

Pandemonium greets Beverly Sills in overdue Met debut *music*

By Robert Finn
Staff Writer

NEW YORK—Soprano Beverly Sills, who called Cleveland home for five



Beverly Sills
First act bow...

years in the late 1950s, finally made it to the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House last night after 20 years or so as a noted opera singer and almost a decade as an international superstar.

Miss Sills appeared in the first Metropolitan production of Rossini's "The Siege of Corinth" and was greeted with a series of roaring ovations that may have caused seismographs to tremble in Cleveland.

When she first appeared on stage—and before she had sung a note—she was greeted by cheers lasting almost a full minute. At the end of her mammoth aria at the start of the second act there was pandemonium in the opera house for well over four minutes. At the final curtain there were showers of confetti and tossing of bouquets.

Her fans, who filled every one of the 3,900 seats, were clearly in a mood to celebrate the correction of one of opera's most glaring career oversights.

Miss Sills, who made her career next door to the Met at the New York City Opera, seemed to be enjoying the occasion. Her performance as Rossini's much-put-upon heroine Pamira was full justification for all the cheering. She tossed off the runs, trills, scales and intricate ornaments of her part with what appeared to be total effortlessness.

There may be sopranos with voices boasting more body in the middle register, but there are none

today who can operate above the staff with the agility, accuracy, assurance and tonal purity of Beverly Sills.

It was really a ladies' night at the Met, for Miss Sills was ably partnered in the trouser role of Neocle by mezzo soprano Shirley Verrett.

Miss Verrett's accurate runs and booming low notes won their own ovation from the audience.

Sad to say, neither of the two major male parts was adequately filled. Justino Diaz as Emperor Mameotto II had little command of the florid Rossini style. As for tenor Harry Theyard, who sang the role of Miss Sills's father, it is hard to see why this harsh-sounding and tremolo-ridden tenor has been promoted into a major career in any opera house.

The minor roles in "The Siege of Corinth" do not count for much, though Richard T. Gill did make a good impression as Jero.

Thomas Schippers conducted tautly, keeping the performance moving along as briskly as the opera's basically static nature would allow.

The sets and costumes designed by Nicola Benois were colorful and appropriately exotic for this story of war between the ancient Greeks and the Turks.

He kept Miss Sills in blue all evening long against the grays and reds of almost everyone else, thus singling her out even when she was not taking a direct part in the action.

"The Siege of Corinth" is one of Rossini's large-scale tragedies and it has had

a most confusing history. It exists in three or four different versions, all of which have points in their favor. For this production, Schippers prepared his own synthesis of the several versions and then made a few changes of his own.

There were some critical carping about the authenticity of the result, but last night was clearly a night for singer worship, not for musicology.

The audience that turned out for this extraordinary event was filled with celebrities; musical and otherwise. Danny Kaye and Kirk Douglas were present, along with Maria Jeriza, Dorothy Kirsten, Galina Vishnevskaya and Rise Stevens.

One could not get near the opera house without being stopped three or four times on Lincoln Center

Plaza by desperate-looking Sills fans offering to buy any extra tickets one might have.

It was a genuine and well-deserved triumph for the lady Cleveland knew as

Mrs. Peter B. Greenough, wife of a former business editor of The Plain Dealer. Clevelanders will be able

to hear "The Siege of Corinth" on the Metropolitan Opera broadcast on Saturday, April 19.

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Low comedy, strip parade back at Roxy

By Robert Dolgan

Live burlesque returned to the Roxy Theater yesterday after an absence of four years. About 50 men attended the first show at 1 p.m. They had paid \$6 each for the privilege of ogling the star, who calls herself Passion Flame, and three other strippers.

The four dancers, who all appeared to be in their 20s, took all their clothes off, save for incidentals such as shoes and gloves. Roxy veterans recalled the days when some of the chorines wouldn't even remove their fish-net brassieres.

The Roxy, the oldest burlesque house in the city, has been showing sex movies exclusively of late.

"People have been asking that we bring back live shows," said Thomas Briggs, Roxy manager. "But we'll probably keep showing the movies in between the girls' acts."

"We're considering putting on burlesque full time," said booking agent Paul Walker. "There seems to be a revival of burlesque around the country. People might be getting tired of porno movies."

Master of ceremonies yesterday was Barney Long, a typically low comic. One time he came onstage with his pants down around his knees. "Now you look like Ralph Perk," a man yelled from the audience.

"With a face like yours you shouldn't talk," Long replied. He also took pratfalls, told corny jokes and tap-danced. He said his father had appeared on the Roxy stage 45 years earlier.

After a joke drew only scattered applause, he said, "There will be no individual applause. Either you all clap together or get the hell out of here."

The strippers, who will appear daily at 1, 4, 8 and 10:30 p.m., are Torchy Diamond, a lanky brunette; Jayde, a petite blonde who struts confidently through her number, and Gypsy Eden who came armed with a Carmen opera costume, a tambourine and a tremendous bust.

The return was no treat for the nostalgia buff. On the same stage where Lou Costello and Bud Abbott immortalized their "Who's on first?" routine, there was only one comic skit, done by Long and the lanky brunette.

And worse, at the intermission no candy butcher came out beside the stage and gave out with his traditional cry: "My assistants will now pass among you with boxes of candy. In each and every one is a valuable prize."

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