

## BALTIMORE'S BLESSING

A visit to the Baltimore Civic Opera reveals why the company is the first love of its artistic director, Rosa Ponselle: it gives the former Metropolitan soprano the opportunity to pass on to younger singers all she learned during her distinguished career. From the coaching of her casts in diction, stage deportment and musical phrasing to the gentle hand-clap with which she unobtrusively leads the audience in applause at the right moments, she oversees every detail of the Civic's performances.

Baltimore adores her—the volunteer workers backstage as well as the society ladies out front, who give generously of time and money to the project. To everyone she is "our Rosa." They greet her warmly before a performance as she enters the Lyric Theater and cheer her to the echo when, with justifiable pride, she steps before the curtain with her cast for the final bows.

The current Baltimore season opened on November 6, 7 and 9 with a first-rate production of *Il Trovatore*, conducted by Peter Herman Adler, whose assured and sensitive reading avoided eccentricity. (Members of the Baltimore Symphony make up the orchestra.) Advance interest centered on operatic newcomer Juanita King, personally coached by Ponselle in one of her own roles, Leonora. If the young soprano's stage demeanor proved virtually nil, her potent dramatic voice promised much, recalling the early Milanov; further study could open any door for her. Undisputed star of the evening was a Ponselle discovery of several seasons back, Lili Chookasian, whose superb Azucena struck the right balance between dramatic fire and musical finesse. Lyric tenor Jean Deis made a Manrico for whom the heroics of "Di quella pira" held no terrors, only freely flung, prolonged high C's. Replacing Richard Torigi in the third performance, Benjamin Rayson sang a capable Count Di Luna, abetted by the forceful Ferrando of Peter Harrower. James Waring's fine unit set of platforms, steps and arches—aided by evocative projections and excellent lighting—gave a unified stage picture, in which director Frank Valentino could provide clean-cut, convincing action. But the accent in Baltimore is on *bel canto*, preserved by young artists through the dedication of Rosa Ponselle. G.F.



Baltimore *Trovatore*: Deis, Chookasian

## TWO IN TEL-AVIV

The latest additions to the repertory of the Hebrew National Opera have been *Tosca* and *Eugene Onegin*. The former, sung in Italian, suffered from a poor production and a conductor (Alexander Tarsky) and singers who lacked passion. The title role was entrusted to a gifted beginner, Greek soprano Athena Lampropoulos, as yet not up to its vocal or dramatic requirements; Livio Pombeni's Scarpia disclosed the diabolical fervor of a tamed rabbit, Iginio Valsecchi's Cavaradossi a robust dramatic tenor and nothing more. *Eugene Onegin*, much better suited to the National Opera's small stage than many other works in the current repertory, had impressive settings by Y. Goldmann, particularly the opening scene and the duel sequence; Georg Singer, Israel's best opera conductor,

struggled courageously with the wretched orchestra and succeeded in welding his international soloists together. It must have cost foreign singers like Michiko Sunahara (Tatyana), Breda Kalef (Olga), Franco Iglesias (Onegin), Placido Domingo (Lenski) and Pombeni no small effort to learn their parts in Hebrew; outstanding among them was Domingo, who in ensemble as well as in his touching farewell aria showed his *bel canto* art at its best.

ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN

## BROOKLYN BONANZA

The Brooklyn Opera presented its usual hardy perennials during October and November at the Academy of Music: *Madama Butterfly*, *Aida*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Tosca* and *Die Fledermaus*. Singing in the works were many familiar and some bright new faces. There were also some surprises, the first being the unscheduled appearance of the Metropolitan Opera's Joann Grillo, who replaced an ailing Gladys Kriese as *Carmen* and turned in a brilliant performance. Miss Kriese had used the previous week's *Aida* to unveil her first local Amneris, a role for which she is visually and vocally suited but which needs a little more personal polishing.

Francesca Roberto sang a splendid *Tosca*, ably supported by Giovanni Consiglio, who as Cavaradossi had to repeat his "E lucevan le stelle." Jerry LoMonaco made a highly satisfactory Rodolfo in *Bohème*, and the cast assembled for *Fledermaus* proved an utter delight. Led by pretty-voiced Dolores Mari, who revealed an unsuspected talent for comedy, it included Josephine Guido, who has never sounded better than as Adele; Charles May, a tall, attractive Eisenstein; Jon Crain, an admirable Alfred; and Arlouine Goodjohn, a fine mezzo, as Orlofsky. In smaller roles, Lloyd Harris, who had amused earlier as the Sacristan, was equally telling as Frosch, and William Beck sang well as Frank.

Responsible for the pleasant staging this season were directors Anthony Stivanello, Richard Stuart Flusser and Noah Rodriguez. Choreographer Thomas Cannon provided some striking sequences in *Aida*, *Carmen* and *Fledermaus*, while conductors Carlo Moresco, Anton Coppola and Vincent La Selva also added brightness to this entertaining group of performances. F.S.