

LETTERS

GLYNDEBOURNE,
LEWES.

THE EDITOR,
TEMPO,
295 REGENT STREET,
LONDON, W.1.

21st February, 1955

Sir,

You have personally in this Winter's *TEMPO* in your criticism of Mr. Blom's new edition of Grove given an astounding account of the post-war Covent Garden. First in refuting for Mr. David Webster, Mr. Blom's phrase of Managing Director, you say bluntly "He was not." I don't understand—you don't, I presume, wish to give the impression that it has not been managed? Secondly, and more seriously, you say that "not only did the sole initiative which led to the reopening of Covent Garden as an Opera House, come from Boosey & Hawkes, but the Company assumed a heavy responsibility, while denying themselves the possibility of obtaining any financial benefit therefrom, by setting up a non-profit making Trust under the Chairmanship of Lord Keynes to determine its policy." I note that it was Boosey & Hawkes who set up this Trust.

You have omitted the fact that quite independently of Boosey & Hawkes' work I paid Messrs. Gerald Eve, leading Surveyors, for six weeks' work in trying to buy the freehold of Covent Garden for Glyndebourne, until the Director of Boosey & Hawkes came to me to tell me that they "wanted to take a lease of it." To which I replied "all right, let's do it like that"—"let's" not "let us"—and I cancelled further work on the possible purchase. But I retained Professor Ebert as my Artistic Leader and altogether I spent about £9,000 of my own personal money in my attempt to prepare the development of the work of Covent Garden—a financial loss I can not put against other financial gain for tax purposes. I waited for two years to see whether Boosey & Hawkes could get the lease, only to find that Glyndebourne was to be kept entirely outside this work, and that now Boosey & Hawkes claim to have had "the sole initiative." When my personal efforts were deflected from purchase to the future development, the verbal arrangement with your firm was "Let's do it like that." I was not at any time told that the work was to go ahead without Glyndebourne in spite of Glyndebourne's expenditure. I should not have agreed to this. It would have been a matter

of credentials in the interest of our Country not in my own interest.

These incidents have been unnecessary, but what really matters is not what happened to me—that is not of much interest and can be laughed out of sight—but how should the right thing be done or have been done?

Yours faithfully,

JOHN CHRISTIE

Mr. Christie's first presumption is correct. I did not wish to give any impression about the management of Covent Garden. I wished to do exactly what I did do—namely, state that Mr. Webster was not appointed Managing Director, but General Administrator. With regard to my 'astounding account' and Mr. Christie's observations thereon, Mr. Leslie Boosey writes:

"I am very sorry Mr. Christie has seen fit to resuscitate the controversy regarding the negotiations for Covent Garden, because if he is suggesting, and it is difficult to put any other interpretation on his letter, that I made a bargain with him and then failed to keep it, I say most emphatically that there is not a word of truth in such a statement. What actually happened is as follows:— The lease of Covent Garden was offered originally to Harold Holt who, being unable to avail himself of the offer, suggested that we, Boosey & Hawkes, should step into his place. After consulting Ralph Hawkes, who was in America, I eventually agreed to do this and we opened our negotiations with the late Mr. Goddard, of Goddard and Smith, two agents of Covent Garden Properties Ltd.

Some time afterwards I was invited to lunch at Brooks's by Mr. Christie. During lunch he told me he had heard I was negotiating for the lease of Covent Garden and mentioned the fact that he had been considering buying the freehold. During lunch, as far as I can recall, we discussed the future of Covent Garden in a general way, and the desirability of rescuing it from continuing to be a dance hall, which it had been during most of the war. At no time during our conversation was any bargain made between us, and when I left Brooks's I can remember as clearly as if it had happened only yesterday, wondering as I crossed St. James's Street how seriously I ought to regard Mr. Christie's statement that he was contemplating buying Covent Garden. I have an idea I went direct to see Mr. Goddard, whose office was just over the road in King Street, to find out from him whether Covent Garden really was for sale. I certainly took immediate steps to find out if this was so, and was told

emphatically that it was not for sale either to Mr. Christie or to anyone else, and I consequently proceeded with my negotiations. When they were complete, I asked Lord Keynes, as chairman of the Arts Council (or CEMA as it was then called) who were to be responsible for presenting opera at Covent Garden in the event of our taking the lease, whether he was willing to have Mr. Christie as a member of the original council, but for personal reasons he said he would prefer not to do so. As he, Lord Keynes, was the *deus ex machina*, I felt there was nothing more I could do about it.

I notice Mr. Christie criticises *Tempo* for not mentioning that he had employed Messrs. Gerald Eve for six weeks in trying to buy the freehold of Covent Garden, and that he retained Mr. Ebert as Artistic Leader, in his attempt to prepare for the development of work at Covent Garden. I do not see how we should be supposed to know the details of Mr. Christie's private affairs of this character, unless he is suggesting that he gave me this information when he invited me to lunch—which again I must emphatically deny.

Let me say in conclusion that Mr. Christie has done so much for opera during his lifetime that his name will be remembered in that connection long after the part we played in rescuing Covent Garden at the end of the last war has been forgotten. Furthermore, if he wishes it to be known that he voluntarily decided to withdraw from his negotiations for Covent Garden because he felt the matter could more easily be dealt with by allowing our negotiations to go through, I would be the last person to deny him this. But by the time I had lunch with him, our negotiations with Covent Garden Properties were so far advanced that it would have been very difficult for either party to withdraw, and I must repeat once again that any suggestion that there was the remotest semblance of a bargain between Mr. Christie and myself is just not true.

Some time ago Mr. Christie made a statement to the Arts Council that he had withdrawn from his negotiations on the strict understanding that he would be given a share in Covent Garden. I took him to task on this and he never pursued it any further."—Ed.

BOOK REVIEWS in this issue are by:—
T.F. Trevor Fisher.

BOOKS RECEIVED

- "MUSIC IN RUMANIA" by Leonard Cassini;
Fore Publications Ltd 2/6
"DIE KOMISCHE OPER" (Berlin 1947-1954)
Henschelverlag Kunst & Gesellschaft, Berlin

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TEMPO

Publishers:

BOOSEY & HAWKES LIMITED
295 Regent Street, London W.1.

OVERSEAS AFFILIATIONS:

PARIS: Boosey & Hawkes, S.A.

22 Rue d'Anjou, Paris 8.

NEW YORK: Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 30, West
57th Street, New York 19.

TORONTO: Boosey & Hawkes (Canada) Ltd.,
209-213 Victoria Street.

SYDNEY: Boosey & Hawkes (Australia) Ltd.,
250, Pitt Street.

CAPETOWN: Boosey & Hawkes (South Africa)
(Pty), Ltd., 92 Loop Street.

BUENOS AIRES: Barry & Cia, Montevideo
264, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

BONN: Boosey & Hawkes, G.m.b.H., Kron-
prinzenstrasse 26, Bonn a.Rh., Germany.

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