

Elusive treasure

MUSIC REVIEWS

Festive concert in honor of Mordecai Seter's 75th birthday. Musica Nova Ensemble, conductor Zeev Dorman. Tel Aviv, Municipal Conservatory, April 8.

IN ORGANIZING a retrospective concert of the works of our veteran composer Mordecai Seter, in honor of his 75th birthday, the Musica Nova Ensemble has made a beautiful contribution to the flourishing of our contemporary musical life. At 75, Seter continues to compose, regenerating himself with each new composition. This concert, by its very nature, had to limit itself, of course, to chamber music only. But even the chamber music pieces clearly indicated Seter's amazing spiritual development.

The "Partita" for violin and piano (1951) and (Yemenite) "Diwan" for nine players (1957), show Seter still deeply involved with Near-Eastern musical sources, the music of the oriental Jewish communities, their folklore and their liturgy. He even quotes whole melodies. All the other works presented at this concert, however, beginning with "Epigrams" for flute and cello (1970), demonstrated Seter's remarkable transformation from an extrovert composer, expressing the collective ideals of Zionism, the pioneering spirit and the national aspirations of our forefathers, into a veritable recluse, isolated from the outside world.

In his earlier works personal feelings were relegated to an obscure corner. In his later works, written after 1970, Seter stays only with himself. This under no circumstances means the eccentric, self-oriented subjectivism of romantics as Wagner or Mahler, who needed hours of music to expound their inflated egos. To the contrary - Seter's works are frugal, minimalistic, ascetic, sparse in their rhetorics and esoteric in their worldly innocence.

"Events" for flute, clarinet and bassoon, a neo-classical composition, consists of a three-cornered conversation with himself. His second Piano Quartet (1982) seems a piece for the initiated only. The "Episode" for piano (1987), played by Astrit Baltzan, reaches beyond the instrument, into the impalpable abstract.

dialectics, dichotomies or dualities and there is no struggle. There are of course contrasts of tempo, texture and rhythm but only between movements, or sections of movements and not within closed, single musical units. In these works all unnecessary marks of extra-musical, applause-winning and audience-cajoling musical means are completely absent. Seter established a new kind of 20th century absolute music, perhaps comparable only to some renaissance music or Bach's instrumental pieces like the suites, partitas and sonatas. Seter has departed from all known schools, streams and styles, creating a path for himself only he can go. His music is extremely difficult to interpret and grasp. The challenge is indeed enormous but he who is willing to take it up may reap gorgeous fruits.

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