

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1940

### Schoenberg Violin Concerto Finds a Champion

**P**UBLIC disapproval of the new Violin Concerto by the Viennese modernist Arnold Schoenberg, which found expression in an indignant exodus at the Friday afternoon concert of the Philadelphia Orchestra and in hisses from the Saturday night audience is not entirely unanimous.

Louis Gesensway, a member of the violin section of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and also a composer of modernist leanings, has written the following letter in defense of the new work.

"Sir: When we started rehearsals of the Schoenberg Violin Concerto it created quite a furore among the men. The comments were devastating. The work created an even greater furore with the public. Nevertheless, I think it is a great composition, one of the rare works of recent years with a definite contribution in the progress of music.

"The general impression at a first hearing when one does not know the purpose of the music is one of confusion, incoherent and meaningless sounds, with the violinist performing all sorts of crazy antics. This is not the case at all. It is not meaningless. It is not formless, and it is not confused or crazy. One needs only an understanding of the background and development of music and the work will stand out, will assume its proper proportions, and announce its great contribution by one of the truly great minds in the field of music.

"In the historical sense music developed from the song and the dance. The diatonic scale, the rules of harmony and counterpoint, sprang fundamentally from the human voice and developed on the possibilities and limitations of the human voice. Later, when instruments began to be added and developed, instrumental technique and its forms also developed from the same rules of harmony and counterpoint.

"Instruments at first imitated the human voice and then they began to

imitate each other for tonal color. When Mr. Stokowski made his magnificent orchestration of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor of Bach, the organ color was achieved. The orchestra sounded like a gigantic organ under ideal conditions. The Brahms' Variations on a Theme of Haydn, which we played last week, simply enlarges a four-hand piano piece. The Beethoven symphonies, when reduced to piano scores, echo the instruments of the orchestra simply as color. With very few exceptions, almost the entire orchestra literature could be analyzed from this point of view.

"Schoenberg, at this stage, brings forth a new idea which I would call 'independent instrumental expression.' That is, an instrument can express, from its own inherent char-

acteristics, sounds which do not have to imitate anything or anybody. It can live and breathe, so to speak, on its own. It has character. It can have harmony, and a form based on its own possibilities. Its rules do not have to be restrained by diatonic limitations. Schoenberg brings this forth with utmost perfection in his violin concerto. The violinist is really playing 'fiddle' music.

"The entire work has a consistency that is unique; there is never a trite or hackneyed phrase, never a mixture of styles. The work has such unity that I am sure that heard repeatedly it will come to seem quite natural and simple. It is, of course, atonal. That is a logical outcome of musical development and the only basis on which 'instrumental harmony' can have a free reign of expression.

"Instead of jeers and hisses, let us greet this great work with cheers and applause, and with an understanding that is so vital to a lone genius who is forging ahead."