

AMERICAN

SHATTERING OPENING

Reiner Concert Sings 'Music'

BY DAN TUCKER

THE CONCERT SERVED up last night by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and chorus was a curious affair. It had lots of everything but music.

The evening's prize offering, however, was an acceptable substitute—Prokofiev's score for the epic Russian film "Alexander Nevsky," which was impressive through sheer size and grandeur. Aside from that were works by Ravel and Chausson, neither of which proved to have much nourishment.

Mr. Reiner's programming has been getting "curiouser and curiouser," to quote Lewis Carroll. There probably isn't a piece in the symphony's library less suited to open a program than Ravel's "La Valse." Like the "Bolero," it is an almost surgical study in building up nervous tension to a shattering climax; it is a program-closer by nature and necessity.

Yet "La Valse" is what Reiner picked to start the evening, and his reading was just as badly judged. He took it at such a leisurely tempo that the relentless, mounting excitement of it just never happened. It sounded, Heaven help us, good-natured.

ERNEST CHAUSSON'S "Poem of Love and of the Sea," for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, consists of two

rather maundering songs with an orchestral interlude. The word for it, I guess, is "inoffensive."

Musically it's Debussy-and-water—timid impressionism, with harmonies that wouldn't disturb Gounod—and it is not easy to remember a bar of it five minutes after hearing it. Still, while it lasts it's pleasant and undemanding listening.

The performance by Massachusetts-born Rosalind Elias had more or less the same effect. Miss Elias' voice is clear and pretty, but it has a rather hard, glazed sound that robs it of warmth.

THE "ALEXANDER NEVSKY" score may well be the finest movie music ever written. That does not mean it's great music; you can't write great music for a film because it would distract the audience's attention and ruin the film.

Prokofiev did a wonderful job, though, in writing music to heighten the moods of somber grandeur or heroic fervor. If it isn't "great" in itself, it is admirably suited to a great subject.

There is a splendor about the mere sound of massed chorus and orchestra that this score exploits to the full. It also has some wonderfully clever "effects." (One of the finest, I thought, was the cantering rhythm that opens the great "Battle on the Ice" scene. It is thudded out by string players on the bridge of their instruments, giving a grinding, glassy—in fact, icy-sound.)