

are ill at ease in a not completely natural idiom. But when a master-composer such as Milhaud writes and produces a masterwork such as *La fantaisie pastorale* – in which every note is the convincingly right one, in the convincingly right color – we witness again the miracle of music.

Grosvenor Cooper

SCHÖNBERG, SHOSTAKOVITCH, STOKOWSKI

MR. STOKOWSKI'S annual fall visit to the Philadelphia Orchestra was productive of the only new music the city has had this season. The conductor wasn't lavish, but he was select. He began with Shostakovich's *Symphony Number 6* and closed his three weeks' term with the premiere of Schönberg's *Violin Concerto*. In the latter he and the orchestra were brilliantly assisted by Louis Krasner, who played the solo music several other reputable violinists had reported unplayable.

Schönberg may not have set out with malice aforethought to write the most difficult violin concerto of all time, but once under way in what seems to be an epitome of the twelve-tone technic he didn't let the violinist's problems obstruct the more important matters he had in mind. The story goes that one violinist told the composer he would never hear his concerto played until violinists grew six fingers on the left hand. Schönberg is reported to have answered "so be it," or words to that effect. The Beethoven and Tchaikovsky concertos earned the same complaints from contemporary violinists, which may be a good omen for Schönberg, but he is either further ahead of his time than Beethoven and Tchaikovsky were or ahead of all time altogether. His concerto has been played, but it is not likely he will live to enjoy its popularity. Philadelphia reacted almost violently. The ladies of the Friday afternoon audience edged towards the exits and some of them kept right on going. Doubtless more would have taken to their heels had the concerto not come at the beginning of a program otherwise climaxed by the *Prelude* and *Love-Death* from *Tristan und Isolde*. The Saturday night audience was characteristically less timid. They gave the concerto a round hissing, as they had hissed some little pieces by Schönberg's pupil, Anton von Webern, a few years ago. Mr. Stokowski was moved to give a lecture on sportsmanship, as he had also in behalf of Von Webern on the earlier occasion, and the performance proceeded to its end, unhissed and not very much applauded.

One or two hearings of the work, even when one has had access to the piano reduction, are hardly a substantial basis for the development of an

opinion. This is very complicated music, and the piano score does not help over-much because the orchestration is integral to the piece. First impressions, however, have some value simply as first impressions, and on this assumption I should say that the Schönberg *Concerto* sounded very strange according to the criteria accepted as more or less as standard in the development of Western music. Certainly it does not seem to be music derived from the basic elements of song. There seemed to be little dramatic or emotional continuity to whatever there was of sustained melodic line. Presumably related fragments appear to be organized in a possibly mathematical fashion. Cerebral is the word usually employed to describe this phenomenon, and it may be the best word. There was, at any rate, no sense of emotion, even of a dispassionate or detached kind.

Beside Schönberg the Shostakovich symphony was about as complicated as *God Bless America*. But it was well received by all the Philadelphia audiences and this reviewer found it very stimulating Shostakovich. The first movement is probably the weakest structurally, but the looseness of structure seems to be part of its essential plan. In its breadth and in its reflective character there is sincerity and a sense of perspective. The other two movements are more effective and more easily assimilable, but they hardly seem as sincere. For all its monotony and its occasional mixtures of style, the slow movement is the best of the three and ranks with the best things the composer has given us.

Henry Pleasants

SWISS PREMIERE—HONEGGER'S NICOLAS DE FLUE

Geneva, December 25

THE most important European musical event this season has been the Swiss world premiere, at Soleure, of Arthur Honegger's dramatic legend, *Nicolas de Flue*. In the spring of 1939, five hundred singers, actors and musicians of Neuchatel had labored long and hard to prepare this work for the National Swiss Exposition. But the war and the mobilization prevented the Zurich performance. These determining facts still kept the same groups from participating, so what we had was not a stage but a concert version for mixed chorus, children's chorus, speaker and orchestra.

The form and style of the work are conceived as a popular and patriotic Festspiel, to be seen and heard in a vast auditorium before an audience of perhaps four thousand. The burden of the action falls less on the handful of singers and actors than on the crowds of supers and members of the