

and in Switzerland — Inter

Zurich Sees Experimental Presentation

By Willi Reich

Zurich

Along with its efforts to build up an attractive and financially productive operatic repertoire with works like "Traviata," "Carmen," "Madama Butterfly," and so forth, the Zurich Stadttheater has always been mindful of its obligations toward modern music. Proofs of this were the first performances of Alban Berg's "Lulu" and Hindemith's "Mathis," as well as many interesting revivals, which have been staged on an average of from four to six times each season.

This year the Stadttheater has tried something new and interesting. It has presented for the first time in Switzerland the most difficult modern compositions for stage, in a single experimental performance. These compositions were the monodrama, "Erwartung" (Expectancy), by Arnold Schönberg, written in 1909, and the pantomime, "Der wunderbare Mandarin" (The Amazing Mandarin), of Bela Bartók, written in 1919. Both works are, for various reasons, so difficult to produce that until now only very few theaters have ventured the undertaking.

Lyric Poem

The lyric poem written for "Erwartung" by Marie Pappenheim at Schönberg's request casts only one person, a woman (played in Zurich by Dorothy Dow, an American), who has gone into the forest at night in search of her lover. She has waited for him during the evening at her house, but he has not come. She sets out upon the road she has so often walked with him. Ominous forebodings torment her. Memories spring up and join with the voices of the forest and the night to call forth strange apparitions. The wanderer penetrates deeper and deeper into the darkness. Finally, as she nears a house, she finds the body of her lover.

Overcome with anguish, she collapses. Mingled with her horror, however, is the suspicion that her lover has deceived her and while on the way to another woman has met with disaster. The greater her despair, the more convinced she is of this fact; but her love is finally victorious over jealousy, and in a visionary outcry the monodrama ends.

For this story Schönberg has written music which, with remarkable sensitivity, corresponds to the moods expressed by the words and develops richness of color and thematic inventiveness. In the entire composition not one theme is repeated.

Influence Noted

"Erwartung" was written at a time when Schönberg was leaning very much toward expressionistic painting. This influence can be clearly traced in the music, inasmuch as the notes, no longer connected by tonal relationship, serve only to express the successive states of thought. This music has rightly been compared to the dream experiences explored by modern psychology; it is directed by the unconscious and from it derives its powers of suggestion.

Bartók's pantomime, "Der wunderbare Mandarin," strikes one at first as being a gangster story set to music, but closer inspection discloses elements of symbolism, paralleling in certain respects Schönberg's monodrama.

Bartók's music likewise follows the dramatic action very closely. In contrast to Schönberg's music, however, it conforms entirely to the outward events. Its effect is therefore more illustrative than purely artistic. Nevertheless, much of the talent of the youthful Bartók can be traced in this music.

A factor in the success of the experimental performance was the work of the director, Victor Reinshagen, who, for the sake of art, had rehearsed innumerable times with his orchestra and then had to be satisfied with just one performance.