, I think, the best of the current lot because it has an inhuman hero and a principal villain who is a fine descendant of the old mad-scientist breed. Its scientific mumbo-jumbo is deliberately overdone, so we can chuckle at it — science-fiction is part comedy, you know — and it has a futuristic laboratory that is just barely passable.

Let's be honest, I like the villain, played by Victor Buono, the best. He is a jolly polyp chap who thinks up scientific gimmicks to dominate the



Gregory Harrison and Heather Menzies in Logan's Run.

world, but who in his spare time is a cultivated man (sure sign of villainy?) who loves chamber music and gracious living.

Patrick Duffy, as the man from Atlantis, has webbed feet, no emotions — hence a blank expression most of the time — and superhuman strength, plus the ability to explode things with sonar rays.

The trick photograph to convince us that Mr. Atlantis is actually underwater and able to speak is mainly to give him hair that waves as he's photographed through a bluish filter. But it passes.

The big problem with Logan's Run (Fridays at 9, Channels 4 and 11) is that it takes itself so terribly seriously. It is — or it was in its debut — missing the comic element, which I take to be a highly attractive part of the genre.

Logan's Run, based on the

movie, is the story of a young couple who escape from a pleasure-palace city of the future where everyone is put to death at age 30 in order to keep the population stable. The city is domed because, centuries before, the world had been devastated by a nuclear war and the outside is officially uninhabitable.

Outside, the couple (played, none too competently, by Gregory Harrison and Heather Menzies) wander weekly from one weird civilization to another. In an early one, they link up with the amiable robot Rem (Donald Moffat, the best actor and most interesting of the three regulars).

The main fault in Logan's Run, to my mind, is the callow lack of interest of its two principals, though their age may appeal to young viewers. They are, frankly, not weird enough or interesting enough.

Rarity! A new, fine, company

BY LAWRENCE O'TOOLE

It happens once in a while, and when it does the elation is something imaginary and out of bounds — like being hit by a 747 and surviving the shock. I exaggerate, of course, but I feel like exaggerating.

The reason? A brand new ballet company called The Small Town Ballet Theatre Company that gave its first Toronto performance last night upstairs at Toronto Free Theatre. The company of three dancers — Leslie Link, Grindl Kuchirka and Sam Walton — introduced Link's A Work In Progress, choreographed to Lubomyr Melnyk's original piano score; and it's a remarkably uncluttered work with hardly anything expendable about it. It's astonishingly lucid, overpoweringly sensual, surprisingly subtle, dynamic and, in the end, pure magic.

TV UPDATE

- 3.30 Bellamy On Botany
6.00 Toronto CBC News Hour
7.30 The Eddie De Vega Show

Where to begin? A faintly Edwardian couple enter beckoning, with cupped hands, anyone who'll enter their imaginative world. She leaves: an androgynous god-like figure in a jockstrap enters and a male pas de deux begins. Danced in barefoot, the choreography uses ballet steps, ballet cliches titled just that much to affect the work. Gradually the asexuality dissipates as the dance progresses, and you feel there's something at stake. Desire? Need? Symmetry?

Because the context of the duet is veiled in abstraction, that abstraction smoothes the banalities and sentimentalities about bodies and what's inside them that you get in other dances. The "Edwardian" man rests (or maybe sleeps, dreaming) while the god-like one performs a solo with Asiatic shifting of his torso and surgically executed lines of movement. Then the "Edwardian" performs his solo, by the end of it loosening his tie, and the intellectually erotic tie is the same as that when the man barely grazes the young girl's knee with his hand in the film Claire's Knee.

In Link's choreography the standard ballet steps seem reversed in their context and, amazingly, as finishing steps in terms of pure dance, they're like the last pieces in a crossword puzzle. Seeing the two worlds (ballet and modern)

being bridged like that is also seeing something new, original.

The "Edwardian" woman arrives back stripped of her frills for a physically pensive solo, which is attenuated and superlatively auto-erotic. The god figure, now less androgynous, joins her and their pas de deux culminates with an incredible, indecipherable erotic touch as her hands drift down one of his thighs with restrained admiration.

The Work In Progress finishes with a trio where some of the motifs are resurrected and it's as though the three have gone through an irrevocable change. Ending with an outreach, the dance seems to say the metamorphosis isn't complete.

Link's choreography has some gratuities in it (there's a rolling motion in the male pas de deux I find hard to forgive), but you can count them on one hand. And, the piece, suggestively lit by Sholem Dolgoy, is more than expertly danced. Melnyk's music, with its clusters of notes repeated in rapid succession (at times beaten into you like a high school poem), seems to curve itself around the dancers.

Small Town. Big talent. A brilliant debut. On the way back my cabbie sang me excerpts from Tosca. There are some nights...

With roots at the CBC, Macnee is back to celebrate its 25th

BY HERBERT WHITTAKER

"What I mean is that what starts in London really started right here in Toronto, long, long ago." Patrick Macnee is holding forth about his latest Avengers' series and how early Canadian television helped bring about that international comedy-adventure show.

He is very luxuriously accommodated at Harbour Castle, as he talks, being here to make the New Avengers. The latest series starts on English TV with seven episodes shot in Paris recently and will be carried on by seven more being made here — at a local cost Macnee estimated airily at \$2-million.

The subject of The Avengers' maple-leaf origins came up naturally enough, for the affable British actor had been making some promos for the CBC self-congratulatory on its 25th anniversary. He had been able to say how glad he was to have been part of its happy, early days.

And happy those early days were, especially compared to the current strife. The anniversary has triggered much nostalgia for CBC drama in particular.

But Macnee is more concerned with The Avengers' happy beginnings. It was a product of Britain's ABC Television, which later became Thames Television, and ABC was then headed by Canadian Sydney Newman, who used Leonard White as

producer for a new adventure series.

"That was in 1960, and I had been working for the CBC here, playing leads in some fabulous shows. I got a letter from my 12-year old son, Rupert, asking me to please come home. Back I went, feeling guilty, and got myself a job as associate producer to Edgar Peterson on The Valiant Years.

"I wound up in charge of that series, after Peterson insulted Richard Rodgers, who has done the music for it. "Too much music," was Peterson's fatal comment. "Just about that time, two Toronto friends, Toby Robbins and Billy Freedman, invited me to dinner in London, and there I met up again with Leonard White, who had also been working over here. Out of that came my entry into his new series."

"Either Leonard or Sydney had the bright idea of using a girl as my partner in crime-detection. She was to be as opposite as possible from me, and it would be nice if she learned judo."

"Well, they offered the new role to Nyree Dawn Porter, who later was Irene in The Forsyte Saga. She turned it down. Then it was between Peter O'Toole's wife, Sian Phillips, and Honor Blackman. Honor got the nod, and turned herself into the hard-fighting lady who was Steed's partner. Diana Riggs played her later, and then Linda Thorsen. Linda was only 20 when she took it on, which is why they had



Macnee as the familiar Steed.

gent — Newman, later to be head of BBC drama: White, himself, and Honor Blackman, who had also worked over here, were aware of the changing sex roles in Britain, and the relationship between The Avengers pair caught the spirit of the times. And holds it still, if the show's popularity all over the globe is any indication.

Is Macnee's whole life caught up in being Steed of The Avengers, in being cool and impeccably dressed, bumbling but always triumphant? Not so, when he is not riding his well-known Steed, he spends time with his two children (he displays a lovely picture of his daughter, taken by himself) and even when he is working here is able to be with son Rupert, now a Torontonians. Macnee senior has two homes, one near Chichester, another at Malibu, and he alternates between them.

And then there is Patrick Macnee the stage star. "I began some of that here, too, but I really came of age as an actor when I played Sleuth on Broadway for 16 months. I played it opposite Jordan Christopher, whom Sybil Burton married after Richard. I still play it opposite him, whenever we're invited to repeat it."

Macnee's stage career is played down by his popularity on television but he is kept busy by it, between Avengers. He's done particularly well on Australian tours, and keeps his eye open for a play that will suit him, and his Australian public.

to invent the character of Mother, to keep the plot moving. Joanna Lumley has taken it over now. "We started back when the Beatles did," smiles the trim and ever-dapper Macnee, over his glass of Perrier water. It is his contention that the Canadian contin-