

The Arts

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Music Books

ARIA, by Brown Meggs (466 pages; Atheneum; \$10.95).

This roman a clef, based on the soap-opera world of larger-than-life recording stars, is peopled with several bed-fulls of assorted singers, conductors and recording executives. It is not a well-written book, yet it has much to offer the record and opera lover.

In the public eye the opera world is an exotic milieu peopled with equally exotic characters. It is a world of glamour and temperament—and it is within the seamier underbelly of this world that Meggs has placed his novel. His characters are one-dimensional—usually horizontal. He revels in their athletic prowess, checking off each bedtime grapple like the 10 p.m. sports roundup.

The plot centers on an American record company and the head of its classical division. It recounts the events surrounding the taping of Verdi's "Otello" one sultry summer in Rome, giving considerable insight into the administrative and economic aspects of record-making.

The second half of the novel provides an exhaustive and fascinating description of the recording sessions themselves. These are not the kind of public relations pieces that pass for journalism in the trade journals, but blow-by-blow accounts of the human and technological action in front of—and behind—the microphones. Lurid it may be, but Meggs deals clearly with the personal and engineering problems of such a complex undertaking.—Ilan Payne