

# Dorati Should Stick to Baton

By Irving Lowens

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National Symphony Orchestra, Antal Dorati, conductor. Assisting ensemble: Westminster Symphonic Choir, Joseph Flummerfelt, director; soloists: Rose Marie Freni, mezzo-soprano; Michael Devlin, bass-baritone; George London, narrator. Kennedy Center Concert Hall. Program: The Way (first Washington performance), Dorati.

Conductor Antal Dorati dredged up an old piece by Antal Dorati, composer, for the National Symphony last night, and "The Way" showed that Dorati should stick to the baton.

"The Way" is not one of Dorati's more recent compositions—it dates back to the 1950's and was first heard in Minneapolis in 1957. It is a large-scale work calling for big orchestra, festival-size chorus and soloists, and it runs nearly an hour and a half in performance without intermission.

"The Way" is the story of the crucifixion, as filtered through the violent mysticism of the French Catholic poet, Paul Claudel. Dorati set the text in French originally; it was heard yesterday in a crude, powerful, even occasionally shocking English translation by John Berryman which catches some of the angularity and vigor of Claudel's rugged unhymed, nonmetrical verse.

This is a troubling, not a comforting work. It reflects, in the peculiarly

## Music Review

faceless, impersonal musical idiom, Dorati opts for in this case, Claudel's self-lacerating, almost masochistic attitude towards the central event in the history of Christianity. I found the implied theology, with its strong overtones of mariolatry, very difficult to accept with equanimity.

Indeed, until the final two of its 14 sections (which are more lyrical than agonizing in feeling tone), I found myself more repelled than attracted by both the words and the music of "The Way." Others must have agreed. A steady exodus from the hall began about half-way through, and at the end the audience was down at least 25 percent.

"The Way" is repeated at 8:30 o'clock tonight and tomorrow.

Of the two vocal soloists, Michael Devlin was much the superior. Rose Marie Freni was not in good voice — her mezzo was edgy and unpleasant in quality. In pacing and projection, narrator George London put them both in the shade. His marvelous delivery of lines which were neither very eloquent nor graceful was a sharp reminder of how much he used to contribute to the

operatic stage in the days when his great bass voice was one of the glories of the lyric theater.

The Westminster Sym-

phonic Choir handled its taxing assignment well, as did the National Symphony with Maestro Dorati on the podium.

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