

Music Review

An Old Practice For a New Work

By Robert Commanday

The piano concerto of thereby taming them rather Ben Olsen, Director of the than evolving or varying Community Music Center, them.

was given a striking premiere performance in a special version for two pianos at the Center on Monday night.

Restoring an old practice which has unfortunately fallen into general disuse, the piano soloist, Kenneth Smith with Eunice Nemeth playing the orchestral reduction, repeated the work following an intermission.

Even in one hearing, Olsen's stormy concerto makes direct communication, for it follows in the Liszt-Prokofiev tradition of rhapsodizing over a few tonal themes that have an immediate thrust.

In the same tradition, development in Olsen's work consists largely of repetitions. Sequencing takes the edge off of the most stinging dissonance, the most exhilarating pianistic roulade, the most trenchant rhythm. In such fashion, Olsen, very much like Shostakovich, popularizes a few short ideas.

The two pianists gave a brilliant account of it. Kenneth Smith on the solo side, performed very impressively through the turbulent and chromaticized passagework that forms a unifying link among the movements. Miss Nemeth gave crisp and authoritative emphasis to the accompaniment.

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Talented Young Composer

By Dean Wallace

Ben Olsen is a talented young composer who fritters away entirely too much of his time with the exigencies of making a living. His list of completed compositions is consequently rather short; but so far everything I have heard has produced a unified feeling of delight.

Thursday night's performance of his Violin Sonata by Louis Fragos and Maria DeJong, in their recital at the Century Club, was like a greeting from an old friend. The work was premiered about four years ago, and has been little played since—and this is quite unfortunate for a composition of such ingenuous brightness and charm.

However prepossessing, it is also basically and structurally strong, and unusually clever in its working-out. If the listener searches for comparison, he will probably chart a line somewhere between Bartok and the Russian neo-romantics. And its nonsense conservatism reminds us of Schoenberg's remark that "There is still plenty of fine music to be written in the key of C major."

The performance by Fragos and DeJong, well executed and obviously well rehearsed, went a long way in communicating Olsen's gift for witty satire as well as his more serious moods.

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