

Pro Arte opens season on strong note

Music

REVIEW/By Ellen Pfeiffer

Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Gunther Schuller conducting, at Sanders Theater, Cambridge, Sunday.

The Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra opened its 20th anniversary season Sunday afternoon with its favorite guest conductor, Gunther Schuller, and two new pieces composed for it.

The first work, by W. Newell Hendricks, a founding member of the orchestra, was a brief, fanfare-like "Musical Birthday Card."

The second, more substantial piece was Lori Dobbins' "Vision," commissioned by Pro Arte. The work shows the inspirational influence of visual art on Dobbins'

work, according to the composer.

If one were to guess at a particular idiom that might have inspired the new work, it would be enamel. Indeed, the primary aural image of "Vision" is that of some iridescent, shimmering insects — butterflies, for instance — captured in time.

In four sections, with an introduction and coda, and with a returning motif that signals each new segment, the piece is clearly organized and aurally appealing. The orchestra and Schuller played it handsomely, and there was particularly elegant work by flutist Julia Skohnik.

With a new book just out in which Schuller scolds the conducting profession for arrogant or careless disregard for composers' intentions, the author-composer-

conductor sets himself a high, standard for orchestral performance. On the remainder of the



SCHULLER

program, he lavished the kind of detailed care on three mainstream works that he finds lacking in many of his colleagues' work.

Rossini's Overture to "The Italian

Girl in Algiers" was remarkable for the careful calibration of dynamics. Schuller demonstrated how effective the famous Rossini crescendo can be when it follows upon a genuinely quiet passage,

and when the crescendo is allowed to build gradually without over-anticipation.

In Strauss' Horn Concerto No. 2, with soloist Eric Ruske, Schuller was not able to overcome the impression of Strauss as an aging composer recycling his own, earlier ideas into a tired, unconvincing pastiche. Ruske's playing was virile, golden-toned, exceptionally accurate, but his part stood out from the orchestra like a three-dimensional image. One never had the feeling of the orchestra and horn operating in the same sphere.

The Prokofiev Classical Symphony completed the program. It was high-spirited, witty, charming, although Prokofiev's challenging string writing did not flatter Pro Arte's violins.