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Dorati Conducts

By Alan M. Kriegsman

Washington's symphony audience was curious enough yesterday to turn out in large numbers for the season's only appearance by conductor Antal Dorati, at Constitution Hall.

But were some of them also dissuaded from coming in the face of a program heavily loaded with modern works? It was a good house, but still far from the capacity crowd that so often shows up for National Symphony programs of the most routine order.

True, the lure of a soloist was lacking, and the program defied the conventionality that has become a National Symphony trademark. Even so, one would have expected an overflow of listen-

ers eager to gauge the credentials of the man who will shortly succeed Howard Mitchell as the reigning director of the Washington orchestra.

Dorati was heard yesterday, not with the National Symphony, whose command he will assume next fall, but with his "other" orchestra, the Stockholm Philharmonic, which he has headed since 1966. If he can do for the National a fraction of what he seems to have accomplished with the Swedish ensemble—the realm of program-making included—then we can look forward to a very fruitful tenure.

Dorati's program made sense, both in detail and as

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DORATI, *From CI*

a whole. "Washington's Birthday," by Charles Ives, was, of course, tailor-made for the occasion. The ballet suite, "Sisyphos," by the late Karl-Birger Blomdahl (he died in 1968, though the fact went unrecognized in the program notes), was an apt tribute to the prolific, inventive Swedish composer, best known for his "space opera," "Aniara." And the brooding romanticism of Mahler's Fifth Symphony served as a welcome counterweight to what preceded.

It was the performance of the Mahler that sent the audience into a tumultuous demonstration of approval. The reception for the Ives, especially, and the Blomdahl, too, was cool by comparison, though the orchestra was no less brilliant in the first half. The Stockholm ensemble, in fact, confirmed the impression left by its last local visit that it

is a superior orchestra in every respect, worthy of standing beside Europe's best. The smooth-voiced, powerful brass section is a marvel, and the taut unity of the strings—not a horse-hair was out of place—could be taken as a splendid model for the National Symphony's future.

As for Dorati himself, he gave us another reminder of the taste and forcefulness of his interpretations, in a program of fairly broad esthetic contrasts.

His Mahler did not have quite the tranquil depths or the transcendental sweep that Leonard Bernstein furnished here in the same symphony not long ago.

Dorati tended to underplay the morbidity implicit in much of the work, and stressed instead its architectural breadth and majestic sonority. In so doing, he steered clear of the bathos that can easily undermine an interpreter too intent on

Mahler's hyperemotionality. Dorati occasionally bent the underlying pulse in the service of expressiveness, but took pains never to break it.

Blomdahl's "Sisyphos" has this much in common with the Mahler—it is unusually resourceful in its management of a large orchestra, and it abounds in striking effects. The style, however, owes more to Stravinsky and Bartok. A shrewdly employed percussion battery enhances its strong rhythmic components. The applause that greeted the slambang finish of one section apparently convinced Dorati to quit while he was ahead, and the remainder of the work went unplayed.

Ives' musical recollections of his New England boyhood, transmitted through a haze of nostalgia and wit in "Washington's Birthday," sounded particularly fresh, buoyant and imaginative in Dorati's sympathetic rendering.

