

CONCERT: HARTMANN'S 'GESANGSSZENE'

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Published: October 2, 1983

When the German composer Karl Amadeus Hartmann died in 1963, he left unfinished his massive "Gesangsszene," or "Song-Scene," for baritone and orchestra. Thursday night, the New York Philharmonic, under the direction of Rafael Kubelik, presented the American premiere of Mr. Hartmann's valedictory at Avery Fisher Hall. For this, we can only be grateful, for "Gesangsszene," even in its fragmentary condition, is a worthy capstone to a distinguished career.

"Gesangsszene," which lasts about a half-hour, is scored for large orchestra and larger baritone voice, which must cut through the composer's ornate wall of sound with commanding clarity. On this occasion, Ronald Hermann proved himself a "heldenbaritone" of power and sensitivity; particularly moving was his spoken declamation of the stark final passages.

The text, by Jean Giraudoux, is one of those gloomy, end-of-the-universe affairs that passed as profundity for a couple of decades after World War II. On this unpromising foundation, Hartmann built a musical construction of solidity, color and originality, with a marked absence of extraneous angst. While there is passion here, it is inevitably tempered with classical dignity.

In the United States, Hartmann's music, which defies easy description, has never been awarded the attention it deserves. Certainly Hartmann, a child of his time, betrays his heritage; "Gesangsszene" called to mind Pfitzner's orchestral songs, Mahler's later symphonies, Schoenberg's "Gurre-Lieder" and "Survivor From Warsaw" and, especially, Webern's Six Pieces for Large Orchestra. But Hartmann manages to combine these varying influences into an esthetic hybrid that is entirely his own.

Mr. Kubelik's conception was one of authoritative intensity, and the Philharmonic responded reflexively to his direction. Program notes of near-Hegelian obscurity were provided, which probably served little purpose other than to scare listeners away from this complex but generally accessible music.

The evening opened with a sluggish and enervated rendition of Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D (Op. 61). Despite the efforts of Henryk Szeryng, who essayed the solo part with patrician elegance, the orchestra's sloppy playing doomed this performance from its first ragged tutti.