

NOVEMBER 4, 1913.

THIS SCHOENBERG MUSIC.

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG, prophesied by James Huneker as the "anarch of tone," was introduced yesterday afternoon to the Chicago Symphony orchestra clientele with the first American performance of his "Five Pieces for Orchestra." His welcome was a melange of scattered sarcastic applause, some whistling, one or two hisses and enduring, hysterical laughter. That it was not a riot was due to the primness of this matinee audience. The riot is expected this evening, when the long sufferers and fervent are scourged with this lash of dissonance. Truly, these five pieces were a nightmare, a horrible obsession, a fearsome turbulence of apparent irrelevancy. "Apparent" is not here inserted at random; there is much more to the matter than madness. But try to convince those who heard this Schoenberg music yesterday that it has any elements of sanity or beauty or honesty and your own reputation is in danger.

Before venturing to chronicle a few bashful impressions of the novelty, let us pause to pay tribute to Mr. Stock's courage. The resident orchestra has been famed since its beginnings for its progressiveness, for its courtesy to new composers. And, while it may be guessed shrewdly that Mr. Stock has no love for such freaks of musical art, yet is he the one conductor in this country who is at the same time sensitive to the currents of thought in Europe and brave enough to risk things he may consider atrocities. This public lusts after novelties, and, like a baby crying for a lighted match and getting it, has only its own credulity to thank.

This is hateful music. But it is not maniac music. As Debussy in our generation has pushed back the boundaries in one direction, Strauss in another and Busoni in still another, so Schoenberg reasons beyond the powers of the ear to follow. Busoni's "Berceuse Elegiaque" hinted the possibilities of combining two tonalities to certain effects. Schoenberg has ventured three, in at least a half dozen pages, and only the inability of the mind to comprehend more compels us to leave the matter with this feeble observation. This is the tribute of cold reason.

Now for impressions! Who has any? Frankly, this typewriter cannot find similes for the bestial racket. There are moments, like a goodly portion of the second and of the third movement, which cre-

ate a definite mood. They have certain elements of beauty—in subtle tone colors, in subtle dynamic effects, and, truly, in almost-melodies which simply emphasize the horrors of a spraddling harmonic scheme of inebriate perversity. That is the trouble with a first hearing of the whole thing. Even its color is forgotten in the distressingly continuous dissonance. Were there a few pivotal points in the five numbers from which fresh starts could be made, it would be infinitely easier to listen to this Schoenberg music. As it is, it is phantasmagoria.

Really, when you come down to brass tacks in the argument most of Schoenberg's chords can be analyzed and shown to be based upon some sort of logic. For instance, a diminished fifth upon a perfect fourth is one of his milder and most useful invectives. How it sounds is a matter which may not be confided to this page on account of postal regulations. But these impertinences hurled into the ear pell-mell and with a crash of thunderous percussions rouse first of all a desire to laugh in ribald exasperation; next, one is annoyed at the brazen impudence of the man; lastly comes that mood which puts us all in the dentist's chair—a sort of "oh-well, who-wants-to-live-anyway?"

There are two queer aspects of this matter. One is that Schoenberg, for all his harmonic complexity, is as primeval as any dance-tune writer in regard for rhythm. Had he cast rhythm aside, too, it would be hopeless to find any common denominator between his music and that of the glorious company gone before him. The other trait was noted in the Busoni "Berceuse Elegiaque"—a much less unpleasant impression from the pianissimo passages than from the strident fortissimos. This psychological point is important. It means that dynamics is related directly to consonance. In other words, no succession of intervals is finally impossible to reconcile, so long as their instinctive antipathies are not blatted into the ear. This is the one point of the matter which results in uncertainty as to Schoenberg's future. If, through frequent hearing, one can find beauty in the dissonant pianissimos, it stands to reason that the dissonant fortissimos, and, with them all possible combinations, may some day become as clear as a scare head line.

No, patient reader, no one of us hopes

to achieve that beatitude. But there were certain among us, you will remember, who hated even the childlike joke of Richard Strauss' "Till Eulenspiegel." Some doubted Wagner, with profanity, too. Who knows?

Today, however, Schoenberg's "Five Pieces for Orchestra" sound like a pandemonium of crosseyed devils playing a big score, as it looks to the layman, without transposing instruments, and with cheerful disregard of each and every other devil.

Let us render unto even these their due, however. Schoenberg is a master of orchestral effect. No score comparable with this has been submitted since the memorable "Max und Moritz." It is too wonderful. The ear cannot begin to grasp it as a dramatic effect, and a series of dramatic effects. Brutal as it is in sound, its color is such color as was "never dreamed on land or sea"; its detail is stupendous; its variety of fantasy surpasses the imagination of scholarship. This stuff may be as awful to think about as an overripe and energetic durian (a species of fruit known to the elite for its extravagant stench and exquisite flavor), but that it foreshadows the inevitable development of musical art—in certain phases, if not in its entirety—may not be denied.

Go, listen, laugh or weep; but go hear it. Ask yourself whether there ever was such a bland impotent as one Beethoven. Sure it is that there never was.

With merely passing tribute to the virtuosity of an orchestra which could compass the difficulties of performance, and to Mr. Stock for the brain and the determination that could extract plot and story from such a mess of undefiled dissonance, let us barely mention a pure, lyric reading of Beethoven's first symphony and an interpretation of Brahms' second symphony, which for the thrilling eloquence of its spirit is not often equaled. The slow movement of the Brahms symphony was a wonderful mood, and, in its way, as great a tribute to the orchestra's sensitiveness as the whole outburst labeled "Schoenberg."

This was the glory of the concert—the last half hour with the mellow classic so beloved by the public and so respected by its interpreters.

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