Music Review

Schuller brings in the new, again

By Richard Dyer
GLOBE STAFF

CAMBRIDGE — Only recently did Gunther Schuller become the author of "The Compleat Conductor," but for decades he has practiced the principles of musical probity that he preaches in his book. In yesterday's concert by the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, he demonstrated them all over again.

Schuller has always believed that conducting new music is a privilege, a responsibility, and a pleasure, so there were two new pieces. One of them was a brief musical greeting celebrating the orchestra's 20th birthday of W. Newell Hendricks, one of the many area composers the orchestra has championed. This birthday card alternated glinting, festive music with a contemplative moment. During this interlude, it was impossible not to think with gratitude of the life of the orchestra's founder, Larry Hill, and of some now-departed players who contributed so much to the collective and cumulative spirit of the ensemble.

"Vision," by Lori Dobbins, is a substantial work by a 39-year-old composer trained in Pro Arte, Page C9

quietier sections dodge about in a mysterious night-music, calmed and unsettled by intricate percussion writing. Schuller led the work with conviction and the musicians played as if they believed in it, too. The large audience contributed attention and, at the end, enthusiasm.

The afternoon's soloist was French horn virtuoso Eric Ruske, who played the Second Concerto by Richard Strauss, a late work (1942) full of a lifetime's experience and exploration, with an elegiac slow movement in the mood of the "Four Last Songs" and a rousing finale that recalls the youthful composer of " Till Eulenspiegel." Not even Ruske's wonderful recording of the Mozart Horn Concerto was adequate preparation for the agility, accuracy, stamina, and tonal flexibility of his playing. Ruske has the macho swagger that is every brass player's birthright, but he can also curve a melodic line with rare eloquence. Schuller was once a crackjack horn player himself and he, Ruske, and the orchestra proved practiced collaborators. (Ruske premièred Schuller's Horn Concerto, a work it would be good to hear locally.)

The enjoyable performance of Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony profited from Schuller's classical discipline of tempo, which enhanced contrast and humor. The overture to Rossini's "L'Italienne in Algeri" featured some grand woodwind solos. Also, in his book, Schuller urges conductors and orchestras to practice Rossini crescendos, and the performance supplied some beauty. Schuller never let the crescendos become accelerandos, and you couldn't tell from one note to the next exactly where the increase in volume was coming from. But you did know you were caught up in something inexorable and irresistible.