MUSIC

By LAWRENCE GILMAN

A New Symphony on Lincoln Heard for the First Time at the Philharmonic

8,832d concert by the Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York, John Barbirolli conductor; assisting artist, Artur Rubinstein, pianist.

PROGRAM

1. Beethoven.....Overture to "Coriolanus"
2. Mason......"A Lincoln Symphony"
   I. The Candidate from Springfield.
   II. "Massa Linkum."
   III. "Old Abe's Yarns."
   IV. 1865.
   (First performance)

Intermission

3. Brahms,
   Piano Concerto No. 2, in B flat major
   I. Allegro non troppo.
   II. Allegro appassionato.
   III. Andante.
   IV. Allegretto grazioso.
   Artur Rubinstein, pianist

THE members of last night's Philharmonic-Symphony audience were privileged to hear the first performance anywhere of the new "Lincoln Symphony" completed last year by the eminent American composer, Daniel Gregory Mason. It may be said at once that there was clearly something more than patriotic responsiveness in the burst of spontaneous applause that followed the close of the deeply impressive final movement of the work, the lament for the dead Lincoln. For this movement takes rank immediately as one of the finest things in the literature of our native music, and its quality was recognized at once by the listeners, who summoned the composer repeatedly to the platform at the end of the performance.

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Mr. Mason told the music-loving readers of these columns something about his attitude toward his subject and about the symphony itself in the Herald Tribune of Sunday, November 2. He disavowed any intention to write program-music, to paint scenes or events. He was concerned with more essential matters—with matters closer to the heart and the nature of music itself: the expression of characters, personalities, emotional substances. He was stirred, he said, by "the contrast between the young Lincoln's seriousness and the trivial good nature of the public about him;" by "the sad fate of the Negroes—a whole race—and Lincoln's tender pity toward them; by Lincoln's salty humor, his sense of broad humanity, and by the tardy realization that came to his countrymen, sobered by his tragic death, of what his vision had meant to them and would mean to the whole world, throughout the future."

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So the symphony was laid out in four movements, which deal consecutively with "The Candidate From Springfield"; with "Massa Linkum" (the slave's view of their friend, an andante dolente); with "Old Abe's Yarns"—Old Abe "with his long and easily striding legs, his wry smile and his hoarse laugh and the rough-hewn stories that he told his friends." And, finally, there is the music that commemorates the dead, incomparable leader, boundless in his tenderness, his understanding, his humanity, his compassion; mysterious forever in his greatness and simplicity.

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This is perilous material for a music-maker—perilous for many reasons. The greatest figure in American history, one of the greatest in all history, and one of the most beloved is a subject to tax the

Daniel Gregory Mason

Composer of the new "Lincoln Symphony" played by the Philharmonic

breadth and depth of comprehension, the taste, the tact, the power of eloquent symphonic speech, possessed by any composer who would turn Lincoln's manifold aspects into tone. Mr. Mason has avoided pitfalls without number, has demonstrated again and again throughout this work his depth of insight and of feeling, his power of salient and expressive utterance, his incorruptible sincerity and dignity as an artist, his tact and sensibility as a poet and humanist in tones.

His music, at its best, has the lofty simplicity, the noble austerity and plainness, that were essential strands in the complex fabric of Lincoln's soul. It is terse, compact, succinct, saying its say with concentration and most skilled economy of means—never excessive, never overwrought; leading by an extraordinary subtlety and interplay of contrasts to the impassioned sorrow of the final movement—that dirge in which a musician of today pays worthy tribute to a deathless spirit.

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After the intermission, the soloist of the evening, the distinguished Polish pianist, Arthur Rubinstein, who had not been heard in America for some years, traversed in brilliant fashion the huge B flat Concerto of Johannes Brahms—always a gigantic task for any player of merely human capabilities. Mr. Rubinstein played with inexhaustible verve, exuberance, assurance—his feats in the performance of this Concerto are, indeed, known to most lovers of music through his phonograph recordings. It was not so easy to feel, however, that this was the reading of a poet—and this Concerto of Brahms, in its greatest pages, is the very attar of poetry. Mr. Rubinstein seemed to be outside the music, looking in—not within it, telling us its secrets of exquisiteness and reverie. In the matchless Andante, it was rather the accompanying orchestra under Mr. Barbirolli that was the poet, singing from the heart of an enchanted music.