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MASON SYMPHONY ON LINCOLN GIVEN

John Barbirolli Conducts the Philharmonic Orchestra at Carnegie Hall

RUBINSTEIN AS SOLOIST

Presentation of Brahms B Flat Piano Concerto Is Closing Number on Program

By OLIN DOWNES

The first performance of Daniel Gregory Mason's "Lincoln Symphony" was given last night in Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, John Barbirolli conductor. This is Dr. Mason's third symphony. It is dedicated to the memory of Ossip Gabrilowitsch. It is frankly programmatic. Dr. Mason would seem to be paraphrasing Berlioz, who once remarked that the public had to be instructed as to what it was to hear, in advance, since the public had no imagination.

Sometimes it is not the public that lacks imagination. A gross injustice may be done the public imagination by insistence on the part of composers or commentators that the listeners must hear such and such a thing in a piece of music. After all, the test is the music itself. Richard Strauss told us what to think in a number of the great tone-poems of his creative prime, which shook the modern world of art, and he succeeded in his purpose. Sometimes a composer is inspired by a definite program to great music. Sometimes he is inhibited by such an arrangement. Sometimes he becomes too specific in following a detailed story. Dr. Mason would have us realize definite aspects of Lincoln's personality and fortunes in different parts of the work under discusison, while Beethoven, preceding Dr. Mason on the program, gives us an overture in heroic and tragic vein and the single title, "Coriolanus."

First Movement Is "Candidate"

There are fine thoughts in this symphony. The first movement is "The Candidate From Springfield." It represents "the basic character of Lincoln." The cheerful and careless nature of the people is shown by the use of the lively tune of the 1860 period, "The Quaboag Quickstep." Then Lincoln's more serious melody is heard in the strings. This melody tempers the comparative frivolity of the popular strains, and a double fugue and march portrays the leader's triumphal entry into Washington.

The second movement of the symphony, corresponding to the classic slow movement, is "Massa Linkum"—the slaves' affection for the leader, their humbleness and gratitude to him. A melody in the manner of a Negro spiritual is played by the English horn, but Lincoln's understanding and pity are voiced by the solo 'cello. "Throughout this movement," as the composer explains, "the Negroes' part in the drama is enacted by the wood-wind instruments, particularly the English horn. Lincoln's by the strings, particularly the 'cello.

The third movement is called "Old Abe's Yarns," a movement in racy style, with humor, irony, buoyancy and also the occasional note of reflection in the music. The last movement is "1865." There is the thought of all that America and Lincoln have suffered together, of the mood that Whitman evoked with the lines "When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed." The previous quickstep is transformed into a funeral march. The tread of this march underlies the tragical melodic commentary, and various thematic fragments pass, as it were, in review, with exalted expression of feeling.

Composer Shows Sincerity

A composer chooses his own method of composing a symphony, and designating the work to his public. Dr. Mason has written with marked sincerity, though sometimes with the accents of other composers. Brahms, Franck, even Elgar rear their heads. Great originality is not there, and it may be in the last movement, where the suggestion is of mood rather than events or external characteristics, that the composer is most convincing and eloquent.

The concert ended with Brahms B flat piano concerto and Arthur Rubinstein as soloist. This music looms gigantic. It is remarkable to observe that a large public is awake to that fact, in a country which had not fully admitted the greater Brahms to its confidence, even twenty-five years ago.

Mr. Rubinstein played with fire and also with poetry. In the first movement, and occasional other places, he appeared a little unstable, but he gained in grip and poise as he continued. Evidently he profoundly knows the composition, and loves it. Sometimes he sacrificed tone quality to an extent that should not have been, although he played the slow movement with poetry and beauty, and the last with a grace and swing admirable for the music. In sum, the performance was distinguished by the qualities of a brilliant pianist and musician who should have been heard oftener in late years on this side of the ocean. Mr. Rubinstein was long and enthusiastically applauded.