

Music: Midnight Bach

Alexander Schneider Directs Christmas Eve Program at Carnegie Hall

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

WHAT might readily develop into an annual concert took place in Carnegie Hall at midnight Saturday. It was a Christmas Eve Bach program under the direction of Alexander Schneider, and the participants included a string orchestra, the Renaissance Chorus of New York conducted by Harold Brown, Julius Baker, flutist, and Russell Oberlin, counter-tenor.

The tickets were priced at 50 cents, first come, first served. Not only was the auditorium sold out well before midnight, but a few hundred people were turned away. The doors to the main hall were closed as soon as the parquet and boxes were filled, after which traffic was diverted to the balconies. The audience was predominantly young, quiet and well-behaved.

To open the program, Mr. Brown led his well-trained group in three chorales. He then invited the orchestra and audience to join in the last of the three, "Wie schoen leuchtet der Morgenstern." The orchestra complied, though the audience was hesitant. (The orchestra played; it did not sing.)

Mr. Baker next stepped before the conductorless string orchestra to play the flute solo in the B minor Suite. This was by all odds the fastest performance the present listener has ever heard. Yet it was not ineffective. It may not have been in the Bach tradition, as most concertgoers recognize the Bach tradition, but the last movement—the "Badinerie"—emerged as a real display piece that sounded amazingly Mendelssohnian. Mr. Baker's clear articulation and phrasing were nothing short of sensational.

Somewhat misplaced on a program of this sort was the Chaconne for solo violin, played by Mr. Schneider in a fervent romanticized performance that could have been a little more refined technically.

The high spot of the program was the little Cantata No. 53, "Schlage doch," performed by Mr. Oberlin and the chamber orchestra. The sweet, penetrating and other-worldly quality of this counter-tenor's voice was employed with impeccable musicianship. He was recalled again and again. To conclude the program, Mr. Brown conducted three more chorales.

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