

## MUSIC REVIEWS

# Schoenberg's world

## — a classic take

BY RICHARD TODD

You might be surprised that Arnold Schoenberg, the very epitome of 20th-century modernism for many, hated music that he considered modern. One of the most profound thinkers in the history of music, he was also a painter of some status, a writer and a poet, and in one poem he sneers at Igor Stravinsky, who recently embarked upon his voyage into neoclassicism, as "the little Modernsky."

Pointing out that music evolves from the past, he declared, "My music isn't modern, just badly played," thus insulting more than a generation of musicians who had been sweating gumdrops trying to do his stuff justice.

Last evening, at Christ Church Cathedral, the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival presented the first of four concerts being given in connection with the symposium called Schoenberg's Chamber Music, Schoenberg's World. The musicians included, among others, the Moscow String Quartet and the Vienna Piano Trio. Three of the composer's children, Lawrence, Ronald and Nuria Schoenberg-Nono, attended the event, and

Lawrence spoke a few introductory words. Just over 400 people attended.

The program opened gently with the arrangement of the Johann Strauss's *Emperor Waltz* for flute, clarinet, string quartet and piano. It's a little astringent, but pretty for all that.

Even the next piece, the *Six Pieces for Four Hands* of 1896, is far from hard-core Schoenberg. But for the next offering, soprano Matha Guth and the Moscow String Quartet performed the *Quartet no. 2 in F-sharp minor*, often described as atonality's breakout piece. It starts in F-sharp minor, more or less, but its last two movements have no key centre at all in the conventional sense.

If ever there was a performance to vaunt the merits of this masterpiece, it was last night's. Guth was particularly forceful and convincing in her interpretation.

Jump forward a quarter-century to the *Variations on a Recitative in D minor for organ*, played last night by Thomas Annand. What's this? A key signature? Yes, it turns out that Schoenberg followed his own theories less slavishly than most of his musical descen-

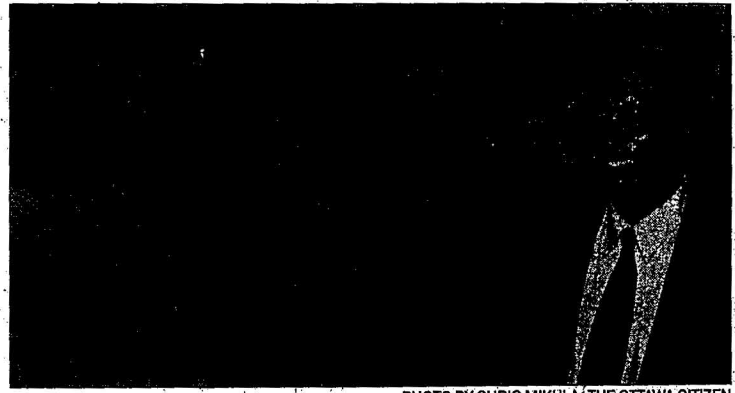


PHOTO BY CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Larry Schoenberg, left, his sister Nuria Nono and brother Ronald Schoenberg, right, chat with composer Eldon Rathburn while attending an exhibit honouring their father, Arnold Schoenberg.

dants, though this piece is by no means easy listening. The concert ended with the *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* of 1942.

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