

The TIMES Book Page

Toscanini, Puccini Are Subjects of New Musical Biographies

"THE MAESTRO: THE LIFE OF ARTURO TOSCANINI." By Howard Taubman. New York, Simon & Schuster, \$5. "PUCCINI." A biography. By George R. Marek, New York, Simon & Schuster, \$5.

By HENRY BUTLER

"THE MAESTRO," Howard Taubman's study of Arturo Toscanini, and George R. Marek's "Puccini" are Simon & Schuster's contribution this week to the music library.

Mr. Taubman, music editor of the New York Times, accompanied Toscanini on last season's NBC Symphony tour and won the 1950 Music Lovers League Prize for his reports.

Mr. Marek, music editor of Good Housekeeping, has got that fustest with the mostest material to fill the Puccini gap on the biography shelf.

I'll say here I think Mr. Marek's book is more informative and more interesting. Puccini, of course, has been dead since 1924, and Mr. Marek consequently has been somewhat freer to examine his subject critically than Mr. Taubman has been.

MR. TAUBMAN, it seems to me, adds comparatively little but statistics to what already has been written about Toscanini elsewhere. He tells us more about the early years of struggle, privation and discouragement. He adds more instances of Toscanini's incredible photographic memory for musical scores (certainly an important ingredient in the maestro's phenomenal conducting).

He straightens out chronology and clarifies the pre-Philharmonic and NBC Symphony years when Toscanini was mainly a legend in this country, despite his 1908-15 seasons with the Metropolitan Opera.

LIKE OTHER commentators, he gives us examples of Toscanini's apparently deliberate baton-breaking tantrums and walk-outs by which the maestro always had contrived to discipline impresarios, sopranos and orchestra players. Omitting names, which might be embarrassing though certainly revealing, he gives us typical Toscanini comments on other conductors.

His attitude, in short, is one of idolatry, which possibly is justified by the maestro's solid achievement.

REVERENCE for Toscanini as a conductor is one thing. Reverence for him as a personality—a very often difficult and dangerous personality—is another thing. Toscanini's blaze of glory with the New York Philharmonic, starting in January, 1926, involved, among other things, sharp competition with Leopold Stokowski from Philadelphia and Serge Koussevitzky from Boston, whose orchestras previously had been packing Carnegie Hall for their annual concert series, while the Philharmonic and the old Walter Damrosch Symphony had been moseying along to poor box-offices.

In that competition, as later in the rivalry over symphonic recordings, a lot happened which Mr. Taubman evidently deems unworthy of mention. Such discerning and witty writers as Charles O'Connell ("The Other Side of the Record") have given ample testimony that Toscanini



NOVELIST AND ESSAYIST . . . Helen MacInnes and Gilbert Hight

'Neither Five Nor Three' Tells Gripping Espionage Story

"NEITHER FIVE NOR THREE." A novel. By Helen MacInnes, and Gilbert Hight. New York, Harcourt, Brace, \$3. Scripts—Howard Staff Writer.

HELEN MACINNES, whose spy thrillers are regular best sellers, and her husband, Gilbert Hight, the Greek and Latin scholar, have been diligently "boning up," as the Scottish-born couple put it, "on an extremely good book."

Not on her latest novel, "Neither Five Nor Three," just published by Harcourt, Brace & Co.

On the contrary, the object of joint MacInnes-Hight concentration is a volume titled, "Federal Textbook on Citizenship."

"WE'VE BEEN talking about it like mad to everybody," said Gilbert today. "It's perfectly wonderful—it indoctrinates you so gradually."

The Hights became sufficiently indoctrinated to pass the exam and take their final oaths of citizenship the other day, a ceremony both compared with getting married.

Helen was hardly pleased when the naturalization examiner asked the routine question, "Can you read and write?" And, after she replied "Yes," remarked, "That's fine. I like your books!"

THE HIGHTS were still pretty ecstatic about the citizenship business as they got around to discussing "Neither Five Nor Three" in their 335 Park Ave. apartment. Unlike "Above Suspicion" and "Assignment in Brittany," both of which made successful movies, the later MacInnes deals not with Nazi espionage, but with a far subtler kind.

It weaves a suspenseful tale of Communist penetration into the world of communication right here in New York and exposes a rarely recognized breed Miss MacInnes calls the "non-Communist Communists." The book's sure to irritate the critics who used to inveigh against Red-baiters while defying Fascist-baiters.

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