

Opera director Rolf Liebermann : departure from the theatre

Autor(en): **Etter, Martin**

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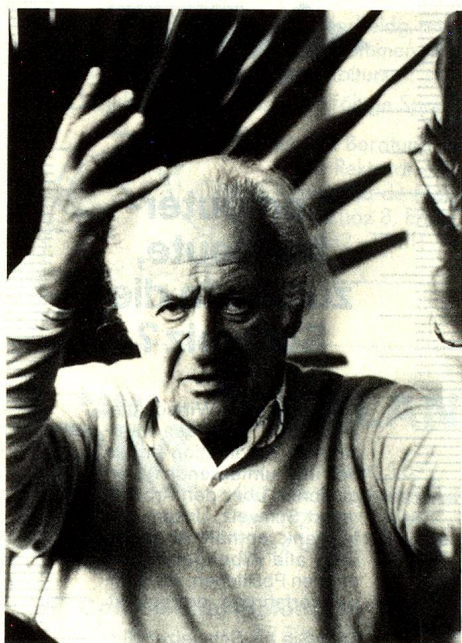
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Opera Director Rolf Liebermann

Departure from the theatre

The grand old man has struck once again: at the end of his musical directorship in Hamburg the 78-year-old Swiss Rolf Liebermann has come out with still another work. He has written together with George Gruntz the music to the jazz opera «Cosmopolitan Greetings».



Rolf Liebermann is undoubtedly among the most important theatre-makers which Switzerland has ever produced. Born in Zurich on the 14th of September 1910, he studied

initially law and then music – with conductor Hermann Scherchen and composer Wladimir Vogel.

Then he worked for some years for the German-speaking Swiss national transmitter Beromünster as a sound engineer and as conductor of the radio orchestra. Later he became the Director of the Music Division of the North German Radio in Hamburg, afterwards Director of the Hamburg City Opera and from 1974 to 1980 Director of the Paris Opera.

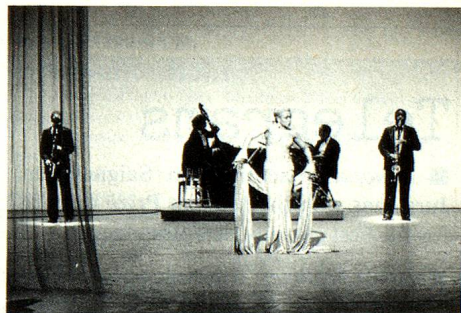
For decades Liebermann was one of the important people who made things possible. Many composers were able to get commissions through him. Moreover, he promoted young talent on the stages under his direction, and did not shy away from risky experiments (especially in the area of staging). During this period he put his own creative talent into the background; his successful operas «Leonore 40/45» (1951/52), «Pen-

elope» (1953/54) and «School of Women» (1954/55) were not continued, his symphonic work hardly enlarged upon.

It was not until 1985/86 that he took up his pen again and composed (based on a libretto by his wife Hélène Vida) the musical comedy «The Forest», which had a successful opening night at the Grand Théâtre in Geneva in April 1987. There it became evident that the «Old Lion» had in no way lost his artistic touch. The innovative new piece was judged to be an inspiring testimony to the art of opera in our century, and since then it has been a subject of discussion in Germany.

But that was not enough. Always curious, willing to take risks, and interested in exploring uncharted areas of expression, Liebermann decided to co-operate on the multi-media project «Cosmopolitan Greetings». His colleagues on the team of playwrights were beatnik poet Alan Ginsberg, jazz composer George Gruntz and the director and choreographer Robert Wilson.

The multi-media opera revolves around stations in the life of the Queen of Blues



Scenes from «Cosmopolitan Greetings» (June 1988, photo: Ralf Brinkhoff).



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Bessie Smith. The story is broken up into a collage-like series of pictures, and symbolizes the process of life and death.

Rolf Liebermann contributed three-to-four-minute-long compositions for strings which, as intermezzi, link the individual scenes together. «In their peacefulness and delicacy they are the antitheses of the powerful big band sound», wrote Alice Baumann, correspondent for the Bernese newspaper *Der Bund*, following the greatly applauded première at the Kampnagel Factory in Hamburg on the 11th of June 1988.

At the end of June Rolf Liebermann bade his last farewell to Hamburg, and in doing so discovered that even international stars such as Plácido Domingo paid him their respect. During his well deserved retirement he will not remain inactive, however. He has already announced that he is working on a cantata-like «dramatic scene» on the Medea theme. A cat never quits chasing mice ...

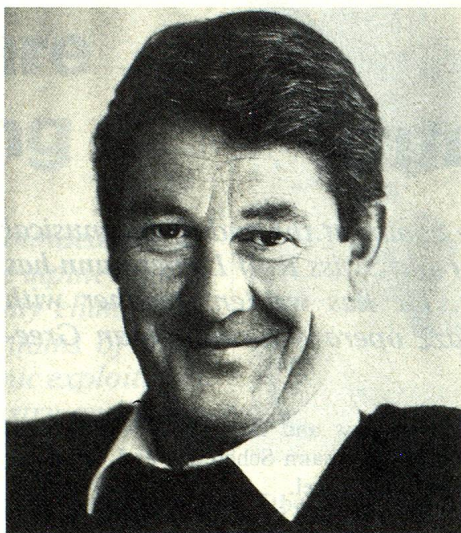
Martin Etter

Telegrams

■ **Zouc**, the actor from Saignelégier, Jura, has won the Molière Prize in Paris for the best comedy performance.

■ **Heinz Holliger**, who was born in Langenthal, has won the Frankfurt-on-Main Music Prize. He is one of the world's best oboists and teaches as a professor at the Academy of Music in Freiburg im Breisgau, W. Germany.

A fresh breeze for «Du»?



«Du», the monthly «Magazine for Art and Literature», gets a new concept and a new Editor-in-Chief, Dieter Bachmann (picture). «A bit less introspection; a bit more discussion» is what author and journalist Bachmann, who succeeds Wolfhart Draeger, wants to offer readers of the Zurich glossy in future. The first number of the new «Du» comes out in September.

What is it that tempts a man like Bachmann who up to now has worked for the «Tagesanzeiger Magazine» as well as for the dramatic art and executive departments of the Zurich Theatre (Schauspielhaus), and who has also made a name for himself as the author of the novel «Rab» and the «Sorgen im Paradies» (Troubles in Paradise) reportages? What attracts a critical observer such as Bachmann to take over a somewhat affirmative and «posh» magazine like «Du» which can hardly be said to swim against the cultural currents? Bachmann readily admits that the horizon of «Du» has narrowed considerably over the last few years. The magazine confined itself, on the basis of a rather élitist claim, to the art sector and, indeed, to some extent distanced itself from what in our time was happening in the whole field of culture. What Bachmann had in mind was a re-enlargement of the subject matter of «Du», the recreation of a «Magazine for Art and Literature» in which, by «Art» also architecture and film, and, by «Literature» not only *belles-lettres* but also «whatever, anyway, moves us in print» would be meant – as far as philosophy, right up to contemporary thinking.

Above all, Bachmann would like to pick up the thread of the first years of «Du», when Arnold Kübler ran the magazine. What astonishes one most about the early num-

bers of «Du» is the enormous curiosity and openness that Kübler evinced towards what was happening at the time. To think back to Arnold Kübler and then to draw the conclusions for today is for him, Bachmann, personally, important.

Urs Allemann (Basler Zeitung)



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