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MUSIC *Milstein, Ness Heard at 16th Symphony*

By JOHN K. SHERMAN
Star-Journal Music Critic

AS THE SYMPHONY SEASON

nears an end, the programs seem to get more and more eventful and less and less orthodox . . . trust Dimitri Mitropoulos not to let the series drift off into innocuous desuetude just because spring is here.

Anyway we had two soloists, a Schoenberg premiere, an off-the-main-line Haydn symphony and the Lalo "Symphonie Espagnol," which latter succeeded in buttering up the malcontents before they went home. Add to that two Grieg songs and two violin encores and you had a program full of delightful incongruities.



Milstein

Nancy Ness, proud and queenly soprano from the land of the fjords, doubtless had the most difficult debut assignment any artist ever had with the local orchestra — the solo role in Schoenberg's gnarled and impassioned F sharp minor quartet for strings, arranged for string orchestra. She acquitted it with high eloquence and an intensity no less than the conductor's and composer's.

With no melodic line for easy memorization, with hardly any anchorage in a vocal role that had little more than a spiritual alliance with the orchestra, Miss Ness negotiated the wide leaps and the difficult declamation in a way that spoke unmistakably of her deep identification with the music. She understood it

and she sang it . . . better, I thought, in the final movement than the third, where the tone seemed a bit constrained by the tension of the text and the orchestral clamor.

* * *

The music itself was no bloodless geometry, as some might expect from Schoenberg, but it was far from casual or fluent tune-making. Pain and struggle and inner torture and final delivery . . . these all were voiced in writhing themes that rose at times to passionate exasperation, and again—as in the second movement — moved in mysterious and fugitive hints. The higher levels of the finale groped toward peace, and the final simple concord was the last word the listener longed for.

Miss Ness also sang, with tender poetic sense, two songs of Grieg—"Solvejg's Slumber Song" and "From Monte Pincio"—and her sensitive and piquant vocalism was ideally supported by Mitropoulos' accompaniment.

* * *

As for Nathan Milstein, one feels that a performance with orchestra for him is all in the day's work, and the Lalo number rolled off his violin with deceptive ease and precision. His is a healthy and beautifully coordinated art, and it runs as smoothly as an expensive machine where the pistons and connecting rods move back and forth with well oiled exactitude.

He gave the Lalo sparkle, vigor, color and sweep, and his two encores—the allegro of the Bach D minor sonata and the 24th Paganini caprice — were handsome examples of unaccompanied violin playing.

The Haydn opener was a crisp reading, with pulse and propulsion, excellent string unanimity and scampering but tidy finale.