

The Symphony

An Enchanting Schumann, An Intense Shostakovitch

By ROBERT TAYLOR

Double S: Schumann and Shostakovitch—yesterday's Symphony offered an enchanting performance of the former, an intense interpretation of the latter's blocky, bombastic, over-weighted and undeniably interesting Tenth Symphony.

If the laurels belonged to Erich Leinsdorf and the Boston Symphony, they were equally distributed among the romantic pantheon of Schumann's Fourth. We have not heard such fluent and cohesive Schumann playing in Symphony Hall for many seasons. Once again Erich Leinsdorf proved masterly in the standard repertoire.

Tonal Opulence

The Shostakovitch was another matter, though not because of the reading, which displayed steadily mounting drive and excitement. Compared to Eugene Mravinsky's treatment, available on records, Mr. Leinsdorf's ideas are more dramatic. The bold outline of his Shostakovitch Tenth parallels Dimitropoulos with, it seems to me, an added tonal opulence.

But the Symphony does not sustain itself. The opening movement is diffuse, the second owes much to Prokofieff and to the early Shostakovitch whom one may speak of, confidently, as a different personality from the artistic camp follower of a recent decade.

The third movement, featuring the French and English horns over a thrumming pizzicato accompaniment that suddenly explodes into ensemble savagery, is urgently profound, and the work ends in a brilliantly controlled contrast of rapid strings, a haunting bassoon solo and a triple fortissimo.

Admirable Grasp

This ambitious statement exists on the epic scale, recalling, also, Shostakovitch's devotion to Beethoven as the onlie true begetter of the revolutionary spirit. One encounters superb workmanship throughout; the orchestration declares the composer's admirable grasp of the instrumental capacities. Aside from technical pros and cons, however, the symphony strikes me as exceedingly old-fashioned in its style.

The only prior live performance of my experience (The Conservatory Orchestra, 1960) left an identical reaction. At that time I noted the following comment in this space, a comment this rehearing does not affect:

"The Tenth bears scant relationship to contemporary mu-

The Program

The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Erich Leinsdorf conducting, presented the fifth program of the 82nd season yesterday in Symphony Hall. The program will be repeated tonight at 8:30:
Symphony No. 4, in D minor, Op. 120, Schumann
Symphony No. 10, in E minor, Op. 93, Shostakovitch

sical expression. The ponderous harmonies contain vivid moments, and the score achieves spasmodic grandeur. The idiom is broad and fustian with a kind of Victorian eloquence. Time and again one discovers felicities: clarinet against the periodic pulse of strings, fiery Khatchaturian minor modes, sweeping proclamations of brass. Ultimately, though, the relentless heroism becomes a tiring stance. The Tenth is a finely-wrought chunk of Social Realism."

In short, this music is the equivalent of the Soviet ideal as expressed, say, in gigantic Millet-influenced paintings dealing with the visual glories of the collective farm and factory, or in beetling statues of Lenin in a frock coat. Such statement may, indeed, involve elements of technical insight. They are so divorced, nevertheless, from my relation to contemporary life that for all their skill they appear fraudulent.

Inspired Version

Particularly so, when pitted against an inspired version of Schumann's Fourth, which speaks the authentic romantic accent of its age. Schumann's ineptitude as an orchestrator is well-known. It could not be detected in Mr. Leinsdorf's clear, graceful, flowing account.

Many normally obscure lines materialized in his limpid phrasing. The thematic material, which elsewhere too often comes forward as though the conductor were treating the separate compartments of Brahms' Variations on a Theme by Haydn, maintained a subtle unity. His interpretation understates.

Mr. Leinsdorf does not need to emphasize the supple melodic contour. He has the supreme gift in the Schumann genre: tact. Here the songful and the tender, the pale but exquisite colorations, possess an unforced dynamic proportion. Here is a definition for that often abused, dim epithet, beauty.

Next week the orchestra goes on tour. Richard Burgin will conduct the concerts of Nov. 2 and 3: Copland's "Preamble for a Solemn Occasion," Ives's Symphony No. 2; Blacher's Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 26, and Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration," Op. 24.

CS Monitor

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Shostakovitch at Symph

Leinsdorf Conducts the Tenth Symphony

By Harold Rogers

Perhaps two long Shostakovitch symphonies within 24 hours are a bit more than even the hardest music lover would care to digest, yet that is what some of us were compelled to do between 8:30 Thursday night and 4 o'clock Friday afternoon. The diet was not unpalatable nor even unpleasant; it was just a lot of heavy eating with little or no dessert.

No less an orchestra than the Leningrad Philharmonic gave us the Shostakovitch Eighth while paying Boston its first visit on Thursday night, and the Boston Symphony is bringing us the Tenth this weekend. One sometimes wonders by what means, diplomatic or otherwise, such interesting junctures occur in the programming of two major orchestras. Yet whether by happenstance or intention, some of us now know a lot more about Shostakovitch in his more recent creative years.

If the Eighth Symphony of 1943 was a protracted searching of the composer's anguished soul, the Tenth Symphony of a decade later reveals, one gratefully discovers, an improved state of affairs. Not that there were no alarums in Erich Leinsdorf's reading of the Tenth yesterday; there were several explosions to heighten the tension and rouse the heart for battle.

But the prevailing mood of the Tenth is quite different

from that of the Eighth. Both, of course, are intensely personal statements by this greatest of living Soviet composers, yet the Tenth finds him considerably more optimistic, at times even reveling in something that could be called joy.

His opening Moderato establishes a lyrical longing, a mood of wondering, seeking, never finding, that is broken by a climax of shrieking havoc, after which the introspection again takes over.

The Allegro abruptly plunges into one of those militaristic action scenes for which Shostakovitch is famous. Here he establishes a good trot, replete with drum rolls, cymbal crashes, trumpet fanfares. Even Mr. Leinsdorf assumed an equestrian posture.

For the Allegretto the composer gives us a slightly grotesque little waltz, restrained, economical, with lovely horn calls; yet this, too, evolves into something strong, stirring, and strident.

The final Andante opens with

a pastoral melody by the oboe; then, as the tempo turns into an Allegro, the music skitters along trippingly, joyously, even with a measure of humor.

Perhaps the Boston Symphony did not bring off the Tenth with the same precision displayed by the Leningrad in the Eighth; yet the Russians have long lived with this music, while the Bostonians were playing it for the first time.

Mr. Leinsdorf opened with an unusually clear traversal of the Schumann Fourth, the clearest within memory. In part he used Gustav Mahler's arrangement, which doubtless did something to eliminate its usual muddy character; but it would seem that the clarity was due mainly to Mr. Leinsdorf's method of handling the orchestra, of displaying certain elements in the light while placing others in the shade.

Music Club Meeting

Leinsdorf Triumphs With Shostakovich

THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, under the direction of Erich Leinsdorf, music director, performed at Symphony Hall yesterday afternoon, and will repeat tonight at 8:30, the fifth program in the Friday-Saturday series. The program consisted of the Fourth Symphony, in D minor, by Schumann, and the Symphony No. 10, in E minor (first time in these series) by Shostakovich.

By CYRUS DURGIN

Erich Leinsdorf triumphed with the Symphony No. 10 by Dmitri Shostakovich in its first performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra yesterday afternoon. One had not expected that a work from would sound warmer, more vivid in color or intense of passion than a romantic score from the mid-19th Century, like the D minor by Schumann.

Yet this was precisely the situation yesterday, and the dominant reason seemed to be not the essential character of either work but the nature of Leinsdorf's conducting. Shostakovich seemed to stimulate his imagination and release his energies. Schumann, contrariwise, had the effect of constraining Leinsdorf within a mood of quasi-classical austerity and laggard tempi.

Tempo cannot be identical with all conductors in the same work, though it should be approximate. There is a small margin for personal inclination, altogether legitimate, and this margin found Leinsdorf at the slower end. Lehaft (animated) with him was really lehaft only in the latter portion of Schumann's finale; the same tempo marking in the first and third movements meant something much slower.

Nor was the conductor susceptible to the emotional ardors of Schumann, though he was most careful to make all as clear as possible, and consistent in style. That he used in part a thinning-out-of-doubled-notes revision made by Gustav Mahler, was of academic interest. The difference between Schuman as Bostonians are accustomed to hear him, was not in the actual sound but in the intellectualized reading.

But the long, involved Shostakovich No. 10, with its huge orchestra, difficult and virtuosic orchestration, aroused Leinsdorf's powers, and the result was a truly brilliant tapestry of colors and rhythms, accents and sweeping lines. And all, mind you, with a fabulous clarity of balance between the instrumental sections.

Shostakovich has been quoted low on the symphonic market for some years, at least in this country. The Seventh and Eighth Symphonies were massive, even bloated, and full of war-induced febrilities; the Ninth was expert but lightweight.

To my mind, the Tenth restores Shostakovich to the eminence established by his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. The avant garde boys may sneer at its tonal harmonic style, and maintain that Shostakovich manifests dissonances not much ahead of, let us say, "Le Sacre du Printemps"

or "The Scythian Suite." All the same, No. 10 sounds well, it is good listening and a substantial symphonic structure. We shall do well to hear it again.

This writer, hearing the Boston Symphony for the first time since Leinsdorf became its artistic head, discovered what great changes have been wrought in just a few weeks. The ensemble is more precise, the quality of solo work more integrated with the orchestral whole, the sections better blended in a general tone quality which may be described as "international".

The Boston Symphony string tone is still in flux, however, for I suspect that those sections have yet to be transformed into the consistent depth and dark richness which showed only at times yesterday. The addition of a ninth doublebass, together with the conductor's interest in bass quality, have made a much stronger foundation.

The next several months will be of extraordinary interest, as Leinsdorf unfolds the varied aspects of his batonless technic and his interpretive approach to a broad repertory.

This coming week the Orchestra will make its first trip of the season to New York and other cities. Richard Burgin will conduct Nov. 2 and 3. His program: Preamble for a Solmiere), Copland; Charles Ives: Symphony No. 2; Boris Blacher: Variations on a Theme by Paganini; Strauss: "Death and Transfiguration."

With the BSO

Leinsdorf Getting Better Sound

By ALLAN SLY

There is no longer any doubt about it—the Boston Symphony sounds better. Particularly the upper strings are much tidier and more incandescent and at one point last weekend gave Mr. Leinsdorf the most extended decrescendo I have ever heard or expect to hear. There was also a sotto voce passage that defied description. The woodwind ensemble is cleaner, the brass better proportioned. But all of these adjustments have occurred as Mr. Leinsdorf has aimed at the heart of the work in hand. There is no hint of the showcase; one's attention is drawn to the essence of a composition, so much so, in fact, that this listener finds the conductor's individuality still eclipsed rather than revealed.

The admirable Virgil Thomson once wrote on what he called musical caesarism, of which there has always been plenty in New York. Mr. Leinsdorf's tight rein is not to be equated with such a quality. The BSO's new sound is still one of aspiration; so much so that a few mishaps among the chorus of horns can be taken in stride as though one's aim exceed's one's grasp.

The Schumann Symphony No. 4 (really the second in order of composition) sent us scurrying through Mr. Burk's program notes lest we lose the advantages of knowing which version of the symphony was being played. It seems Brahms, Weingartner, Mahler and others have been in the act, and Schumann himself had second thoughts. Those BSO subscribers who like to regard a work of art in the round, as it were, had an unusually interesting time sorting out their impressions of a resoundingly beautiful work, conceived while the world was still young and performed as though it still were. An unexpected fringe benefit that accrued was that by laying Schumann's four movements end to end (as he wished) latecomers were excluded until the conclusion. We were thus spared the usual parade between movements—with its inevitable excitation of guilty truculence and sardonic complacency throughout the house. One's heart bleeds for the latecomer but one's artistic conscience is drawn more to the matter at hand, which after all is unhindered, uninterrupted, unhandicapped attention to an evancement experience. For the most part the audience seems to see it this way. It is more attentive than formerly.

The Shostakovich tenth is another expansive piece of self-revelation. It is as though the composer were reporting a lengthy episode of his emotional life as he confronts his world—a world, no doubt, even less malleable to his desires, less accommodating, than our world is to us. In fact the Soviet creative artist's deportment, vis-a-vis his communicable environment, stems from factors only dimly guessed at by us. This all adds interest, if also some bafflement, as a Shostakovich work unrolls itself. Is it indeed us he is addressing in the first place? Is the signal getting through to us or do we lack certain emotional clues?

Possibly, while this music carries enormous entertainment validity, its true character and artistic purpose are revealed only to those who steep themselves in its performance. Mr. Leinsdorf and the BSO appear to have assimilated its musical essence. Their lucid and well-paced delivery of it gives us the maximum chance of understanding it. But I am not convinced that we do, ultimately. Perhaps we have partly lost the knack of being simple in our musical pleasures; certainly it is unusual nowadays for a composer to turn his fecund inventiveness to the task of expressing romantically a long personal drama. But Shostakovich does so, with consummate assurance, and last weekend's performance must be saluted as a resoundingly effective one.