

REVIEWS | MUSIC

Alea III gives a perfect answer to, 'What's new?'

ALEA III - Theodore Antoniou, music director, in music by Darius Milhaud, Steve Reich, Frederic Rzewski, and Gyorgy Ligeti, given Friday night at the Longy School of Music, Cambridge.

By Richard Buell
Globe Correspondent

If you were looking for a perfectly terse, fair, and entertaining answer to the question "What's new?" this was the concert for you. We don't know what conductor Theodore Antoniou thinks of the

idea of "packaging" 20th-century music, but consciously or otherwise that's what brought off Saturday night at Longy with immense success.

What was the upshot?

The ear was challenged, the mind and body stimulated. An audience found itself surprised, made enthusiastic.

Surely, concerts of 20th-century music ought to be like this.

You got the feeling of having been at several different points of the musical compass.

For one thing, it was good just to be hearing Darius Milhaud's four "Symphonies for small orchestra (1917-1922)" - each a brace of movements that will try anything: the palest of pastorals, polytonality at its grittiest (the bistro vs. the Conservatoire), a jerky little canon that stands perversely on its head, starting from the double bass ... "Etc." will have to do for the rest, which was also delightful.

Perhaps the most modish thing played was Steve Reich's Octet (1979), an extended and at first simple-seeming instrumental piece ("It is minnie-mahl," announced conductor) that you can't listen to in an ordinary way - it seems like a tape loop - but can't be ignored either.

Reich plays tricks with your attention. Something alters in that syncopated little mantra that gurgles away at you. Ten minutes later it isn't syncopated.

Reich's choice of "minimal" materials seems, to these ears, master-

ly, his feeling for instruments sensitive and imaginative.

It was a performance you can't say "convinced" you; no, it had you, and bravo!

Next came the "humanist realism" (his words) of Frederic Rzewski's 1977 "Four Pieces for Piano," an unlikely syncretism of high-flying Russian piano concerto madness, folk song, riffing, new sonorities, all dashingy projected by Janice Weber, who earned an ovation.

Gyorgy Ligeti's "Chamber Concerto for 13 instrumentalists (1969-1970)" seemed almost ominously sophisticated and virtuosic in its technique, a collection of wry and at times surreally vivid orchestral anecdotes that didn't waste a note or a second of anyone's attention.

The Alea III people played this as convincingly as they had everything else, and, a bit helpless the next day trying to explain to a friend what it had been like, we found ourselves saying: "Well, if Nabokov had been a composer ..."

Cecilia's 'St. John Passion'

BACH'S ST. JOHN PASSION - Given by the Boston Cecilia Chorus and Baroque Orchestra (Daniel Banner, concertmaster) conducted by Donald Teeters, Sunday afternoon at Jordan Hall.

This performance of the less familiar of the two Bach Passions had enough that was first-class about it to make for a cumulatively satisfying musical experience and an instructive one - though, as if to put you off, in the program notes you again encounter the

big (67) but also admirably lithe in rhythm, and clear and balanced in sound; and, among the instrumental contingent (21 players), some local Baroque specialists who contributed the expected reedy, ectomorphic sonorities.

As the Evangelist, tenor Ray de Voll brought a lot of experience and culture to the part, and a rather too legato, uninsistent way with the asperities of the German language. Jane Bryden's two soprano arias teamed with musical interest - a deliciously cool, choirboyish tim-

provided
s sound
ie Neats
and mid-
the Pro-
es brood-
ith mock
nd has a
ey moved
Phil Caru-

of



OPY

SACK THEATRES

A gutsy, emotional movie about what it