

Schoenberg Ode Has Premiere

Lord Byron's *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, penned in celebration of that tyrant's abdication, has inspired Arnold Schoenberg to compose a work, bearing the same title, for "reciting voice, piano and string orchestra." It was given its world premiere Thursday night at Carnegie Hall by the Philharmonic-Symphony under Artur Rodzinski, with Mack Harrell, Met baritone, as narrator and Edward Steuermann as piano soloist.

The 70-year-old modernist composer, activated by the resemblance between Napoleon and Hitler, has written the piece, a program note tells us, as "protest music—an expression of his and the rest of the enlightened world's contempt for despotism and intolerance." The resulting work is a combination of speech and music—the narrator intoning the *Byronic Ode* in its entirety against a background of strings and piano. After a stormy orchestral introduction followed by sudden quietness, the voice of the narrator is heard in Byron's opening lines:

*'Tis done—but yesterday a King!
And armed with Kings to strive—
And now thou art a nameless thing:
So abject—yet alive!*

As the narrator continues, the accompanying music is often precisely descriptive (as in the line "With fronts of brass and feet of clay"); it is now angry, now mournful (as in the lines on the Empress). Certain climactic lines are spoken unaccompanied; others are broken up by sudden changes in rhythm. And there is a dramatic crescendo near the end where Byron hails Washington as "the Cincinnatus of the West."

But all this is not as moving as one might wish. The music is deeply sincere, but often so restrained and always so disciplined that it fails to project the emotion and dramatic power inherent in Byron's poem. Instead of being a concurrence, a balanced wedding of speech and music, it was more a monologue with background music, although this may have been due to the fact that the narrator's voice was so amplified last night by the use of loudspeakers that the orchestra often was drowned out. This was doubly unfortunate since Mr. Harrell, though limited in his phrasing by the prescribed rhythms of the score, did not give a particularly inspired—or meaningful—reading of Byron's lines.

Mr. Rodzinski and the orchestra opened the evening with Mozart's *Haffner* Symphony and, after the Schoenberg *Ode*, jumped back to the 18th century classic tonalities of Haydn's Cello Concerto in D. Gregor Piatigorsky played the solo part with his accustomed artistry.

—ROBERT A. HAGUE

PM,

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