

## SCHOENBERG LEADS OWN COMPOSITION

Conducts the New Friends of Music Orchestra in 'Pierrot Lunaire' at Town Hall

### WORK SELDOM HEARD HERE

Mme. Erika Wagner-Stiedry, as Assisting Artist, Gives Music Speaking Accompaniment

By OLIN DOWNES

The appearance of Arnold Schoenberg, when he conducted the performance of his "Pierrot Lunaire" yesterday afternoon at the concert of the New Friends of Music in Town Hall, was one of the most impressive experiences that a musical audience has had in seasons in this city. It was also the occasion of a new understanding on the part of many, and certainly on the part of this writer, of the composition.

The occasion emphasized, incidentally, the enormous importance to all music of adequate interpretation, and the fact that the mere sounding of notes in more or less accurate accordance with the signs on the printed page does not of itself suffice to reveal the spirit of a masterpiece.

For Mr. Schoenberg proved an absolute master conductor of his own music. He has no poses; he is unthinkable as virtuoso leader or a poseur of the baton strutting his hour. He is concerned solely with his task, and he is technically able to project his precise intention by means of simple, economical, unmistakable movements. He impressed his music upon the audience as immediately as he effaced himself from any conspicuousness. The sheer precision and power of his thought governed the interpreting artists.

#### Mme. Wagner-Stiedry Assists

In the light of this performance and of the wonderful art of Mme. Wagner-Stiedry in reciting in song-speech the poems it was clear that although "Pierrot Lunaire" had had several previous performances in this city, beginning in 1921, we had actually never heard the work in its full significance before. This was the best performance here of the composition, at least since 1925.

It was further evident that if Mr. Schoenberg can make an orchestra of one hundred obey him as an orchestra of five obeyed him yesterday the managers of American orchestras are missing an opportunity, with this musician buried in Hollywood, in not engaging him as "guest" to personally present scores of his which remain moot points of discussion today. Among other things this was the occasion, curiously unexpected, of the emergence from obscurity of an internationally famous composer as conductor of his own works!

We have implied the fact, namely, that Mr. Schoenberg was very fortunate in his collaborators, first in the performance of Mme. Wagner-Stiedry, who made her first public appearance in this city, and previously had worked out this score with him in a Western studio for gramophone records. She interpreted the poetry with an eloquence and imagination unparalleled here, and in a way which, one believes, exemplified the exact use of the "spreche-stimme" — "speaking voice"—or, as the program had it, speech-song or song-speech, which Schoenberg intended and which we believe a good many singers have misunderstood.

#### Pitch of Voice Indicated

Under this treatment intervals indicated in his scores which seem ugly and entirely unvocal become simply indications of the general pitch and inflectional curve of the voice, of which all the registers are employed for tone color as well as dramatic contrast, and blend in a singular and most sensitive manner with the instrumental tone and nuance.

It is indeed a special artistic device in which Schoenberg has not been emulated, or, as a rule, accurately represented. Mme. Wagner-Stiedry's superb German diction, her sincerity, her wide range of nuance and mood would have made the Guiraud poems impressive in the mere recitation; yet it is clear

## THE PLAY

A. A. Milne's 'Sarah Simple' Put On Theatre at Provincetown Pl.

SARAH SIMPLE, a comedy in three acts, by A. A. Milne. Staged by Wallace Rooney; setting by Forrest Thayer Jr.; produced by the Hilltop Theatre. At the Provincetown Playhouse through Nov. 27.

William Bendish .....	Guy Spaul
Marianne Bell-Mason.....	Helen Riggs
Sarah .....	Joy Harington
Amyas Bendish .....	Leslie Stevens
Alfruda Bendish .....	Florence MacMichael
Charles .....	Edward Broadley

### By BROOKS ATKINSON

To look on the bright side of things deliberately the old Provincetown Playhouse need not feel so melancholy as usual just now. Three good actors are behaving with professional competence in a production of A. A. Milne's "Sarah Simple," which opened on Saturday evening. Technically it represents the New York debut of the Hilltop Theatre, a band of young people who have been doing nicely for three Summers in Ellicott City, Md. Since only two of the six actors are Hilltoppers in good standing, the Village debut is more technical than real.

What the old Provincetown ought to feel encouraged about is the fact that Joy Harington, a young English actress of beauty, poise and style, is stepping smartly over a stage that has been horribly battered in recent years; and Guy Spaul and Helen Riggs are actors also. After some of the outlandish behavior that has passed for acting in Macdougall Street recently the Provincetown seems almost pleased to have a good-looking gal acting as though she knew what she was doing on a Tom Thumb stage.

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Since Mr. Milne's "Sarah Simple" has never been done in this country, we may as well have a look at it. It is a comedy about a girl who returns to her husband after eight years and at the moment when he is philandering with a canon's widow. Being a careless fellow, he

Eduard Steurmann, took part in the premiere of "Pierrot Lunaire," given under the leadership of Otto Klemperer in Leipzig in 1912 and his performance testified to his understanding. Every player in the little orchestra of five, which was called upon to play a total of eight instruments, was a coordinated and highly expressive element of the ensemble—Frances Blaisdell, the flutist and piccolo player; Eric Simon, of the clarinet and bass clarinet; Stefan Auber, 'cellist; Rudolph Kollisch, violin and viola, and Fritz Kuhner, violin. There was but one thing to regret, though that was serious: the lack of the text of the poems, with a parallel English translation in the program books, which would have meant much to a big majority of the audience, in the complete understanding of the work. The concert, which began with a rather poor performance of the Schubert Octet, was thus a sweeping success. At the end all the artists and finally Mr. Schoenberg were recalled again and again to the stage.

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The texture of this music is of astonishing richness, subtlety, flexibility and logic, and the composition is the work of a man of the most sensitive feeling, whose understanding of every principle, technical or psychological, of the poetry, is as remarkable as his mastery in his own idiom. The work is so scored that the reciter of the poem is apparently as free as regards tempo and emphasis as if there were no such thing as a musical investiture, fitted with miraculous precision to the verse, to be considered. No dramatic orator, in any situation, could have been given greater apparent freedom to work her will with the verse than the singer who stood by the conductor's side yesterday, and every fleeting thought and fantasy of the poet was companioned and reflected as in a mirror by the music.

#### 'Literary' Quality in Music

What are we to call Mr. Schoenberg in this score? Certainly a romanticist, and by no means an "absolute" musician. It is not only literary music but the music of an arch-tone-painter, and it is not without importance that the period of "Pierrot Lunaire" is the one in which Schoenberg literally had taken to painting. Yet the score is also an organism on its own account and concentrated music, with a wealth of tone color gained from a very few instruments ideally balanced and mated to the sonority of the voice. And this tonal speech is felt to be the one inevitable expression of the situation.

The score can be analyzed, explained, "justified," if that were necessary, in effects which are still highly modern, though Mr. Schoenberg has gone much farther in dissonance and in the linear conceptions of later work than this one, which is nearly thirty years old. But analysis concerns anatomy "explanation" of this score has its roots in the inexplicability of that which is genuinely felt, envisioned and created.

If the New Friends of Music had only given us this concert, the public would be enormously their debtor. Mr. Schoenberg was fortunate in all his collaborators. His pianist,