

Antal Dorati, Conductor (and Composer)

1974

By Paul Hume

Antal Dorati's name rarely appears on concert programs in Washington. Yet he is a relatively prolific composer of music that ranges from piano solos to large works for orchestra, with and without chorus.

Last year Dorati programmed his Chamber Music, a set of songs for soprano and chamber orchestra in which he revealed gifts for writing vocal lines of unusual beauty, supported by sonorities of elegance and special aural perception.

The year Dorati was named to take charge of the National Symphony, he conducted his first symphony in a series of concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. That work, which was previously well recorded by the Minneapolis Orchestra when Dorati was its conductor, is a muscular score of striking vigor and effect. The National Symphony should play it before long.

This Holy Week, however, Dorati is offering the orchestra's subscribers their first opportunity of hearing one of his full-length works, a choral-orchestral work Dorati completed in 1956, a year before it was first performed on Good Friday, 1957.

It is a setting of the Passion story. The text is not from the Gospels but rather from Paul Claudel's contemporary view of the Passion which he called "The Way of the Cross." Dorati has shortened the title to the simpler, "The Way," and, having composed the work originally to Claudel's French, uses, in this country, a translation by John Berryman.

The choral forces are used in full and small groups and in men's and women's voices. They, as well as the contralto and baritone soloists and the narrator, share the responsibility of narrating the events.

Paul Claudel was one of the major figures in 20th-century literature.

(Washington Post
1974 Apr. 7.)

Among his plays "The Satin Slipper" may be the best known, though Washington audiences have also seen "The Tidings Brought to Mary." Many composers, both French and non-French, have often turned to Claudel, finding special inspiration in the particular kind of mystic symbolism in his writing. Honegger's "Joan of Arc at the Stake" is, like Dorati's "The Way," a contemporary telling of a famous historic event. In both Claudel added dimensions pertinent to our own times.

Dorati studied with Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, yet in listening to his music there is always the clear sound of a man who has his own musical personality.

Just before he ended his association with the Stockholm Philharmonic last January, Dorati was honored in that city with a festival of his own music. The programs ranged from symphonic and chamber works to a recent set of piano solos written for his wife, Ilse von Alphenheim.

This placing of an orchestral conductor's own compositions on concerts led by the composer-conductor has been one of the venerable traditions since 1842, when the Vienna and New York Philharmonic orchestras were founded. Chicagoans heard admirable music by Frederick Stock during his long tenure with that city's orchestra, as Bostonians heard Rabaud, New Yorkers Mahler, Cincinnatians Goossens, and more recently, New Yorkers Bernstein and Chicagoans Martinon.

Many conductors are not also composers, nor need they be. However, when they are, there is no reason why their own works should not appear on their programs, where they share the same testing spotlight as other contemporary works. The fact that the composer of a work is also conducting it does not confer upon the music any special aura of innate quality. And, depending upon the purely conductorial gifts of the composer, his being in charge of

the baton does not always do the most for his music.

There were years in which admirers of music by Stravinsky, Copland and Hindemith felt that other conductors made their music sound more persuasive than they themselves. In all three cases this situation changed as the composers became more proficient conductors. Hans Kindler, the National Symphony's founder, often played his own transcriptions of other men's music. Only three of his own works appeared on the orchestra's programs, one of them under a pseudonym in the hope of fooling the critics. He was a more effective arranger than composer.

With Dorati, the orchestra has a man the strength of whose conducting gifts become more apparent from year to year. From the evidence heard up to now, it will be rewarding to become further acquainted with Dorati the composer.

