

Post  
Music...

## New Friends Feature 'Pierrot Lunaire'

By HARRIETT JOHNSON

The listeners at the New Friends of Music concert yesterday afternoon in Town Hall had a chance to tug at their intellects when Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" was given an expert performance under the direction of Fritz Stiedry. Set to 21 poems from Albert Giraud's poem of the same name, in a German translation by Otto Erich Hartleben, the composition still sounds to me, as it did 15 years ago when I first heard it, like an unsuccessful experiment rather than a great work of art.

In employing a "sprechstimme," instead of a sung melody, Mr. Schoenberg replaces one of the strongest mediums for emotional expression, with one, not nearly so effective. That is, the speaking voice loses its effectiveness when forced to bobtail its freedom by fitting into a rhythmic, dynamic and pitch frame laid down by the composer.

Furthermore, in trying to hear the music written by Mr. Schoenberg, which is, at once, elusive, dreaming and dramatic (in spite of its fugues and canons), I had the curious feeling of battling my way, while the human counterpart of a disembodied spirit insisted on wailing simultaneously. No matter how hard the voice tries, if it can't sing, and it's supposed to interpret a fantastic poem that pursues both blood and ecstasy in the midst of moonlight, what can it do but wail?

Mr. Schoenberg's constant atonality no longer upsets any but the most naive ear, and his thematic ideas, highlighted by an imaginative scoring for solo violin, viola, cello, flute, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet, and piano, frequently take flights of fancy with the poem. He succeeds in making his fiendishly complex counterpoint, poetic. In addition, he disguises his "tour de force" so that nobody would know it was there, unless familiar with the intricacies of the score.

Nonetheless, the whole adds up to the same situation as the hungry man faced when handed a complete dinner flavored with cinammon instead of salt. Maybe it was good, but he still wanted salt. Other works have been written with varying success employing the speaking voice, but in "Pierrot Lunaire," its particular use dissipated the high intensity of poem and music.

Mr. Stiedry conducted a superb performance and he was ably assisted by Erika von Wagner, the "speaking voice," plus a group of instrumentalists, including Edward Steurmann, pianist, who also officiated at the first performance of the work in Berlin in 1912, under the baton of the composer.