

Music

8 Part IV—SUNDAY, JULY 29, 1951 * Los Angeles Times

The SOUNDING BOARD

By ALBERT GOLDBERG

Schoenberg-Balanchine-Pilgrimage Play

In Arnold Schoenberg contemporary music has lost one of its two main influences — Igor Stravinsky, of course, being the other.

The Stravinsky influence up to the present has been the more potent and his music has been the more successful to the extent that it has reached an infinitely wider public. But there is at least the possibility that the ideas of Schoenberg will even more strongly prevail in the immediate future and, as in the case of Bela Bartok, now that he is dead the public will quite likely affect an interest in his compositions that it has never on any appreciable scale displayed before.

During the greater part of his creative life Schoenberg occupied the unenviable and paradoxical position of a famous composer whose major works were practically never performed. Only a single composition, "Verklarte Nacht," ever caught on in the permanent repertoire, and even its hold was tenuous until it became the background music for Anthony Tudor's best ballet, "Pillar of Fire." And since it was issued in a popular recording under that title a great many people know it by that name instead of the one the composer gave it.

ENTERS ATONAL WORLD

Otherwise Schoenberg's music has been heard—certainly in this country and, as far as one knows, in Europe also—only when performed by dedicated groups of esthetes for audiences equally specialized in their interests, or by conductors occasionally willing to risk the momentary displeasure of their public for the sake of healthy controversy.

This may indicate nothing of the permanent value of his music but it does reveal something of its uncompromising nature. Even the earlier works in post-Wagnerian style, such as the "Gurrelieder," were impracticable of frequent performance because of the enormous apparatus required, though the musical content offered no particular hazard to ready comprehension.

The size of the apparatus was steadily reduced as Schoenberg entered the atonal world of "Pierrot Lunaire" and other works of his middle period, but as the music advanced steadily further from any recognizable norm the difficulties of performance and assimilation increased. And though economy was the basis of his final 12-tone style, its complete novelty created an entirely new universe for both interpreters and audience.

COMPOSER'S COMMENT

Schoenberg's music, like that of Bartok after his death, will undoubtedly now enter the first phase of its ultimate fate. It will be frequently performed, it will be listened to as a fait accompli rather than as a continuing experiment and it will be scanned for its possible qualities of permanence instead of for its novelty content.

What the result will be of this trial period is anyone's guess. In an interview in this column nearly three years ago Schoenberg said, "In 50 years musicians and the public will understand me. It has always been that way with the mature work of composers who had something new to say."

But it has never really taken the public, or musicians for that matter, that long to catch up with any composer. By that time a composer either is fully understood, though he may not be popular, or he is outmoded—time has passed him by. Audiences will now discover in Schoenberg's music those things that can be immediately comprehended, and will earmark for future reference and further hearing its problematical features. It may eventually accept those features, or it may reject them.

SURVIVAL ARGUMENT

The strongest argument for the survival of Schoenberg's music is the emotional fervor that the experienced ear can easily detect even in its most harrowing extremities. "Any real composer only writes music from some emotional compulsion," Schoenberg told us. "I feel that there is definitely as much emotional expression to my music as to any other."

It will take time for interpreters to learn to extract this emotional substance and for audiences to perceive it. It will be a long and difficult task. If the emotion is then found to be true and meaningful, the music will survive in spite of the hard shell in which it is encased. If not, then Schoenberg will be remembered only as the inventor of a system that opened new paths for other men. Time alone will decide.

Schoenberg Memorial Planned Over KECA

A memorial concert for the late Arnold Schoenberg will be given on the "Music of Today" broadcast over KECA from 4:30 to 5 p.m. Saturday. Schoenberg's String Trio will be played in a recording made by the Koldofsky Trio last year, and the Roger Wagner Chorale will sing "Peace on Earth," for mixed chorus a cappella.