

The Spotlight

A Dissonant View

BY ANN HOLMES
Fine Arts Editor

AND WHAT about the Houston Symphony? Its concerts have been musically good, but not very often provocative or stimulating beyond the moment.

The Symphony maintains the status quo, and for an expensive enterprise depending upon public money, this is an Olympian achievement in a way.

But there has to be more. Is it too much to ask that our orchestra, which now costs more than \$800,000 a year, be a lively forum of musical doings, a sounding board for musical thought beyond the accepted and the safe?

I do not think it is heresy to think enough about our orchestra to criticize it, or to want the best for it from what must obviously be another point of view. To take it at its face value, never caviling, never wishing for more is to be essentially disinterested in it, uninvolved.

On its tour the orchestra was well received. The cities that really counted gave the ensemble an encouraging round of applause. The prevailing tone of major critics' comments was that the orchestra is on its way—not fully arrived—but on its way.

Harrumphs

And unquestionably this is Sir John Barbirolli's hour in America—perhaps in the world. He is regarded with affection and admiration everywhere. There are harrumphs about the Englishness of so much of his programming, but critics who hear him occasionally brush this off as merely Sir John leading from strength.

At home here, he is adored too. Hearing his programs more often, one can complain oftener about quite so much Elgar, for instance. But he offsets these with rich evenings of standard symphonies and concertos played by standard concert "name" artists.

All this leads to a kind of musical museum operation. Preservation but not provocation. Museum directors know now that it is no longer enough to merely hang up the Rembrandts. The whole operation must be more lively.

Why was it that the young Texas composer of quality whose Epitaph for JFK which was submitted to the symphony was turned down here, while other orchestras through America and Europe played it? Things unhappen here.

Why, in the season to come, do we have so many repeats in the guest conductor lineup?

Andre Previn will conduct four subscription concerts and one Chronicle Dollar Concert. He has played here before. One of his pairs of subscription events could have been used to introduce the talents of someone else.

We are being deprived of the experience of men like Mehta, Steinberg, Szell, Krips, Maazel perhaps, or Martinon. We cannot believe they would have all declined to come and, if so, we should discover why.

Georges Tzipine is coming again as a guest conductor. No sweeter fellow exists, and his music usually gets better the second week. Perhaps this is natural. Guests reportedly get less rehearsal time than Barbirolli has.

Jussi Jalas will come too—the son-in-law of Sibelius. We shall hope that his virtuosity is not all by marriage.

Sameness

The sameness of the conductors, the sameness of the programs, and even of the guest artists, good as they are, contributes to that status quo mentioned above.

What should the symphony be doing?

It should be sampling something of the musical thought of this day we live in. And that means not only new music, but new sensations in music, even the electronic. We should perhaps have evenings with a great diva and tenor; a concert version of operas the Houston Grand Opera would never stage. More Orff, Stravinsky and all those undreamed of things that are going through the minds of creative men today and which we are being so carefully spared.

No Rembrandt in the museum of fine arts lost its dignity the night the museum staged its discotheque, and Brahms won't blister in the sparks from some electronic music.

We plead for an authentic life in music in Houston with the symphony as the logical leader.

The value of the Houston orchestra cannot be questioned. It is our most brilliant arts export, a gem in our dazzling cultural display. There is no room for disillusionment if one critic finds the program static. Perhaps another will find it otherwise.

But the symphony belongs to us all. We must support it with our dollars and even beyond that, with what is more priceless our ears and our hearts—and let us hope with our expressed ideas, too.