

ROMAN TOTENBERG

"A Brilliant Performance"

ASPEN FESTIVAL, MILHAUD VIOLIN CONCERTO, MILHAUD CONDUCTING

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Music: Aspen Serenade

Milhaud Work Has Premiere at Festival to Which It Is Dedicated

By HOWARD TAUBMAN
Special to The New York Times

ASPEN, Colo., Aug. 19.—The Aspen Festival now has its own Serenade. Since it is the work of Darius Milhaud, it will be performed in the years to come in places far removed from this bracing mountain spot, old mining town. It will help to reaffirm the truth that art has greater life-giving power than valuable metals, which created Aspen in the nineteenth century and then let it decline.

The Serenade, which had its premiere yesterday, was composed as a tribute to the Aspen Festival, where Mr. Milhaud teaches composition. The composer planned to employ the talents of "the magnificent virtuosi of Aspen"—guest artist and first-desk men of the Festival Orchestra, who are assembled here to perform publicly and to be members of the Aspen Music School faculty.

Because he was writing for nine players, Mr. Milhaud decided to give each part independence of scope. This decision led him to revert to a style that he favored in the Twenties. But the polytonality of 1957 differs from that of three decades ago. It is more subtle and economical. It does not give the impression of being exuberant or impetuous. It develops fresh tints and combinations of tone without any intention of shocking. The composer has matured, of course. But listeners have grown accustomed to polytonality and take it more readily in stride.

The work has five brief movements, all aglow with the play of Mr. Milhaud's fancy and wit. It is not a

deep piece, but the third movement has a reflective warmth. For the rest, all is vivacity and color. The first letter of the indications for each movement spell out Aspen, and the final section is marked "Nerveux et COLORE." Mr. Milhaud did not even forget the state. One is surprised that he did not somewhere include the Rockies.

Mr. Milhaud was his own conductor, and his nine players gave him a sparkling performance. They were Albert Tipton, flute; Lois Wann, oboe; Reginald Kell, clarinet; Harold Goltzer, bassoon; Wesley Lindskoog, trumpet; Eudice Shapiro, violin; William Primrose, viola; Nikolai Graudon, cello, and Stuart Sankey, contrabass.

One would not say that the "Aspen Serenade" belongs among the best of Mr. Milhaud's compositions. As an occasional piece, however, it shows the hand of a polished, though still quelling, craftsman.

The Violin Concerto, less than ten years old, is another matter. It is one of Mr. Milhaud's finest works. The slow movement has a deeply moving tenderness touched by dark shadows. The skepticism and brittleness that inform so much contemporary music and that infect some of Mr. Milhaud's is altogether absent in this sustained and tragic reverie for violin and orchestra.

The end movements have the vitality and mastery one would expect from the composer, but at best they are only a frame for the heart of the score.

Roman Totenberg, who has played the concerto before, gave it a brilliant performance. He surmounted every technical hazard with ease, relating the thorniest passages to the design of the music. And in the slow movement he was, like the composer himself, a searching singer.

Isler Solomon, permanent festival conductor, who has received a vote of confidence in the form of a new two-year Aspen contract, conducted the first half. He brought out the vigor and imagination of Bloch's Concerto Grosso No. 2, a work that dresses an old form in a valid modern garb. Then he gave handsomely modulated support to Mr. Tipton, soloist in Haydn's D major Flute Concerto. Mr. Tipton played with finesse and a lively awareness of the spirit of this appealing score.

But the occasion was Mr. Milhaud's. He received a standing tribute from the audience when he came on the stage. Mack Harrell read a statement prepared by Courtland D. Barnes Jr., festival board chairman, paying Aspen's respects to the composer on his sixty-fifth birthday on Sept. 4. There will be other tributes to Mr. Milhaud, free artist and citizen of the world, but none more affectionate and heartfelt.

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