The MIT Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of David Epstein, will present a concert in Kresge Auditorium tomorrow (Saturday) at 8:30, and repeat it next Tuesday at 8:00 in Wellesley's Houghton Chapel. The program will consist of John Harbison's Incidental Music for Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," Ernest Bloch's Suite Hebraique for viola and orchestra, and Gustav Mahler's First Symphony. John Harbison is a member of the MIT music faculty, as is Marcus Thompson, the viola soloist in the Bloch Suite.

These concerts are a preview of the Symphony's upcoming tour, and the choice of music reflects the high degree of confidence which Epstein has in the orchestra. The Mahler First is a major challenge to any orchestra, requiring a great deal of virtuosity and mercilessly exposing any faults. John Harbison's Incidental Music is written for five or seven string ensemble, and features jagged melodic lines in rapid bursts of short notes.

All of these pieces raise interesting questions about the place of extra-musical influences in so-called "absolute" music.

Mahler's First Symphony was originally titled "Vorsang-A Symphonic Poem," and its five movements were divided into two parts as follows: Part 1 From the Days of Youth: 1. Spring without End, 2. Blumine (A Chaplet of Flowers), 3. Ut picturae (A Hebraic Suite) and Part 2: 4. The Hymn of Life. Prologue, 5. From Hell to Heaven. Mahler later sought to remove the titles and "programs," most concert and record jackets notes deal with the musical depiction of the original "imagery," and warned the scoring in many subtle ways. (A recording is available of the early 1893 version on British Py TPLS 13037, conducted by Wyn Morris, that should be heard by anyone seriously interested in the evolution of Mahler's style.) The titles are thought-provoking and offer an intriguing challenge to any orchestra, requiring a great deal of virtuosity and mercilessly exposing any faults. John Harbison's Incidental Music was written for five or seven string ensemble, and features jagged melodic lines in rapid bursts of short notes.

As an example, the song which Portia sings (to give Bassanio a clue to help him choose the proper coin that will win her hand under the terms of her father's will) is an important thematic element in the Harbison score (it is reprinted here). It is in the form of a question and an enigmatic answer, and the two halves are superimposed when (Bassanio figures out the meaning of the tit and chooses correctly). Does an understanding of the action taking place at this point help the listener to understand the music, and is it essential to an understanding of the music? Harbison believes that the piece should be able to stand more or less on its own in a concert setting; he says that it could just as well be titled Suite (or Strings in a non-theatrical) setting. The kinds of understanding to be gained from the musical/dramatic and purely musical approaches will probably be different. But it is not clear that one or the other is better.

In his narrative introduction to Walt Disney's Film Fantasia, Deems Taylor said that music is divided into "music that tells a story" and "absolute music." It is clear from even the most cursory examination of the music on the MIT Symphony's program that this division is not at all clear-cut, and that many pieces exhibit both types of characteristics. It is particularly important to realize that a piece can legitimately be approached from the purely musical and extra-musical angles, and there should be no stigma attached to listening to a piece of music for its extra-musical values.

Portia's Song from Incidental Music for Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" by John Harbison

---

It would be impossible to give a complete listing of the concerts that are coming up in the near future in the local area in any reasonable amount of space—this seems to be the time of year when all of Boston's many musical organizations schedule their spring concerts simultaneously. I will, therefore, briefly list those events that have caught my attention for the next two weeks.

March 15: Handel and Haydn Society performing Handel's Israel in Egypt. One of Handel's first oratorios, Israel tells the story of the Romans in Egypt, and isock-full of the glorious choruses of exaltation that Handel wrote so well. Symphony Hall, 8 pm. March 16: MIT Symphony Orchestra. March 17: Chorus Pro Musica performing Bach's St. John Passion. Of the two Passion settings by Bach that we know today in their complete forms, the St. John is the more taut and dramatic. Charles Broderick will be singing the part of the Evangelist. Symphony Hall, 7 pm.

March 19: MIT Schola Cantorum singing two Cantatas of J.S. Bach (B.W.V. 120 and 194) and the Missa Brevis K. 192 of Mozart. Kresge Auditorium, 8:00 pm.

March 22: Director of the Museum of Fine Arts performing masses of Josquin. MIT faculty member Rufus Hallmark is the tenor soloist. Sanders Theatre, 8:10 pm.

March 24: Harvard University Choir under John Ferris's direction will perform the Monteverdi Vespers of 1610 with original instruments. This glorious work, the piece that Monteverdi wrote to show off his talents in order to gain the musical directorship of the Cathedral of St. Mark in Venice, is rarely performed, and more rare are performances using the original instruments of the period. Memorial Church, Harvard, 8 pm.

March 24: Masterworks Chorale under Allen Lamont performing Bach's St. Matthew Passion. Nothing more needs to be said about the music, and Mr. Lamont's choruses has acquired itself quite capably in the past. Sanders Theatre, 8 pm.

---

Portia's Song from Incidental Music for Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" by John Harbison

---

Tell me where is fancy bred, or in the heart or in the head? How be got how you ri shed? ec pli, re pli. It is o gen dered in the e que. With ga ing fed, and fan cy des in the cr acle where it lies. Let us all ring fancy's knell. I'll be got it, ding song, bell ding, dong, bell.