

Jan 23, 1950

Steuerman's Concert Heard by Capacity House

Program Is Devoted to Entire Piano Literature of Composer Arnold Schonberg

By DONALD STEINFIRST

The International Society of Contemporary Music, Pittsburgh Chapter, devoted its ninth concert of modern music Saturday night to the entire piano literature of Arnold Schonberg. The locale was the Carnegie Theatre of the College of Fine Arts of Carnegie Institute and the protagonist was Schonberg's noted disciple, Edward Steuermann. The house was filled to overflowing and most of the audience remained in the hall completely through the program.

In making possible a hearing of all the piano music of Schonberg on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday anniversary, the ISCM has rendered Pittsburgh music a benefice of incalculable value.

Music Is Revolutionary

As Frederick Dorian, chairman of the Chapter, pointed out in his illuminating foretalk, Schonberg's "Transfigured Night," now almost a "pop" piece, was considered just as revolutionary at its premiere in 1899 as his contemporary music based on the 12-tone rows is today. Who today, with any assurance, can state that the music of this composer, however dissonant it sounds to ears trained on the Eighteenth

century, will not be considered "old hat" 50 years hence?

Music is not a static art. It must needs grow to live and innovators and creators like Arnold Schonberg take their place in the long unfinished lists with Monteverde who freed opera from the formalism that hindered its progress or Haydn who, enlarging on the Mannheim School, freed the symphony from its conventions. None of these men were inventors, yet each constantly experimented and strove for new pastures unfettered by the then agreed upon rules of the game.

Because Arnold Schonberg has found himself unwilling to accept the chromatic scale (in itself an artificial adoption) as the means to express himself subjectively, he has been drawn inevitably to the twelve-tone scale by which, by his lights, such expression is possible. That this music sounds dissonant or atonal (Schonberg despises the word "atonal") might well be the fault of the listener.

It might well be that this music, so often harsh to the listener of today, will not be the music of tomorrow. I for one am doubtful but I would not deny for a second the right—in fact duty—of such a creative artist as Schonberg to write in this medium and to ask the listener to hear it over and over again.

Somewhat Conventional

Indeed, a few more performances such as Mr. Steuermann's on Saturday night will go far to dispell the doubts of even the most incredulous listener. While the program was not arranged chronologically, it included the Three Pieces, Op. 11, the Suite, Op. 25, Six Short Pieces, Op. 19, Five Pieces, Op. 23, and a piano transcription of the First Chamber Symphony. The music thus traced the definite style changes from tonality through to the 12-tone scale music.

The earlier works, the Chamber Symphony and the Three Pieces, reveal the gifted composer in more or less conventional dress. The Symphony in fact often reminds the listener of the dreamy chromatic changes of the Verklarte Nacht. The Three Pieces are somber and in minor mood and rather depressing in content. The Six Short Pieces, fragments really, are taut and many-mooded.

With The Five Pieces, Op. 23,

the composer approaching aton-most difficult style imaginable and Mt. Steuermann, who has devoted his life to the study of Schonberg's music, gave what must be considered an authoritative performance in every respect, one that merits applause from every side.

With the Suite, Op. 25, however, written completely in the 12-tone system, there is much to ease the listener on his way. Here the conventional dance rhythms of the classic Suite, Gavotte, Menuet, Gigue, etc., are utilized and presented in a new and interesting garb.

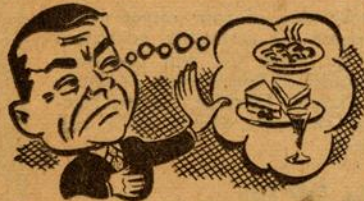
Technically, the music is of the

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