

Music Review

Schuller brings in the new, again

By Richard Dyer
GLOBE STAFF

CAMBRIDGE — Only recently did Gunther Schuller become the author of "The Compleat Conductor," but for decades he has practiced the principles of musical probity that he preaches in his book. In yesterday's concert by the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, he demonstrated them all over again.

Schuller has always believed that conducting new music is a privilege, a responsibility, and a pleasure, so there were two new pieces. One of them was a brief musical greeting celebrating the orchestra's 20th birthday from W. Newell Hendricks, one of the many area composers the orchestra has championed. This birthday card alternated glistening, festive music with a contemplative moment. During this interlude, it was impossible not to think with gratitude of the life of the orchestra's founder, Larry Hill, and of some now-departed players who contributed so much to the collective and cumulative spirit of the ensemble.

"Vision," by Lori Dobbins, is a substantial work by a 39-year-old composer trained in

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Schuller, Ruske a dynamic duo

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California who is now teaching in Pennsylvania. The piece is kaleidoscopic. In the course of its development, the same elements combine and recombine in different patterns — what was background becomes foreground, perspectives shift, and mystery becomes insight. The piece has the freedom of fantasy but also the discipline of shape. It is also unpretentiously craftsmanlike, so we can follow it with pleasure. Dobbins has a good ear for orchestration. The

PRO ARTE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF BOSTON

Gunther Schuller, conductor laureate
At: Sanders Theatre, Sunday afternoon

quieter sections dodge about in a mysterious night-music, calmed and unsettled by intricate percussion writing. Schuller led the work with conviction and the musicians played as if they believed in it, too. The large audience contributed attention and, at the end, enthusiasm.

The afternoon's soloist was French horn virtuoso Eric Ruske, who played the Second Concerto by Richard Strauss, a late work (1942) full of a lifetime's experience and exploration, with an elegiac slow movement in the mood of the "Four Last Songs" and a rickety finale that recalls the youthful composer of "Till Eulenspiegel." Not even Ruske's wonderful recording of the Mozart Horn Concertos was adequate preparation for the agility, accuracy, stamina, and tonal flexibility of his playing. Ruske has the macho swagger that is every brass player's birthright, but he can also curve a melodic line with rare eloquence. Schuller was once a crackerjack horn player himself and he, Ruske, and the orchestra proved practiced collaborators. (Ruske premiered Schuller's Horn Concerto, a work it would be good to hear locally.)

The enjoyable performance of Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony profited from Schuller's classical discipline of tempo, which enhanced contrast and humor. The overture to Rossini's "L'Italiana in Algeri" featured some spiffy woodwind solos. Also, in his book, Schuller urges conductors and orchestras to practice Rossini crescendos, and the performance supplied some beauts. Schuller never let the crescendos become accelerandos, and you couldn't tell from one note to the next exactly where the increase in volume was coming from. But you did know you were caught up in something inexorable and irresistible.