WHEN GERMAN CONDUCTOR Wilhelm Furtwängler brings down his baton on the evening of Sept. 5 to introduce the opening chords of Ludwig van Beethoven's immortal Ninth Symphony, he will simultaneously launch the Berlin Festival, 1951. Twenty-five days later, on Sept. 30, an uninterrupted series of festival plays, concerts, operatic performances and other special attractions will come to a fitting end with the presentation of another Beethoven masterpiece, the “Missa Solemnis.”

In the interval between Sept. 5 and 30, visitors and native West Berliners will be treated to a memorable array of cultural and entertainment offerings. The visitors are expected to stream into the city from all parts of the free world as well as from the eastern sector of Berlin and the Soviet-occupied zone. They will be joined by outstanding artists from half a dozen European countries as well as the United States.

 Appropriately, the Schiller Theater, named after one of Germany’s greatest poets, will be the scene of opening-night festivities. Now undergoing reconstruction in preparation for the Sept. 5 inaugural, the theater will be dedicated in ceremonies preceding the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra’s rendition of the Ninth Symphony.

DURING THE REMAINDER of the festival, first ever held in the former German capital, Berlin and western German stars will compete or collaborate with visiting artists from France, England, Austria and the United States. In many instances, such as the opera appearance of Astrid Varnay, leading soprano of the New York Metropolitan Opera’s Wagnerian wing, German and foreign performers will share the same stage.

Orchestral accompaniment for Miss Varnay’s performances in the roles of Isolede in Wagner’s “Tristan and Isolde” and of Brunhilde in “Die Walküre” will be provided by the Berlin Civic Opera Orchestra, and supporting casts will be made up of star members of the Berlin Opera Company.

Later in September Suzanne Juyol of France will replace Miss Varnay in repeat performances of “Tristan and Isolde” and “Die Walküre.”

Comprising an integrated whole, the festival program has been weighted with complementary admixtures of tried, proven attractions and premiere performances. It has also been spiced with ingredients representing the best in orchestral concerts, light concerts, opera and stage, ballet and choral works, and with such special items as pantomime programs and chamber music evenings.

The Berlin Civic Opera, now undergoing a thorough grooming for its regular fall schedule of operatic performances, will present five new productions especially prepared for festival audiences. The list of special productions includes Malipiero’s opera, “Phantasien um Callot,” Bartok’s “Bluebeard,” Stravinsky’s “Oedipus Rex,” Gian-Carlo Menotti’s “The Consul,” and a re-studied version of Strauss’ “Salome.” The last will feature the Viennese star, Ljuba Wellitsch.

Opera-lovers will also have an opportunity during the festival to attend guest performances of the famous “Beggar’s Opera” by the Hamburg State Opera Company.

Following the September curtain-raiser, the restored Schiller Theater will feature—very appropriately—Schiller’s “Wilhelm Tell” as well as Zuckmayer’s new play, “Gesang im Feueroften” and Hugo von Hoffmannsthals’ orchestration of Sophocles’ tragedy, “Oedipus.”

Concerts are to be presented by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Sergiu Celibidache and guest conductors, and the RIAS (US-sponsored radio in the American Sector of Berlin) Symphony Orchestra is planning a Mozart evening with Erna Berger as soloist. The RIAS Symphony Orchestra will also give a special Bartok program starring Tibor Varga as soloist.

Poster announcing 26-day Berlin Festival, first ever held there, goes up outside Schiller Theater, which is being reconstructed for grand premiere of international cultural event. Top stage, screen and radio artists from many countries will participate. (PRB BE-HICOG photos by Schubert)
Among standout chamber music programs and recitals listed on the festival schedule are appearances by the brilliant Juilliard Quartet of New York, by the Amadeus Quartet from London, the Koeckert Quartet from Munich, the Berlin String Quartet and the renowned Dennis Brain Wind Ensemble. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau will sing "Die schoene Muellerin," a song cycle. Helmut Roloff will present an evening of modern piano music, and Gerhard Taschner will give a violin recital.

Pantomime will be the order of the day at Berlin's tiny Tribuene Theater during the colorful festival. "Bip," "Der Jahrmarkt" and "Der Mantel," after the novel of Gogol, are slated for presentation by Marcel Marceau and his company from Paris, while the United States will be represented by pantomimist Angna Enters. The Tribuene will also stage Boris Blacher's "Romeo and Juliet."

Neither Shakespeare nor the Broadway musical has been overlooked by festival program-makers. The Old Vic Company of London will step before the footlights of the Hebbel Theater to present Shakespeare's "Othello," while Broadway will come to Berlin with full-cast performances of the hit show "Oklahoma" and a new production of Robinson Jeffers' "Medea," starring Judith Anderson. Guthrie Mc Clintoc has accepted an invitation to direct the Berlin staging of "Medea," an adaptation of the classical Greek tragedy by Euripides. "Medea" will be presented 13 times between Sept. 11 and 22.

The US and British troupes will receive competition from the Comedie Francaise, which is planning a performance of Molieres' "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme."

On the lighter side of the festival are open air performances in the 25,000-seat Waldbuhne, where special mixed programs are to be given by artists from the opera and ballet. A Johann Strauss evening is also on schedule. Choral works will be presented by the Aachener Chor (Aachen Choir) singing Carl Orff's "Carmina Burullui" and the famed Hall Johnson Choir of New York, specializing in Negro spirituals.

Berlin and world premieres of a number of concert works are planned for the festival, among them the "Kantata Profana" of Bartok, a violin concerto by Boris Blacher, Honegger's symphony No. 4, a piano concerto by Pepping and the violin concerto of Schoenberg. Blacher's "Lysistrata" ballet will also be premiered at West Berlin's Civic Opera House.

As a matter of course many of the troupes and individual artists billed for performances during the Berlin festival have received international acclaim from critics and audiences. These noted stars and groups form the festival's headline circle. To utilize the 25-day cultural holiday in another direction, the city-sponsored committee is also recruiting unemployed local actors for a company to be trained by a "name" director. Appearances by the amalgam group are to be announced shortly.

From a statistical viewpoint, the range of festival events is decidedly impressive.

Approximately 200 separate, complete programs will be presented between Sept. 5 and 30 on nine different Berlin stages, including those of the Berlin Civic Opera, Titania Palast, Korso Theater, the Schiller Theater, the Tribuene, the Hebbel, Renaissance and Schlosspark Theaters, and the Theater am Kurfuerstendamm. Total seating capacity of the nine theaters is approximately 9,000. An additional 25,000 persons can be seated in the Waldbuhne.

Festival performances will be given in three languages—English, German and French. Among guest conductors will be Wilhelm Furtwaengler, Sergiu Celibidache and Ferenc Fricsay of Berlin; Josef Kellberth, Hamburg; Paul Sacher and Carl Schuricht, from Switzerland. Scheduled to visit Berlin with orchestral and choral groups are Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, conductor of the Northwest German Radio Symphony Orchestra of Hamburg, Ernest Bour of the Orchestre National of Paris and Felix Raabe of the Aachen Choir. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the local Hochschul Choir will be directed by Hans Chemin-Pettit and Werner Egk.

Visiting and local artists will present orchestral, operatic, dramatic and other compositions by playwrights and composers representing more than half a dozen nations.

As added insurance that Berlin during September will impress visitors as the "Show-Window of the West," a variety of side attractions has been scheduled for the festival weeks. These include sporting events and a series of special art exhibits, among them a display of sculpture and drawings by Henry Moore, sculpture by Bourdelle, and a retrospective show of Max Bachmann's works.

During 10 days of the festival, an auto show, featuring famous "makes" of half a dozen countries, will also be held.

Blueprinted by West Berlin authorities for nearly a year, the Berlin Festival is receiving moral and financial support from the Allied High Commission. Berliners confidently expect that it will supply a conclusive answer to the question: "What is Berlin today, culturally speaking?"

Equally important, the festival is expected to furnish irrefutable proof that the island city, though geographically isolated from the Western-democratic world, stands—in an artistic as well as in a political sense—in the forefront of the current struggle against Communist control and oppression.

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