Symphony Program ‘Insipid, Uninteresting’

By ROBERT ZELENKA and STEFAN OFFENBACH

The fifth concert of the Houston Symphony Orchestra was of a quality inferior to that of the previous four. Of the four works performed, only the Haydn Concerto for Oboe was done with any great degree of artistic skill.

THE OVERTURE to “Donna Diana” by Reznicek opened the evening. The music moved very quickly. The piece, taken from a comic opera of the late nineteenth century, was swift, refreshing to hear, and quite uninspired.

Concerto in C major for Oboe and Orchestra, attributed to Joseph Haydn, was the second work of the concert. Musicologists are unsure whether Haydn actually wrote the concerto; however, the music is of the middle eighteenth century period and is decidedly Haydnesque.

LADY BARBIROLLI’S exquisite playing of the solo instrument gave the composition its life. The cadenzas, written by Lady Barbirolli herself, were of clean style and were well integrated to the work as a whole. Her playing was precise, moving, and joyful to hear.

“Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks,” a tone poem by Richard Strauss, was third on the program. Something was amiss in the presentation of the piece; the music had no flavor.

DVORAK’S FOURTH Symphony, in G major, concluded the program of the evening. The orchestra played without apparent enthusiasm.

The program was insipid in execution and uninteresting in choice. It was received with a standing ovation, the third such reception in five concerts. Surely the Houston audience is one of the most generous in the country.

It is difficult to state with whom the reviewers are the most disappointed: the audience or the concert.

TWO WORKS by Mozart, the overture “La Clemenza di Tito” and Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in C minor, Number 24, and the Symphony in E major, Number 7 by Bruckner are the subjects of next week’s concert. The pieces chosen for presentation are of high magnitude; it is hoped that the orchestra will regain the pace it set forth in the first four concerts. Gina Bachauer, a pianist of skill and fame, will be guest artist.

The Lyric Art Quartet, sponsored by the Shepherd School of Music, performed Wednesday evening, November 8, with oboist Evelyn Rothwell Barbirolli as soloist. The group performed two string quartets, Verdi’s Quartet in E minor and Hindemith’s Quartet No. 3, and Reicha’s Quintet for Oboe and Strings in F minor.

Minor was the first work presented. Almost operatic in nature, this quartet is the only chamber work which Verdi wrote. The group, played with expression, did justice to the lyricism of the composition.

Reicha’s Quintet for Oboe and Strings in F minor is perhaps one of the prettiest of all chamber works. Although it had been performed only once previously this century, it is deserving of a much better fate. Lady Barbirolli, as always, gave a moving performance. The oboe part in this composition gave her an opportunity to show her mastery over her instrument. The string section demonstrated once again their skill, handling their own solo parts and the accompaniment of the oboe with equal skill.

The last work on the evening’s program was String Quartet No. 3 by Hindemith. Unlike many modern works, this composition is one which pleases the ear of the listener by its dissonances rather than assaulting him. Working together in a well-organized unit, the quartet gave a most professional performance.

The cello prelude to the final movement was particularly well done.