-STAR OF GRAND OPERA

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communicate itself instantly to
the listener, Verrett feels.

"If anything starts hurting me now," she says, "I'll go find a new voice teacher. Luckily, so far, nothing has hurt in my new work.

"I've heard some voice teachers say, 'For a while this won't feel too good.' That's baloney! It's never supposed to hurt; it should feel easy, but to achieve that there are certain things one has to do.

"You must experiment. If you read a lot, much of what you read will be useless, but you can get little gems sometimes and it makes you think, 'Hey, why didn't I think of that?'"

As she made these observations, the artist was occasionally interrupted by doorbells and the telephone. Once she paused to wish her five-year-old adopted daughter a pleasant time at a neighborhod children's party.

At another point, Verrett's husband, a handsome, talented painter and teacher, entered the room for a pleasant chat. Of Italian - American background, he has devoted a decade to helping build his wife's dazzling career.

Opera critics, long accustomed to glorious voices emerging from ungainly bodies, innocent of acting skill, have frequently marvelled at the conviction of Verrett's stage characterizations.

Many of these worthies forgave the late Maria Callas many of her vocal deficiencies because of her towering capabilities as an operatic actress.

They often sat mesmerized by the reedy urgency of the voice and the superb use of eloquent hands and graceful movement which was often economy itself.

Early in Verrett's career, as long ago as her "Carmen" at Spoleto, Italy, and at the New York City Opera in the early 60s, audiences and critics both realized that they were in the presence of an exceptional actress as well as a notable singer.

"I have never sung down to an audience," she says with genuine satisfaction.

Only Game In Town

Verrett looks back on those days when, as she says, "Carmen was my only game in town," and, though she does not anticipate future stage performan-PAGE 12



Flowers and Opera seem to go together. Here is Shirley in Paris at the time of her debut at the Paris Opera in 1973. Note how she spends part of an evening—with street flower stalls.

ces of the role, she still may record the full opera.

"I don't think of Carmen as a guttersnipe," she asserts, "she's not a whore who goes out to sell herself! She's selective and most intrigued when her target seems uninterested. Then it becomes a challenge.

"She's alluring, yes, but

doesn't have to be a hip-swinger. The allure should come from within. Like all great roles, Carmen must have a beginning, a middle and an end. Her Don Jose may be a mama's boy, but Carmen is free; she just doesn't live by other people's rules!"

Among her more difficult past experiences as the heroine of



Thoughtful and pensive is the mood as Shirley plays the Warrior in "The Siege of Corinth"



A good example of flashing eyes and fiery disposition as Shirley was caught as "Norma."

Bizet's opera was one at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow when the exuberant tenor threw her around the stage so roughly in the third act that she could hardly walk thereafter.

But she did keep him at bay for the rest of the performance and in so doing learned how to stand firmly so that, as she puts it, "He threw me only as far as I wanted to go after that!"

Recently invited by Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte to join them in films, Verrett demurs for the present but has eyes fixed on future movie operatic versions of Bellini's Norma, and Verdi's Macbeth and Aida.

One of the artist's greatest triumphs from every point of view, was scored at the Metropolitan on opening night in October, 1974 at the first time ever performance of Berlioz' Les Troyens in that house.

On that occasion, Verrett sang both suicidal heroines in the two parts of the opera, "The Fall of Troy" and "The Trojans at Carthage."

Scheduled to portray the cold and sexless soprano role of Cassandra in the first part of the five - hour opera, Verrett also took over the warm, womanly and amorous mezzo role of Queen Dido in the second part when mezzo Christa Ludwig withdrew because of indisposition at the last minute.

Verrett's tour de force was acclaimed throughout the operatic world and it would be no exaggeration to say that she earned a place in musical history with the accomplishment.

Interpretations

Commenting on the problem of getting easily in and out of character, a Verrett specialty, she says, "I don't want people to think that Verrett came out of the head of Zeus. I want someone to tell me how to make interpretations more valid.

"Most stage directors don't criticize your acting or movement, but I learned a lot from Boris Goldowsky, one of New York's leading operatic coaches. First of all, you should have the capacity to look the part.

"You can camouflage to make people believe the physical aspect. I'm very much interested in ballet and theatre and I'm always willing to learn."

Asked about a singer's need for training in sports and stage deportment, the artist indicates enthusiastic endorsement.

