

# Schoenberg Suite Is Heard

New Work Performed First Time in New York by Philharmonic Orchestra.

By W. J. HENDERSON.

That learned and thoughtful Briton who writes behind the name "Terpander" not long ago quoted from a little book of Jean Cocteau on Picasso: "Rien ne lui semble plus ridicule que le jargon de la critique moderne." One cannot doubt that thoughts similar to this must often have floated into the aloof mind of Mr. Arnold Schoenberg.

Dwelling in a stratosphere of his own creation, hearing daily the harmony of spheres attuned to a twelve-tone scale, and looking down on a world vainly striving to hoist itself on the shoulders of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to new heights of musical contemplation, he may have wondered frequently what some of his critics meant. And withal some of them probably did, too.

But now suddenly Schoenberg comes down out of his stratosphere, stretches his limbs, plants his feet on the ground from which he soared into the viewless ether, and hands out a piece of music which may drive all the head shaking critics to hard use of the word "reactionary." Otto Klemperer introduced the new composition to New York last night at the Philharmonic-Symphony Society concert in Carnegie Hall. It is a suite for string orchestra, was finished in December, 1934, and revealed to the world in May by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Mr. Klemperer conducting. The work was accepted by last evening's audience without excitement and with a polite demonstration of respect.

The reactionary movement in this suite consists in a return from the realm of atonality to that of old fashioned keys. This carries with it disuse of the ultimate conclusions of the twelve-tone scale, which is nothing more than the familiar chromatic. When a composer develops his harmonies from these tones, chiefly in a series of fourth chords, he soon finds himself in the region where all the fixation of major and minor fuse themselves in new compound, defying the limitations of key signatures.

The new suite is in five movements. The first, an allegro, according to the admirable analysis of Dr. Bruno Ussher of Los Angeles, is after the form of a Handelian overture. It is in G major, common time, contains a fugue with three subjects treated in double and triple counterpoint, and also has a modicum of sonorous partwriting in close harmony. The second movement is in E minor and major, a set of variations on a short theme, written with great skill and absorbingly interesting to a musician and perhaps even to a musical lay hearer. The third movement is a piquant and rhythmic minuet and the fourth a vivacious gavotte which astonished by its wizardry in the use of chromatics. The fifth and last movement is a gigue in 12-8 time, a very stimulating and animated section of the work.

In spite of the establishment of keys and the employment of fundamental relationships, the suite continually offers novel harmonic effects. These consist chiefly in the chordal constructions, the unusual emphasis on certain voices and the uncommon instrumentation. For the casual hearer the fullness and number of the inner voices in the counterpoint will perhaps be the most striking feature of the composition. There is nothing of sustained melodic importance, of course; the laconic theme is the technical starting point of the true modernist. Without doubt there is a reason.

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The impression left by the suite upon at least one mind was that Schoenberg was still a professor. Since he abandoned the flesh pots of tonal sensualism which fed him in the "Verklaerte Nacht" and the "Gurrelieder" and went out into the promised land of atonality he has produced no work which seems to bear the stamp of Olympus. His music has worn for the most part the appearance of a demonstration of his theories, and every creation of his technical mind has seemed to end with an emphatic "Quod erat demonstrandum." He has followers who revere him as a grand Mahatma of his art, and if he has not fathered a generation, he has at least founded a sect.

The suite is said to have been composed with high school orchestras in mind; hence the return to primitive moods and methods. But in this case the demonstration does not quite "click." We do not believe the schoolboys will like the suite, but of course that does not matter. What does matter is that grown folk will probably not like it either, and there will be nowhere for it to go, for one feels sure that the New School for Social Research will hardly tolerate it, even as an example of a mighty one's fall. Mr. Klemperer and the strings of the orchestra gave the music a brilliant performance. The subdued handclapping was not their fault.

Mr. Schoenberg's work was unkindly sandwiched between the prelude to "Lohengrin"; which is inexorably diatonic and chordally as well as rhythmically four square, and the fifth symphony of Tschai-kowsky, which is romanticism in shameless candor and quite as diatonic as the Wagner. The evening was not without its comforts for the venerable among the listeners.