

Klein's 2nd

Cautious Retreat From Boulez

By F. J. BRIMM

(Editor's note: Frederick Brimm studied music at Princeton. He is a graduate student at the University.)

The Austin Symphony's program last night opened with a tolerably dull performance (without benefit of harpsichord) of Corelli's familiar Christmas Concerto. The adjective applies to the orchestra, not the solo group, whose playing was excellent. Otherwise the concerto never sounded better than adequate, and Ezra Rachlin's idea of closing movements on a diminuendo chord seemed very wrong, an uncertain, sentimental noise wholly out of key with the structural solidity of Baroque music.

Rachlin's performance of the Mozart Piano Concerto in A, K. 423, as soloist and conductor, struck a happier note. The or-

chestra was well rehearsed, and the balance of sound between strings and winds was particularly pleasant.

AS SOLOIST, Rachlin was less successful. His playing seemed very good, if a little inflexible, in the first and second movements (no small compliment when you consider how difficult and exquisite the second movement is) and not at all good (or even perfectly accurate) in the last movement—but then the high quality of the orchestral sound was a consolation.

In reviewing the major work of the evening, Dr. Lothar Klein's new Second Symphony, I feel all the uncertainty a critic ought to when he is presented with a piece of which he has never heard a performance or seen the score, and which is full of all the difficulties modern music can present even to a trained ear, much less mine. Still, there are a number of things one can reasonably say.

Klein has explained, both in a Texan article and in the program notes, that his idea was to retire a little from the mathematical complexities of avant-garde music, and particularly from that fascination with pure sonic texture which is as evident in popular music today (cf. Rocky and the Elevators) as it is in Stockhausen and Boulez. Instead, he has gone back to the solid pre-set sonorities of the Nineteenth-century orchestra, and the familiar but still challenging forms of sonata and rondo. What results is a work that (as I think can be seen, even through an acceptable but hardly perfect performance) always will leave the listener with mixed feelings.

THE FIRST movement is much the better of the two. After an impressive slow opening, it continues with a tightly constructed sonata movement built around cool brass sonorities and a central theme of two adjacent chromatic steps. The coda is, remarkably good, using some of the blander material in such a way

as to give it an interest it lacked during the movement proper.

The second movement strikes me as an ambitious failure: it oscillates between unhappy parodies of the two worst features in Strauss, the decadent-Viennese, and what my old teacher Milton Babbitt used to call the polemical. Two uncertainly portentous trombone notes, played fortissimo and very low near the beginning, drew some laughter; and the only point of interest I could discern in a long and very academic exercise in counterpoint that occupied the midsection was a brilliant entrance by these same trombones, beginning about thirty measures of wildly beautiful stuff that ought to have been taken out and played by itself.

ANY UNKIND thoughts this movement caused, however, were dispelled in indignation at the poor reception the composer got; I imagine most of the audience were unaware that he is what he is, namely one of the most distinguished members of the University's faculty and an internationally respected composer.

The lady in front of me stopped chewing her mink long enough

to ascertain that he was from Austin, and seemed to feel mildly guilty; I could have shaken her. The first movement alone would have entitled Klein to three or four bows anywhere but here.

The evening concluded with Strauss' Death and Transfiguration, a piece which is a favorite of Maestro Rachlin's and which he and the Symphony executed remarkably well. It was pleasant to think how much we have gained in musical taste in the eighty years that separate Strauss from Klein; for all its enthusiasm and even inspiration the Strauss piece sounded so heavy, so overblown, with its grossly literal storytelling and its hundreds of bars of "How Dr. I am" in every major key at the end — intended to suggest the ascent to eternity of a heroic human soul.

Klein, I suppose, never will have Strauss' reputation or his fame; but I would be willing to bet that he (let alone Stravinsky and Webern) could take you near heaven with a violin and piano. It will be a pleasure to hear his chamber music performed here next week.