

The Music Makers

By IRVING KOLODIN

Schoenberg's 'Five Pieces' and Szigeti's First Piece.

Handled as gently as any time bomb, the "Five Pieces" for orchestra which Arnold Schoenberg wrote in 1909 and conductors have since been trying to ignore, finally came



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to the attention of a Philharmonic-Symphony audience in Carnegie Hall last night. Lightly battered on one side by the "Figaro" overture of Mozart and heavily blanketed on the other by the third symphony of Schumann and the Brahms violin concerto, it is an experience which will be remembered when these more usual things have gone their way to another dozen repetitions.

Thanks to his sturdy constitution and the devoted services of so sympathetic a conductor as Dimitri Mitropoulos, Schoenberg has lived to see these revolutionary works of his thirties come to acceptance, in his seventies, as a valid

musical experience. No longer the catcalls and the laughter, the jeering and the intolerance. This audience was listening attentively, rather than politely; the response was scattered, but it was persistent. One can only regret that Schoenberg is denied the radio and a nationwide audience on Sunday's broadcast.

For Mitropoulos, it was a remarkable piece of work, as much in the realm of what is called "interpretation" as in the mere organization of a reading magically clear and understandable. Each of the pieces had the character inherent in it, agitated or moody, subtle or elusive. Where Schoenberg made his point by contrasts in timbre rather than variation in design, Mitropoulos was his man no less than where the key was rhythmic alteration. There was an inescapable sense of order and

logic throughout which made one wonder: How often has this been true of performances in the past?

It was something of an irony to realize how much the comprehension of this idiom owes to its popularization, by disciples of Schoenberg in the films, on the radio, and in other commercial media. Now that his innovations have become commonplaces, one can see them for what they are—the epigrams that retain their meaning when the cliches derived from them are frayed and threadbare.

In its conventional aspects the evening was both hearty and refined. Mitropoulos's "Figaro" overture is not the subtlest we have heard, the delivery of this suggestive musical anecdote a little more underlined than one would think an audience of this

sophistication would have required. However, his treatment of the Schumann "Rhenish" was thoroughly idiomatic, a little chary of orchestral coloration for Schumann, but full of seemingly rhetoric, apt phraseology.

If Joseph Szigeti's playing of the Brahms violin concerto appears as something of an afterthought in this notice, it is no more than a response to the ridiculous practice, now become habit at the Philharmonic, whereby such performers are reserved for the evening's end, as a kind of reward to the audience for enduring what has gone before. Szigeti's Brahms is ever a good deed in a naughty world, throwing its light far beyond the compass of the Shakespearean candle. Its limited tonal power was perfectly appraised by Mitropoulos, who provided an orchestral background lean in sound but nonetheless intense. Szigeti's poise and eloquence were at his complete command, even when a false start in the finale compelled a fresh beginning.

Hunt Wummer playing the flute, and Felix Galimir leading a small section of strings. The general level of interpretation was sound, well-schooled, but also rather methodical. In striving for objectivity, the players often lapsed into pedantry.

The evening's most distressing phenomenon, however, was the synthetic sound which came from an electronic organ. It is true the electrical organ is being scaled down to century proportions.

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