

New Zealand audiences to Menotti was an innovation, but that was not quite so. He already knew Menotti from his days in London, and Menotti operas were in vogue at the time. In the 1960s, he made no particular attempt to go beyond the established classical repertoire. Later, at the University of Adelaide, he kept on producing the operas he knew, the notable exception being *Idomeneo*, and even then, because he was a Mozart fan. He was in the same groove all the time. His creativity lay in musical interpretation rather than trailblazing. He was not one to strike out in new directions, with the exception of *A Unicorn for Christmas*.

Related to this was his view that opera was entertainment and nothing more – although not entertainment in a trivial sense. He once said to me, ‘If you don’t feel uplifted at the end of an opera, you might as well not have gone’. Drama and spectacle were part of staging successful entertainment. But the point is that Dad was not one to seek deeper meanings or moral reckonings in the plots of the various operas, nor consider how the content of the librettos might reflect the ethical and political dimensions of their time and place. He was simply not that sort of person. He was somewhat typical of his generation, in that he equated a good memory and rote learning with intelligence. A retentive memory is especially important for opera singers trying to learn their lines, but memory is not the same thing as understanding, or reasoning, or perceptiveness, or problem solving, or thinking in the abstract. I had an animated discussion with Dad on this very point in 1981, and he was unyielding in his certainty that a good memory was the hallmark of cognition and intelligence.¹⁸

To give an example: he sang the role of the Count in Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro* more than any other role. He was ‘the perfect Count’ in the view of Honor McKellar (who sang the role of Cherubino), but he’d never thought seriously about the meanings in the plot until in the late 1960s when he happened to read the relevant chapter in Spike Hughes’ *Famous Mozart Operas*. He said to me, ‘You know, Doug, there are things in *Figaro* that you’d never have thought of’. Neither had he thought of these things himself. He was interested in the mechanics of opera rather than its wider implications. Dad could interpret the music and especially the role, but not the overall libretto. He did not see the incongruity in the way that *A Unicorn for Christmas* was billed as indigenous New Zealand opera, yet the setting was a baronial castle with scenes from Tudor and Victorian England. To him, setting Ngaio Marsh’s play *The Wyvern and the Unicorn* to music would simply make good entertainment.

To continue with this theme, a few years ago, I mentioned to Dad a letter to the paper about the Opera Company’s 1957 production of Menotti’s grim Cold War opera, *The Consul*, which the letter-writer deplored as ‘an attack on socialism [and on] any country moving towards that goal’.¹⁹ Dad was utterly astonished. Nothing could have been further from his mind, he assured me: ‘We put it on