

Dec 5, 1949

CONCERT AND RECITAL

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By Jerome D. Bohm

New Friends of Music

The program of the New Friends of Music in Town Hall yesterday afternoon held only two numbers: Schoenberg's song cycle, "Das Buch der Haengenden Gaerten," sung by Rose Bampton, with Erich Itor Kahn as accompanist, and Mozart's Serenade in E flat (K. 375), performed by a woodwind ensemble under the direction of Ignace Strassfogel.

Schoenberg's "Buch der Haengenden Gaerten," based on fifteen poems by the leader of the German school of imagists, Stefan George, was the first work in which he abandoned tonality to pursue the paths which finally led to the twelve-tone system of composition. These songs are hardly likely to take a place in the regular repertoire, not because of their want of musical value, for they are extraordinarily subtle and sensitive settings of George's poems, but because singers who can interpret them are rare in any age.

The composer was fortunate in having so remarkably gifted a singer as Miss Bampton and so accomplished a pianist as Mr. Kahn to perform them on this occasion. The songs demand a singer with the wide vocal range to encompass their wide tessitura, which not only spans two octaves from the A below the staff to the A above it, but which keeps the voice for extended phrases either very low or very high. Even more exacting demands are made on the singer's aural capacities; for the problems of intonation and the accurate negotiation of unusual intervals, posed with very little or no assistance from the piano, can be met only by a musician of the highest quality. Miss Bampton is such a musician and a profoundly perceptive one as well. She not only gave a musically flawless account of these songs but interpreted them with the sensibility necessary to convey their ever-shifting moods. And this was done with the poised assurance of a mature artist. Mr. Kahn's accompaniments seconded the soprano's work admirably, being stylistically and pianistically immaculate.

Probably the greater part of the audience derived more pleasure from Mozart's entrancing E flat Serenade. The woodwinds and horns played the captivating melodies arrestingly, with carefully adjusted sonorities, under Mr. Strassfogel's understanding leadership.