

On the Aisle

'Nevsky' Cantata Expertly Done, but Still Sound Track Minus Film

BY CLAUDIA CASSIDY

FULL RESOURCES of the Chicago Symphony orchestra and chorus, plus the visiting mezzo-soprano, Rosalind Elias, were deployed under Fritz Reiner's direction for Thursday night's "Alexander Nevsky," the cantata Serge Prokofieff drew from his score for the Eisenstein film so widely admired 20 years ago. It was a first performance in Orchestra hall, it is being recorded, and it was expertly done to the applause of a large audience.

Whether or not it was worth doing is another story, no doubt with several opinion sides. It is sound track music without the film — superior sound track at least a part of the time, but almost always inferior Prokofieff. It is music written to order, propaganda music in which he may have had his heart, but seldom his great gifts as a composer. It concerns the invasion of Russia by Teutonic barbarians, their defeat in the battle of the ice [which sounds like an ice ballet], a lament for the dead, and the jubilant cry of victory to clanging Russian bells. Some of the best of it is Prokofieff's own version of Gregorian



Rosalind Elias

to two songs by Maurice Bouchor. This is typical Chausson music from his nostalgic garden drenched with the remembered scene of lilacs and roses, only this garden is beside the sea. It is quite lovely music of its kind, a little out of place on this program, but able to make its place. The orchestra played beautifully, especially in the surge of "The Water Flower"—the other song is "The Death of Love"—and Miss Elias sang correctly, sometimes even beautifully, but without the special affinity for the music that lies in the haunting cadence of the French "amoureuse."

The concert began with Ravel's "La Valse," under usual Reiner conditions an admirable preface to Chausson. This time, unaccountably, the mood was destroyed by harsh bombast.

chant, a blocklike chant of the Crusaders. In general, there is skill without inspiration.

Much the same could be said of Mr. Reiner's performance, in which he concentrated on his powers of organization and found no room for the eloquence of improvisation. "Nevsky" is a dull score for orchestra, which just goes thru the motions while the chorus enjoys the plums. This chorus was at its best in the enthusiasm of attack, a fresh, accurate, all-out attack which might actually have been defending Mother Russia. Miss Elias, a slender, dark haired girl with a normally vibrant voice, was a little lost at the back of the stage where the impact of the elegy was dispersed.

She fared better stage front for Chausson's "Poeme de l'amour et de la mer," set

Concert by the Chicago Symphony orchestra, Fritz Reiner, conductor; Rosalind Elias, mezzo-soprano; Chicago Symphony orchestra chorus, Margaret Hillis, director. Presented in Orchestra hall Thursday evening, March 5, 1959, and scheduled for repetition Friday afternoon.

THE PROGRAM

"La Valse," a Choreographic Poem Ravel
"Poeme de l'Amour et de la Mer" Chausson
[First performance at these concerts]
"Alexander Nevsky," cantata from the film.
Music Prokofieff