

STOKOWSKI LEADS SCHOENBERG WORK

By OSCAR THOMPSON.

Arnold Schoenberg has written a piano concerto and it has had its world premiere in our midst. The immaculate Leopold Stokowski introduced it at yesterday afternoon's broadcast by the NBC Symphony before the usual invited audience in the orchestra's Radio City habitat. Eduard Steuermann was the solo pianist.

As if fearful about the concerto's reception, the conductor spoke a few prefatory words, which were to the effect that he had studied the new work for a long time and was convinced that it was one of the landmarks of music.

That conviction impels respect. But this listener can only report that he found the concerto a very ugly affair—ugly, in spite of a certain saccharinity that sicklies much of its perpetual dissonance. This dissonance is, of course, quite in order, since the concerto is a work of Schoenberg's twelve-tone dispensation. Aside from its sentimentality, it is more like the music of the earliest 1920s, or even earlier in Schoenberg's career, than it is like "modern" music of today. It belongs with the Five Pieces, which were first performed in 1912, as an intellectual structure. Every note is a calculation. The scoring, often harsh, sometimes bitter sweet, is only too recognizably of the same old prescription.

There are block-like sections which, if the work were played with pauses, might be regarded as movements, but the distinctions between them are more those of tempi than of expressiveness or feeling. The piano is scarcely a solo voice, its part being that of an instrument in the orchestra, though one that has a continuing prominence. The most daring virtuoso will hardly be drawn to essaying its crabbed figurations. The instrument neither sings, nor cajoles, nor flashes, nor thunders, in its own right. It just keeps going and it sometimes has a wisp of a theme. Mr. Steuermann is a good technician and a good Schoenbergian. His confreres are likely to agree that he is so good that he is welcome to this concerto.

Mr. Stokowski also introduced his orchestration of Cesti's seventeenth century air, "Tu man-cavi a tormentarmi," a finely sanorous exploitation of a noble melody, and gave an eloquent performance of Schubert's "Un-finished" Symphony.

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