

N. B. C. Players Offer 'Pelleas,' By Schoenberg

Stokowski, After Finishing
Radio Program, Conducts
Rarely Performed Work

By Jerome D. Bohm

The most interesting part of Leopold Stokowski's first concert with the NBC Symphony Orchestra last night, in what was formerly Mecca Temple but is now the Cosmopolitan Opera House, followed the broadcast portion of the program. After having performed for the radio audience his own arrangement of Bach's Prelude in E-flat minor, the first movement of Philip Warner's Sinfonietta and Brahms's Third Symphony, Mr. Stokowski announced that he would direct Schönberg's "Pelleas and Mélisande." He said that the performance should be considered as an informal rehearsal for the traversal of the work which would follow later in the season for radio listeners.

The Austrian composer's "Pelleas and Mélisande" is his fifth opus. It was first performed in 1905, the same year that saw the first presentation of Strauss's "Salomé" and had its only previous New York performance at the hands of the Philharmonic Society under Josef Stransky's direction about twenty-eight years ago. It is an extensive tone poem requiring about thirty-five minutes to unfold.

The music, like all of Schönberg's earlier products, stems directly from the Wagner of "Tristan" and, like the somewhat later "Gurrelieder," it is richly polyphonic in texture and gorgeously orchestrated. The sheer tonal sumptuousness of some of its pages is only equaled by similar pages in the "Gurrelieder." The instrumentation bears the mark of Schönberg's individuality, and one touch, the employment of glissando effects for the trombone, antedated Strauss's similar procedure in his "Elektra."

Although Schönberg has not been able to put aside the Wagnerian essential turn in some of his melodies, and has not freed himself wholly otherwise from the Bayreuth master's spell, there are none the less already indications here of the later Schönberg, not only in the wandering tonalities utilized but in the scoring as well. The work has its dull moments and its sugary ones. But viewed as a whole, it is highly impressive, and one should be grateful to Mr. Stokowski for rescuing it from undeserved oblivion. It was superbly set forth, if not perhaps wholly to Mr. Stokowski's satisfaction, but the acoustics of the auditorium are hardly better than those of Studio 8 H in Radio City, which Mr. Stokowski did not wish to use for his series of concerts with the orchestra, and one would like to hear it again in more favorable surroundings.

The evening began rather dubiously with a sentimental interpretation of the Bach Prelude, and the ensuing trite, operetta-like movement from Mr. Warner's Sinfonietta did little to dispel the first infelicitous impression. But the Brahms Symphony received a far less mannered performance than had been vouchsafed thereto by the All American Youth Orchestra under Mr. Stokowski's leadership last spring. And while it was not entirely free from arbitrary bits of pacing and overaffectation nuance, the conception had much that was genuinely expressive and convincing.

Robert