
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

RAVE REVUES

Before its format was gobbled up by television, in the early sixties, the revue was the *bonne bouche* of American musical theatre. “The Great American Revue,” a vivacious, well-curated exhibition at the



New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, traces the evolution of its ravishing frivolity. Each franchise had its specialty: comedy and song (George White's Scandals), spectacle and star turns (Ziegfeld Follies), parody (Garrick Gaieties). Here, Erté, Mark Lawson, Joseph Urban, and James Reynolds celebrate the female body in their sumptuous set designs and objectify women variously as lamps, cacti, and mixed salad. A touch-screen jukebox with forty of the great revue hits includes songs by George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Cole Porter, lending a lighthearted backbeat to a genre dedicated to corrupting an audience with pleasure. Among them is Eddie Cantor's hymn to Prohibition: “You Don't Need the Wine to Have a Wonderful Time While They Still Make Those Wonderful Girls.”

—John Lahr

melodrama, taking a cue from Willy Decker's modern-dress production. (May 2 at 7:30. This is the final performance.) ♦ Robert Lepage's production of “Götterdämmerung,” the very grand finale to Wagner's “Ring” cycle, was the last to be presented to the public; at the première, back in January, the singing was uniformly impressive, the conducting sturdy, the staging intermittently effective. Most of the cast, including Katarina Dalayman, Wendy Bryn Harmer, Jay Hunter Morris, Eric Owens, and Hans-Peter König, has returned, as has the conductor, Fabio Luisi. (May 3 at 6.) ♦ When James Levine was the Metropolitan Opera's artistic director, the operas of Benjamin Britten—the finest English-language master of the form—made regular appearances on the company's schedule; in the last decade, not so much. So we can be thankful that the current regime is offering a brief revival of the Met's most celebrated Britten production, from 1978: John Dexter's staging of “Billy Budd,” the composer's strange and powerful transformation of the Herman Melville novella. Aside from the quality of the work itself, it was a great vehicle for the tenor Peter Pears; this time the role of Captain Vere is filled by John Daszak, with Nathan Gunn taking the title role (for which he is famous) and James Morris reprising his portrayal of the villain, Claggart. David Robertson, an uncommonly smart and incisive conductor, is on the podium. (May 4 at 7:30.) ♦ “The Makropulos Case,” Janáček's penultimate opera, concerns a still-beautiful three-hundred-and-thirty-seven-year-old diva who shows up at a Prague law office in 1922 and begins to nose around for a mysterious document that provides the key to eternal life—a story as unlikely as it is riveting. Long a great vehicle for distinguished sopranos in middle age, it now belongs to Karita Mattila, who heads the cast in a revival of the Met's 1996 production. Richard Leech, Johan Reuter, and Tom Fox are also featured; the authoritative Czech maestro Jiří Bělohlávek conducts. (May 5 at 12:30 and May 8 at 8:30.) ♦ With

“Das Rheingold,” Richard Wagner began his colossal “Ring of the Nibelung” tetralogy, and the return of the Robert Lepage production means that the Met has all four works up and running. The assembled cast is formidable, featuring such singers as Stephanie Blythe, Patricia Bardón, Bryn Terfel, and Richard Paul Fink; Fabio Luisi. (May 5 at 8:30.) ♦ For all the hype about the forty-five-ton set, the Met's new “Ring” is ultimately carried by fine singers. They abound in the next performance of “Die Walküre,” which features Deborah Voigt, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Stephanie Blythe, Jonas Kaufmann, and Bryn Terfel; Luisi. (May 7 at 6:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

New York's flagship orchestra spreads the wealth this week, starting off with one of its yearly concerts at Carnegie Hall. Alan Gilbert's program is simple, and powerful: Mahler's titanic Symphony No. 6 in A Minor. (212-247-7800. May 2 at 8.) ♦ Yefim Bronfman is simultaneously a dreadnought pianist in the Russian tradition and a committed new-music advocate. It is in the latter role that he appears with Gilbert and the Philharmonic, performing the world première of the Piano Concerto No. 2 by the orchestra's outgoing composer-in-residence, Magnus Lindberg, in a program that also features two exuberant warhorses, Dvořák's “Carnival Overture” and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F Minor—one of the great avant-garde works of its time. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. May 3 at 7:30, May 4 at 11 A.M., and May 5 at 8.)

CHANTICLEER

The fabulous male chorus from San Francisco is always welcome at the Metropolitan Museum. Its latest concert is a tribute to the newly refurbished