

Barati Leads Chamber Symphony

By ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN

Before taking off for two months as guest conductor of the symphony orchestra in Honolulu, George Barati led his own chamber orchestra of San Francisco Symphony men through one of the most challenging performances of the season last night at the Veterans' Auditorium.

The challenge was all condensed into one of the three works on the program—Schoenberg's "Ode to Napoleon"—and it was brilliantly met by all concerned. Barati very wisely went through the piece twice, and whatever had been tentatively done the first time was done up brown the second.

The work is a setting for speaking voice, strings and piano of the poem with which Lord Byron lashed the fallen Emperor in the days of his final exile. It was composed in 1942, when Adolf Hitler was still riding high on the Wilhelmstrasse, but it is obvious that Schoenberg was not thinking about French history when he composed the music, and put into it such heat, triumph, gloat and exultation as he did.

MAJESTIC EXCITEMENT

When a great artist approaches the political themes of his moment, he is likely to handle them in some such roundabout or symbolic fashion as this, rather than head-on. The total effect of the work is of a kind of sweeping, majestic excitement. Schoenberg is not above the battle, but he gives voice to its issues in his own involved, complex and highly personal idiom. The music is full of those glistening, sliding and shattering effects of which Schoenberg is past master, those vertiginous melodic leaps and hard, angry, pounding phrases that abound in his later music, but it also calls for some things that are

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so rarefied as to be impractical in a large hall, such as harmonics of the piano.

No doubt about the score, in Paul Rosenfeld's phrase, is as full of crabs as Chesapeake bay, but the point of this work lies not so much in the complexities of its structure as in its dramatic, climactic expressiveness. It proves — if proof was needed—that the Schoenberg idiom is magnificently suited to dramatic ends.

The performance—especially the second one—was altogether such as the composer might have wished, thanks to Barati and the musicians, and to Reider Torsen, who read the text with spirit and authority, despite the fact that Schoenberg's score prescribes the rhythm and the intonation of every syllable he had to utter.

STRAUSS VARIATIONS

Barati also gave the first local performance of the "Metamorphoses," by Richard Strauss, one of that composer's last works and one of his gentlest, coolest and most persuasive. This is a series of free variations on a theme, spun out in the most masterly style, attaining considerable length with a minimum of material, but without a moment's thinness or over-elaboration. There are plenty of strained and inadequate moments in the earlier works on which the reputation of Strauss is based. Perhaps, as Haydn said of himself, he learned in his last years how to compose.

The concert opened with an able performance of Bach's C minor concerto for two harpsichords in an arrangement for two violins, with Frank Houser and Felix Khuner as the soloists.

Police Chief